

Points on Pets: Drivers should exercise some restraint

by R.G._Elmor_DVM

Q: I have often wondered if allowing dogs to run around freely in cars or transported in the backs of open trucks without being restrained ever causes accidents. A dog running around in a car has to be major distraction and most likely often blocks full vision of the driver. Do dogs ever fall out of the backs of trucks? It seems to me that there ought to be laws prohibiting the transportation of animals without proper restraint. I have often thought that we should have a national "transport your pet safely week" to draw attention to this problem.

A: Although I do not have numbers regarding the number of accidents caused by free-roaming pets in cars and trucks, your concerns are justified. A free-roaming pet can obstruct the view of the driver and can be a major distraction. Accidents can be caused by animals moving unexpectedly and because of obstructed views through rear windows and rear view mirrors. Of course animals hanging out of windows and running unrestrained in the backs of trucks can cause serious accidents.

Fortunately, there are many safe ways to restrain pets in moving vehicles. Using a secured crate is the safest form of confinement. The crate should be large enough to allow the dog or cat to fully stand up and turn around comfortably. Crates placed in the beds of trucks should be securely bolted to the floor or strapped so that they cannot slide around during acceleration or sudden stops.

Using a properly fitting restraint harness specifically designed for pets is the next best option to using an animal crate while transporting pets. Pet harnesses can be purchased at most pet stores and online. Of course the lead on the harness should be short enough to keep the pet from roaming throughout the automobile.

Animals on long leads can actually be more dangerous than free-roaming animals. There are many reports of dogs on long leads in the beds of trucks falling out and being dragged to gruesome deaths.

A third alternative for restraining pets in station wagons and vans is the use of dividers to confine the animals to the rear portion of the vehicle. However, if the animal is free-roaming behind a divider it still might obstruct the view to the rear and might be thrown against the divider during a sudden, unexpected stop.

There are laws regarding the transport of pets in some localities. Of course, making these laws more widespread is a worthy cause and could result in reducing the frequency of serious accidents involving transported pets and their owners.

Q: This might seem strange, but our dog seems to be calmer when we are reading and listening to soft classical music than when we are watching television. Of course, we are more calm while listening to good music, too. Are we just imagining that music calms our dog? Is there anything published in the scientific

literature about this?

A: Just as in humans, what our dogs listen to does seem to have an effect on their behaviors. It has been shown that uncomplicated classical music does have a calming effect on dogs and babies. A new book titled "Through a Dog's Ear" by Joshua Leeds and Susan Wagner (Sounds True, \$18.95) addresses how music affects dogs. This book explains how to use sound to improve the health and behavior of our canine companions.

Send an e-mail or write to Pets, P.O. Box 120190, San Diego, CA 92112-0190. Only questions of general interest will be answered in this column.

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