

## What 56% of Owners Do With Their Pets: Avoiding Tragic Mistakes

This is obviously something that owners relish, and many pets do, too. How to enjoy yourself doing it without making it stressful for your pet, and the homework you must do in advance to help avoid injury, escape, or even death. What I consider the last resort option.

Analysis by [Dr. Karen Shaw Becker](#)

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- More than half of U.S. pet owners (56%) travel with their pets
- When travelling by car, secure your pet in a crate or carrier that is securely fastened to your vehicle
- Travel by air with pets only as a last resort, and if you do be sure you're aware of the airline's procedures for handling pets both on the aircraft and on the ground

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More than half of U.S. pet owners (56%) travel with their pets, as do a sizeable number of those in the U.K. (41%).<sup>1</sup> Understandably, the biggest concern pet owners have is that their pets will become stressed out, but this can be effectively managed by making the proper preparations.

While it may be tempting to hop in the car, roll down the windows and let your pup happily ride in the front seat, stick his head out the window and travel with his ears blowing in the breeze, these are among the worst choices for your pet's safety.

About the only worse choice would be to travel with your pet loose in the back of a pick-up truck; in the event of an accident, an unrestrained pet is at serious risk of injury.

### Pet Car Safety 101: Proper Restraint

You wouldn't allow your children to ride in a vehicle unrestrained, and you shouldn't allow your pet to do so either. In the car, I recommend keeping your dog in a crate, as it is by far the safest method.

That being said, it's important to properly restrain the crate in your vehicle as well, so you'll want to choose one with tie-down straps.

Many crate and pet carrier manufacturers claim their products are crash-tested and safe for use in a vehicle, but there are no established test protocols or standards required to make such claims.

Last year, the Center for Pet Safety (CPS) along with Subaru of America, conducted a study that looked into safety of such products and found many are actually unsafe.<sup>2</sup>

The researchers tested pet products, including pet booster seats, according to the Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standard crash conditions for child safety seats. A variety of (simulated) dog breeds in different shapes and sizes were used in the tests.

Many problems were revealed, especially among products that connect to dog collars and harnesses. The collars could choke your dog in an accident and oftentimes the harnesses failed, "resulting in catastrophic failure that could cause serious injury to both the pet and vehicle passengers."

## **Top-Rated Travel Crates, Harnesses and Carriers**

While CPS does not recommend the use of any pet travel seats or booster seats, they did recommend several harnesses (one with a CPS certified five-star crash test rating), crates and carriers, each of which has strength-rated anchor straps or worked in connection with vehicles existing LATCH connection systems (used for children's car seats).

While you could technically secure most any crate in your vehicle using elastic or rubber bungee cords, these are not secure enough in an accident, putting your pet at risk of injury.

Keep in mind, also, that putting your pet into a crate, carrier or secure harness is for both their safety and yours. An unrestrained pet can be a distraction to the driver or could crawl under their feet, causing an accident.

In an accident, an unrestrained pet can also turn into a projectile, which is life-threatening for your pet and other passengers, who could be struck by the pet.

You'll want to choose a crate or carrier that fits your pet snugly, with enough room to be comfortable but not excess room (which poses a risk to your pet in an accident). Your pet should then be secured into the back seat or cargo area of the vehicle — not the front passenger seat.

The top-rated harness had an infinity-loop system that allows it to be safely attached to your vehicle's seatbelt along with an energy-absorbing padded vest. Specifically, CPS identified the following as the safest travel options for pets:<sup>3</sup>

- Sleepypod Clickit Sport Harness
- Gunner Kennel G1 Intermediate with Strength Rated Anchor Straps
- Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed with PPRS Handilock
- PetEgo JetSet Carrier with ISOFIX-LATCH Connection

## **Is It Safe to Travel by Air With Your Pet?**

It can be safe to travel by air with your pet, but there are no guarantees, and your experience may vary widely depending on airline, time of year and many other factors. Ideally, if your trip requires air travel, I recommend leaving your pet at home in the care of a qualified pet sitter.

If that's not an option and you must fly with your pet, it's important to do your homework first. While the pet cargo area on most aircraft is temperature- and pressure-controlled, the conditions can shift widely.

A study by the American Association of Laboratory Animal Science showed that cargo hold temperatures shift by 50 degrees or more during most flights. On half the flights studied, the cargo area reached 85 degrees, which is quite a bit warmer than the temperature in the passenger cabin.

And 15% of the time, the cargo hold dropped to a chilly 45 degrees. What may be more dangerous than the cargo hold itself is what happens to your pet before and after boarding. This is the riskiest time for a pet during air travel. Dr. Laurie S. Coger, told USA Today:<sup>4</sup>

*"Most injuries, escapes or deaths occur on the ground ... Heat stroke, injuries due to crates being dropped or broken, or other mishaps are most likely during loading and unloading ...*

*The reason many airlines restrict travel during hot or cold times is the lack of climate control while waiting to board the plane.*

*... Tarmacs can get blazingly hot or dangerously cold, putting a pet sitting in an airline crate at great risk. Some airlines have climate-controlled pet areas where pets are held until they board.*

*Always ask what an airline's procedures are for pets that are waiting to board, and for when they are unloaded."*

If you're planning to put your pet on a plane, be sure he is acclimated to his crate well ahead of time, and think twice before administering a sedative, which may cause potentially dangerous changes in heart rate, function and balance (and should definitely be avoided in dogs with epilepsy or cardiovascular disease).

To help reduce anxiety naturally, consider giving flower essences orally before, during and after travel. Mist the air around your dog's carrier with pet-friendly essential oils a few days before travel.

## **RV Travel With Pets**

Sixty-one percent of RV owners travel with pets; it's one of the great benefits of travelling this way!<sup>5</sup> However, your pet should be safely restrained, just as in any vehicle — not allowed to roam freely about the interior. You should also be very cautious about leaving your pet in the RV while you go sightseeing. Temperatures can quickly become deadly inside, and even leaving the air conditioning running is not a guarantee, as a power failure would put your pet's life at risk.

If you plan to leave pets in your RV, there are temperature-monitoring devices available that will send a signal to your cell phone if the temperature gets too hot or too cold. To be sure your dog doesn't escape, you'll also want to securely fasten a leash and collar or harness before venturing outdoors. A pet gate can be used as a barrier if you plan to stay in one place and leave the door open.

Finally, if you let your cat roam your RV while you're parked, be sure you know of his whereabouts before extending or retracting a slide-out. If your cat hides in such a spot, he could be seriously injured.

# Pack This Before Travelling With Your Pet

No matter what type of travel you're planning, preparing accordingly ahead of time is key (check out the app BringFido for this). Identify ER clinics along the way, and be sure your hotel or campground allows pets and that you've planned for plenty of pit stops along the way. You should pack a bag for your dog too, including items such as:

- A basic first-aid kit
- An extra collar and ID tag
- Leash
- A copy of your pet's medical file in print form or on a thumb drive
- Their dog bed, or towels or blankets for bedding and a couple of favorite toys
- Bowls, food and treats, along with extra bottled water

You'll also want to plan some extra time into your itinerary, as traveling with pets may call for unexpected, and extended, stops. However, your extra efforts and preparation will surely pay off, and you and your pet will share new adventures and memories to last you a lifetime.

## Sources and References

[PetMD](#)

<sup>1</sup> [TripAdvisor Top 10 Pet-Friendly Accommodations](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Center for Pet Safety July 22, 2015](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Chicago Tribune November 25, 2015](#)

<sup>4</sup> [USA Today June 8, 2015](#)

<sup>5</sup> [VetStreet June 2, 2015](#)

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