

Follow the safe route when travelling with pets

Safety, comfort and complying with legal requirements are the essential road rules, says **Bruce Waddell** of Willows Veterinary Group

When travelling with your cat or dog in the car there are two areas that owners must consider – complying with the law and the comfort of the animal.

According to the Highway Code: "Animals should be suitably restrained in a vehicle so that they don't distract the driver or injure them if the vehicle stops quickly". Despite this, one in four owners unwittingly breaks the law by not having their animals restrained. The majority of these are dog owners – only 8% of cat owners let their cats roam freely in the car. While many dog owners will restrain their dogs adequately for long journeys, it is tempting just to let them hop in on short jaunts.

DOGS

Ensure they have everything they need to keep them comfortable on their trip. Having a checklist or a travel bag with all the items in will help.

Lead, collar and ID tag: it is not uncommon for owners to forget to pack a lead when the dog simply trots out of the house and into the car. Make sure you put the lead on the dog and keep a firm hold when you stop the car before you open a door – you don't want the dog to make a bid for freedom. If this is not possible, open the door/hatch slowly and make sure you have hold of your dog. It is important that your dog has a collar with an ID tag with your mobile number on it. If you are far from home and he/she is found wandering there is no point in people ringing your house phone.

Food and water: take a sufficient supply of the food your

dog is used to eating and water that your dog is used to drinking. It is advisable to take enough food for the duration of your trip as changing their diet could cause upset stomachs. Make sure you make frequent stops, especially for water, as dogs can easily become dehydrated in cars. It also gives your dog the opportunity to burn off some energy and stretch their legs.

Bedding: in cold weather, pack a dog blanket to keep your dog warm.

Poo bags: needed for comfort breaks.

It is also a good idea to bring a damp cloth in a bag to wash your dog's paws before allowing them back in the car.

RESTRAINING YOUR DOG

We all know dogs that like to stick their heads out of the window and take in the air. Even if your dog is a happy traveller, they should not be allowed to roam free within a moving car.

If you are involved in an accident, your dog could be thrown through the windscreen, or could even be the cause of an accident.

The best solution is a dog crate. It should be large enough for your dog to stand up and turn around in, but not so large that your dog slides



around as the car is moving. It is important that the crate is fixed securely.

If you do not have a crate there are alternatives. You can buy harnesses that are designed specifically to work with seat belts. They allow the dog enough freedom to move but will restrain them in the event of an accident.

Dog guards can be used but make sure that they are compatible with your vehicle and

that they are rated to resist your dog's weight in the event of an accident.

CATS

Much of the advice given for dogs applies equally to cats. However, when choosing a cat carrier, cats like to sit in a small space and don't move around much so the carrier shouldn't be too large. Make sure it is easy to clean as many cats will vomit, urinate or defecate on a car journey. Make sure there is good airflow around the carrier but that it is secured firmly, either behind the seats or with a seatbelt.

Before you move the carrier at the end of the journey ensure that it is still securely fastened.

Finally, whatever pets you are travelling with, make sure that you have adequate venti-

lation in the car. Cars can soon become like greenhouses for pets – remember they have a fur coat.

Also make sure that your pet is not in direct sun. When the sun is concentrated through the car's windows it can cause sunburn and heatstroke, so make sure you are able to provide shade.

If your pet suffers with anxiety about travelling or motion sickness, there are products available that can help – plan in advance, though, as some need time to work.

Contact the Willows Veterinary Group on 01606 723202.



TIPS FOR SQPS

- If your pet suffers from anxiety when travelling, the use of products such as Adaptil (dogs) and Feliway (cats) can help, particularly if they start at least a week before.
- If your pet has travel sickness, get veterinary advice as there are some medications that can be used to help with this.
- Your vet will also be able to offer advice on behavioural training and other medications that can help to reduce stress and anxiety in travelling patients.