

## Article 25

### Canine anxiety with car rides very common

Dear Gus,

My dog is generally well behaved, but when we go for a ride in the car, watch out. He begins jumping all over and is very difficult to control. Any suggestions on how to make this a safer, more positive experience for both of us?

Vida D., Orange

Dear Vida,

Car problems are very common. To understand why, let's talk about the experience from a dog's perspective. I just left my mom, brothers and sisters for the very first time in my life. I'm put in a confined space that moves. I'm not feeling well, so I become nauseous and vomit. Soon after, I'm in this space again and am taken someplace with lots of commotion and other animals. Bad enough, I vomit again on the way, and now get pinched and poked by a strange person (the veterinarian). Then, back in the moving space where I vomit again.

This may seem a bit exaggerated, but it's similar to most dogs' earliest experiences with car travel. You can understand why many dogs have "car anxiety". Unfortunately, this can lead to a bad traveling companion.

Good car manners are, as you suggest, not just a matter of comfort, but of safety. The safest method of pet transport is a travel crate, also known as a flight crate, secured to the car. Another new option is a seat belt for dogs where the dog is secured to the car seat belt. Very common is a divider, similar to a fence which keeps the dog separated from the seat compartment of the car. With any of these methods, obedience training is important to keep your dog calm and quiet during your ride.

If you rely on a divider, you should be using the "down" command so that your dog lies down and does not move around the backspace of the car. This is still somewhat risky, since if there is a sudden stop or an accident, the dog becomes a projectile object within the space. This can cause severe injury to your dog. Never, under any circumstance should you transport your dog in the bed of a truck or even a capped bed for any reason.

You'll need to begin to desensitize your dog to car rides, no matter which method you use. Begin by sitting with your dog in the parked car for a while, praising him for behaving appropriately. Next start taking short rides around the block, again with lots of praise when he behaves. Don't correct or scold him if he misbehaves, just stop the exercise since you do not want him to associate the car with negative experiences. Make the car travel experience a fun and positive learning experience.

I hope this helps, and happy trails to you and your canine companion!

Gus

Gus Marnel of Milford is the owner of K-9 Communication and a Master Trainer and graduate of the United States K-9 Academy. Ltd. If you have a question for Gus, email him at [gusk9@opt0niine.net](mailto:gusk9@opt0niine.net)

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