

A Guide for Traveling By Car With Your Pet

by Paris & John in PetPlus

Without a second thought, most of us routinely take steps to ensure the safety of the driver and passengers every time we get in the car. We buckle up, we keep our heads and arms inside the car, and we watch for oncoming traffic before we exit the vehicle upon arrival. The days of children riding on Mom's lap or unrestrained in the back seat are, fortunately, long gone. But what about travel with your dog?

As it stands, that same attention to passenger safety hasn't yet been fully extended to our four-legged passengers. A safe dog travel study by Kurgo and AAA showed that, while nearly 6 in 10 people have traveled with their dog in the car at least once a month over the past year, only 16 percent were restraining their dog while in the vehicle.

Today a growing number of states are regulating the transportation of pets in autos for the safety of both the dogs and the humans—but it doesn't take a law to tell conscientious drivers that securing your dog is best for dogs and for the people inside the car. “Drivers should use a pet restraint system for your dog every time their pet is in the vehicle,” said Jennifer Huebner-Davidson, AAA National, Traffic Safety Programs manager. “A restraint like those offered by Kurgo will not only limit distractions, but also protect you, your pet and other passengers in the event of a crash or sudden stop. An unrestrained 10-pound dog in a crash at only 30 mph will exert roughly 300 pounds of pressure, while an unrestrained 80-pound dog in a crash at only 30 mph will exert approximately 2,400 pounds of pressure. Imagine the devastation that can cause to your pet and anyone in its path.”

Along with keeping your dog secure in the event of a sudden stop, car restraints also minimize distractions. The Kurgo and AAA survey showed that nearly a third of drivers were distracted by their dog's actions such as standing on the center console or even climbing into the front seat while you're driving. Secured dogs are also unable to put their heads out an open car window, a practice that puts canines at risk both for falling out of the vehicle and getting an insect or particle embedded in their eye.

Also, in the event of an accident, having a secured dog allows emergency personnel to quickly enter the vehicle without concern of being bitten by a frightened dog or of letting a loose dog venture out into traffic.

Options for car restraints start with booster seats for small dogs; dogs sit in the booster seat while wearing a harness that's clipped to the booster seat. Crates and carriers, buckled in so they can't become projectiles in a sudden stop, are another option for small and large dogs. Drivers with large dogs can also opt for harnesses that buckle into seat belts, clip to cargo tie-downs, or attach to a zip line across the back seat.

On arrival, a secured dog is easy to leash up before removing him safely from the car. Unsecured dogs, no matter how well they are trained, can get excited on arrival and quickly bolt when the doors are first opened.

A few moments spent securing your dog can help you and your dog have a safe ride in the car.