

BUCKLE-UP PUP!

While traveling with pets, it's safety first, and luckily there are many varieties of auto restraints for dogs.

BY DR. MARTY BECKER + KEITH TURNER

Do you secure your dog while traveling in the car? That question typically draws an uneasy look and an uncomfortable response from even the most conscientious and well-meaning dog guardian.

The truth is that most pet-loving people—including those who wouldn't think of driving in a car without first securing themselves and their children with seatbelts—don't provide the same protection for their pets.

And the results can be tragic.

According to the American Automobile Association, unrestrained pets cause more than 30,000 accidents annually. That's thousands of fatalities and injuries that could have been avoided with the use of a simple pet restraint, harness or crate.

Leaving your pet loose in a moving car can be a danger on many levels, says Dr. Tony Johnson, emergency

department director at VCA Indiana Veterinary Specialists in Indianapolis.

"It's beneficial to both people and pets to have animals properly restrained in a car—either with a commercial restraint device or in a carrier," he says. "I have seen several dramatic and heartbreaking cases where dogs were either tied to a moving vehicle or jumped out of a vehicle and suffered severe injuries."

Christina Selter, founder of Bark Buckle UP—an organization dedicated to teaching pet owners about the importance of securing their pets while traveling—warns that an unrestrained dog can be dangerous to everyone in the vehicle. "In a 30 MPH accident, a 60-pound dog can cause an impact of more than 2,700 pounds, slamming into a car seat, windshield or other passengers," Selter says. "And if the animal survives and gets loose, it can run into traffic or impede the progress of emergency

UNRESTRAINED PETS CAUSE MORE THAN 30,000 ACCIDENTS ANNUALLY.



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crews arriving on the scene.”

Riding unrestrained in a car is just as dangerous for pets as it is for people, says Grant Biniasz, a spokesman for VPI Pet Insurance.

“Injuries can be sustained during an accident, or even when slamming on the brakes,” he says. “We also see many cases where unrestrained dogs have been injured jumping out of an open window if they see something interesting—like another dog, or a squirrel—outside of the car.”

There are many varieties of auto restraints for dogs. There are harnesses, like the Tug N Hug Truck/SUV/Auto safety line; hammocks, such as the Coverking Car Seat Pet Protector; crates, like the Petmate Vari-Kennel; and interior barriers, like the Euro Barre-Aire by Doctors Foster and Smith.

In fact, one auto manufacturer, Volvo, has made dog safety such a priority that the Swedish automaker has introduced its own line of pet barriers that fit into some of its more dog-friendly models. And several other automakers are reportedly following suit.

No matter what type of restraint you choose, the key is to introduce it to your pet as early as possible, says Biniasz.

Restraining provides protection in three ways:

1. Keeps the driver safe from surprise distractions.
2. Reduces distractions for others in the vehicle who might, in turn, distract the driver.
3. Secures the pet in case of sudden stops or collisions.

How often does your dog ride in the car? Probably more than you think: Fifty percent of dog owners consider their pet's comfort when buying a car, and 82% of dogs travel in the car and on vacations, according to Bark Buckle UP's website, www.barkbuckleup.com.

“It is very difficult to train an older dog to wear a restraint in a car,” he says. “Pet owners should acclimate their pets to restraints from a young age.”

The importance of pet car safety is perhaps best summed up by Sgt. Rick Martinez of the Anaheim Police Department in California, who has seen first-hand the tragic consequences of unrestrained pets in vehicles.

“We all want to spoil our pets,” says Martinez. “The best thing you can do for your dog is to buckle them up in your car. In case of an accident, it will save their life and greatly enhance the abilities of first responders to take care of other occupants.”

The point is crystal clear: You love and value your pets, so make sure they are secure. **f**

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