



# Train Kitty and Fido to Enjoy Car Rides

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While we humans are used to auto travel as a daily fact of life, many cats and dogs hate going for car rides and even get sick on the way. For cat owners this may seem like only a minor inconvenience until you have to take Kitty to the vet hospital and she mysteriously disappears upon sight of the carrier signaling the trip. With dogs; however, where play-dates at the park and other companion duties are part of every day life, good car-riding skills are a more obvious must.

Luckily, a love for car rides is easy to train in dogs or cats if you take the right steps. One bad experience early on can set you back though. And that bad experience doesn't have to be rollercoaster ride up and down San Francisco streets in a clunker with a broken clutch. Many factors surrounding the trip can serve to sour your pet towards the sojourn. For instance, if you were agoraphobic like most indoor-only cats, or afraid of new people, sights and sounds, like any pet that stays secluded instead of getting adequate practice seeing these things, being crammed into a little box and hauled off in a noisy metal monster would surely result in your needing long-term psychologic help. To make matters worse for Fido and Kitty, often the first ride is a trip to the vet hospital where they sit in a strange

room filled with foreign smells, odd creatures, and sometimes ear-shattering sounds.

And finally, even if the new sights and destination don't present a problem, the actual sway of the car can make some cats and dogs sick. Some pets respond by just salivating profusely while in other cases you first just hear a weird wind-shield wiper sound emanating from somewhere in the car. Then you hear a gag and a smell that immediately alerts you as to what's going on. After one ride like this, future fits of nausea can be purely psychologic. Like the time you ate almond fudge ice cream right as you were coming down with the flu and now the sight of almond fudge ice cream makes your stomach feel queasy.

## How to avoid bad experiences

This all sounds pretty bad, but these bad experiences are easy to avoid altogether. First, if your dog or cat will be riding in a travel crate, make sure he likes his carrier. Keep his carrier out at all times, feed him all of his meals in the carrier and also randomly hide treats for him to find at the back or under the bedding until he learns that the crate is great place to be. You'll know when he's ready

because he'll frequently go in on his own to search for tasty surprises and he'll sometimes even lie down and sleep in the crate.

Now you're ready for a short car ride. Dogs and cats who won't be in travel carriers should be on leashes with someone attached to the other end or seat-belted in so that they remain somewhat stationary. Without these proper precautions, some dogs don't wait until the park to start playing. To them, the car is their moving playground. Other pets are just a nuisance and can distract their owners enough to cause a car accident.

### **The First Car Ride**

Start the ride with your pet on an empty stomach and give treats during the ride so your pet associates the car ride with the yummy treats. If he's hungry, then once he's somewhat relaxed he'll start eating the treats. Next make sure that the first ride is short so that your pet doesn't have much time to get nauseous. And of course make sure your driving skills don't make your Fido sick. Lastly, end in a location that your dog or cat likes. For most cats, this means end up back home. Practice these car rides until your dog or cat acts relaxed all the time then increase the driving distance. This usually only takes a few rides for dogs and cats may only need a few more.

### **What to Do if Fido Already Hates the Car?**

What do you do if your dog already hates car rides and won't even get near the car? You can routinely feed him near the car in area where he'll immediately eat his meal. Then each time move the bowl a little closer until he's finally eating in the car. In fact, you don't even need to use a bowl, you can toss his meal on the floor of the car for him to find in sort of a scavenging game. Once he regularly eats in the car you can take him for a short ride. If your dog or cat actually consistently gets sick in the car, then medical intervention may be in order. Your veterinarian can prescribe an appropriate anti-nausea medication, and sometimes even a medication to block the salivary effects one or two times will do the job.

In any case, most pets, even the seemingly most car-phobic dogs and cats can learn to tolerate and even enjoy their car rides if you just take it step by step and teach him to associate the car with pleasant things.

#### **For More Animal Behavior Information**

Visit Dr. Yin's Behavior Web Site at [www.nerdbook.com/sophia](http://www.nerdbook.com/sophia)

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