

Carrying Pets Safely



Produced with the support of the Department for Transport

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In a crash, an unrestrained pet could be seriously injured, or injure people in the car. At 30 mph, for example, a 50lb (22.5 kg) border collie would be thrown forward with a force equivalent to almost nine 12 stone men.

Unrestrained pets can also distract the driver, and cause an accident. Even pets that are normally well behaved could be frightened by something unusual and dive for the driver's feet or lap. Following a crash, an unrestrained pet could escape and be hit by another vehicle or cause another collision. A frightened dog may attack strangers who are trying to help.

Ensure that your pet is safely secured in a seatbelt harness, a pet carrier, a dog cage, behind a dog guard or (in an emergency only) in a suitable well-ventilated zip-up bag. The most suitable restraint will depend on the needs of your pet.



A Safety Harness

For medium or large sized dogs – a safety harness that attaches to the seatbelt is best. It should go round your dog's chest, back and shoulders and be attached to the car seat belt, which should be fastened.

Before buying a harness:

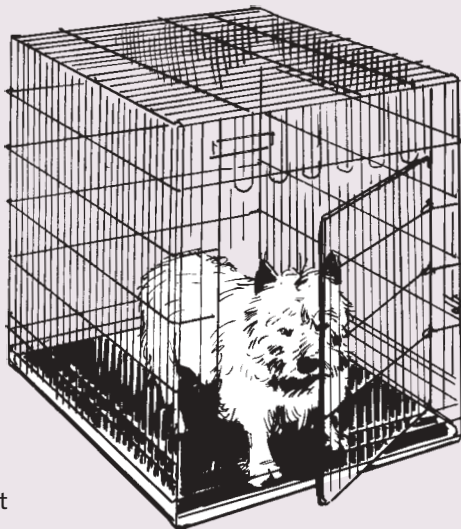
Make sure it is designed to be used in a car. Check that it is suitable for your dog's size and weight and ensure it fits properly, with wide straps to distribute the forces safely across your dog's body, particularly the chest and shoulders.

Try to make sure your dog cannot get entangled in the harness as this will be uncomfortable and could distract the driver.

Pet Carriers

For smaller dogs, cats and other pets, a pet carrier is a good option. It needs to be the correct size and should be held firmly in place with the seat belt or by wedging it firmly in the footwell. Never put a carrier in the boot of a saloon car as your pet could suffocate, and avoid putting it unsecured in the boot of a hatchback or estate car, as the carrier will be thrown around in a crash.

Some owners put self-scented material at the bottom of the carrier to help keep their pet calm.

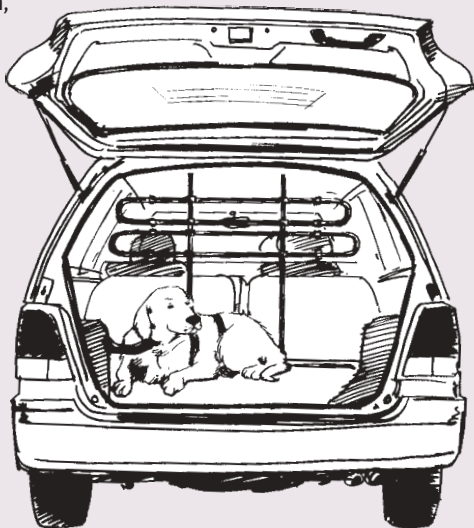


Travel Cage or Crate

A travel cage is suitable for dogs and larger animals. Make sure it is the correct size for your pet. Leave plenty of space around the crate to allow for ventilation, and ensure it is secured with the seat belt. In a hatchback or estate (not saloon) car, a cage can be attached to anchorage points in the boot.

Dog guard

A dog guard will keep your pet away from the driver but it will not protect the animal in a crash. For some vehicles, accessory kits are available to help build a dog cage.



Zip-up Bag

In an emergency (taking an injured animal to the vet, for example) a zip-up shopping or sports bag can be used, as long as it is big enough to hold your pet comfortably and it allows your pet to get enough air. Ensure that you strap it securely with the seatbelt.



Transport in Open Vehicles

Transporting dogs in open vehicles is dangerous. The dog is exposed to the weather, to grit and debris being blown into its eyes, nose, or throat, and to the risk of jumping or falling from the vehicle. If there is no alternative, put the dog in a cage that will protect it from the elements, and prevent it jumping or being thrown from the vehicle. Fasten the cage securely to the vehicle or secure it with a seat belt.

Getting your pet safely in and out of your vehicle

Most pets, apart from dogs, should be put in a carrier before you put them in the vehicle. Keep your dog on a lead while it is getting in or out of the car, and ensure that it uses the door on the pavement side. Do not let it jump through the window.

After a Crash

Do not let your pet out of its carrier or cage until it has calmed down and is in a safe environment. In a serious accident call out a vet.

Other Tips

- Don't let your pet stick its head out of the window because dirt and insects can get into its eyes and nose.
- If your vehicle has airbags, make sure that your pet will not be struck by the airbag if it goes off.
- Check that your pet is covered by insurance if it is hurt in a car accident.
- Consider travel training for your pet.