



FEATURE



Pets in Cars

THE REAL FACTS

Over two-thirds of Australian households own pets, making Australia a country with one of the highest rates of pet ownership in the world. Considered by many as integral family members, pets regularly travel in the family car, however, it's also vitally important to make sure all your passengers, including your pets, are appropriately secured when you are driving and to keep their safety and comfort a priority when they are travelling with you in a car.

This not only involves having them secure and restrained in a vehicle but by ensuring that they are comfortable in a vehicle, stopping for regular toilet and exercise breaks on long trips, keeping them hydrated with water and never leaving them in a locked vehicle.

Restraining your dog can save its life - and yours

Vehicle restraints for dogs are widely available and include restraints that either attach to existing seat belts, or have buckles that clip directly into the seat belt. Generally, restraints may be attached to the dog's collar or harness. When unrestrained, not only may your pet distract you from driving, they may also face the risk of being thrown from a seat or the back of the car upon heavy braking or in the event of an accident.

Restraining a dog in a car therefore provides several safety benefits, both to the dog and the occupants of the car:

- the dog cannot move around within the car and therefore has less potential to distract or disrupt the driver.
- in a collision, the dog may be less likely to become a projectile, thereby potentially decreasing the risk of injury to the driver or passengers.
- restraint may prevent the dog from jumping out of a moving car's window, which reduces the risk of injury to the dog and other road users.

In addition, many dogs are killed or injured each year when travelling on the back of open and moving vehicles unrestrained. Some of these escaped canines are very distressed and disorientated, often causing an obstacle and source of danger to themselves and other road users.

There are various laws in Australia governing the transportation of animals in cars. In Western Australia, pet owners owe a duty of care to make sure that their animals are not transported in a way that causes or is likely to cause unnecessary harm. Transporting animals in the Northern Territory must be done in a manner that does not unreasonably or unnecessarily inflict suffering on the animal, while Queensland pets can't be transported in a way that is inappropriate for the animal's welfare. A similar duty of care owed by pet owners to their pet is mirrored in other states across Australia. To gain a better understanding about the road rules involving animal transport specific to the state you are living in, consult your state's road traffic authority.

There are widely available restraint options, although you should take into consideration the type of car you drive and the size of your dog.

Harness: Swivel style attachment systems which anchor to the existing seatbelt and attach to a dog harness. To be effective, it is essential for the harness to be correctly fitted and for the anchor to be secure.

Pet transport crates: For complete safety, crates must be secured to your vehicle and be big enough for a pet to stand up, lie down and turn around as per RSPCA guidelines.

Cargo barriers: Ideal for station wagons and four wheel drives. They can be purchased to suit your make and model of vehicle or you can purchase adjustable barriers which are easily installed and removed. If your cargo area is large consider the use of a harness as well.

NSW Road Rules

- You can be fined and hit with demerit points if your dog is causing you not to be in full control of your vehicle. You can also be fined if you drive with your dog in your lap.
- A driver, motorcycle rider, bike rider or passenger must not lead their dog on a leash while moving. A motor cycle rider must not ride with an animal between the handlebars and the rider.
- Pets should be seated or housed in the appropriate area of the vehicle.
- If a dog is injured because it was unrestrained, the owner can face heavy fines and a jail sentence.
- Carrying a dog unrestrained in the back of a ute also comes with heavy fines.
- Drivers caught with unrestrained dogs can risk fines of more than \$400, with 170 people charged over the offence since the pet-related road rule was introduced in NSW in July.
- The legislation, which stipulates that motorists must not drive a vehicle with an animal on their lap or preventing them from having proper control of the car, carries a penalty of three demerit points and \$338, rising to \$422 in a school zone. (A NSW Police spokeswoman said of the 170 offenders, four had been caught in school zones).

If an animal is injured as a result of being unrestrained, owners also face up to six months' jail and fines of up to \$5,500 under the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act. The RSPCA managing inspector, Matthew French, said that even the Australian tradition of conveying dogs untethered on the back of utes could land drivers with on-the-spot fines of \$500 under the Act.

In the likelihood of an accident involving a domestic pet, you must contact the owner, Police or RSPCA and you should take it immediately to the nearest animal shelter/veterinarian, if injured.

Dog restraints

Typically consisting of two parts, a harness and anchor, a dog car restraint system works best when it anchors your pet down without limiting its ability to move, stretch or lie down. The harness should go around your dog's neck, in front of its shoulders and behind the front legs. These come in all sorts of material including nylon, leather and fabric, but make sure you purchase one that suits your dog best.

The anchor is a set of rings or a strap that connects the harness to your regular seat belt attachment or to a cargo tie-down ring at the back of your station wagon, minivan or SUV. With the station wagon, minivan or SUV, in addition to restraining your dog down to a cargo tie-down ring, putting it behind a cargo barrier may also minimise driver distractions.

It is always important to check state standards before you head off to purchase your car pet restraint or set up a cargo barrier. Please take note of the recent NRMA Insurance Research Test of popular pet harnesses on the market.



NRMA test of popular pet harnesses

An NRMA test of popular pet harnesses has revealed that a number are not effective in restraining pets in common low speed collisions. NRMA Insurance Head of Research Robert McDonald said the testing was undertaken to urge pet owners to consider the safety of their pets and passengers when travelling in vehicles and a variety of dog safety harnesses were tested on the market using life size and correctly weighted dog 'dummies' at speeds of up to 35km/h.

"Our tests showed that an unrestrained pet sitting on the back seat of a car can hit the dashboard with enough force to cause serious injury, even at a collision speed below 20km/h," said Mr McDonald.

Of the 25 pet harnesses tested across a range of manufacturers, all but two failed to restrain the 'dummy', due to the use of weak plastic buckles similar to those used on most backpacks. The only two harnesses that didn't fail were the Purina Roadie harness and the Sleepypod Clickit harness. Unlike the other harnesses, the adjusting buckles and webbing stood up to both the 35km/h drop test and in-car low speed crash test of up to 20km/h.

"Most people using the commonly available harnesses are doing so in a genuine attempt to keep their pets safe. However our testing has unfortunately shown that most harnesses, while effective at restraining pets, are not safety devices and do little to prevent injury in a common, low speed crash. "An effective harness is critical when travelling with a pet as it keeps the animal safe and restrained and avoids the driver being distracted while driving with the animal moving around inside the vehicle. In a collision, an unrestrained pet also has the potential to injure the other passengers in the vehicle.

"Many dogs weigh over 20kg, with some over 50kg. The Purina Roadie harness proved effective at restraining dogs up to 35kg, while the more expensive Sleepypod Clickit harness tested to be more suitable for larger animals," said Mr McDonald.

Additionally, in a survey of 450 NSW dog owners, over 40 per cent admitted to the insurer that they don't restrain their dog when it's travelling in the car. Dog owners are simply placing them on the front or back seat (70 per cent), in the back luggage area (15 per cent) or alarmingly on their lap (4 per cent)¹.

"Just as you restrain a child in the car, we want to urge all dog owners to consider these results and ensure their furry friend is secured safely when travelling in the car," said McDonald.

Pet owners should be reminded that a driver must not drive a vehicle if an animal is in the driver's lap – they will incur a significant fine and loss of points.²

The testing was conducted by dropping weighted harnesses at speeds of up to 35km/h. The in-car testing was conducted using a specially modified crash test car at speeds of up to 20km/h. The tests were completed at the NRMA Insurance Research Centre in Sydney.

Dog car harness test results

Harness	Results
Purnia 'Roadie'	Pass (see above image)
Sleepypod 'Clickit'	Pass
Animates 'Car Safety Harness'	Fail
Black Dog 'Car Harness'	Fail
Masterpet '2 in 1 Car Harness'	Fail
Rudducks 'Car Harness'	Fail

(Shortlist of the most readily available harnesses)

1. Based on Pure Profile research conducted in October 2013

2. Rule 297 (1A), Road Rules 2008 (NSW) - www.rms.nsw.gov.au/index.html

Source: <http://www.nrma.com.au/paws-and-secure-your-puppy>



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Carriers for smaller pets

No matter the size of your pet, you want to be able to transport it safely in your car. A robust carrier, secured to the car seat with a seat belt or a specially designed carrier restraint, may provide your smaller pet with adequate protection in the event of a collision or heavy braking.

Choosing a carrier of the right size is important; for maximum comfort it should be wide enough to allow your animal to lie down flat, turn around, stand erect and stretch with clearance. Being trapped in a carrier may put an animal under a lot of stress, however one way to calm it down and decrease your nervous pet's risk of injuring itself during the drive, is to provide it with its favourite toy or blanket. The better your pet behaves in its crate, the easier it will be for you to keep your eyes on the road without being distracted.

Never leave your dog unattended in a car!

Take the pledge to never leave your dog in a hot car!

Your car can get hot enough to cause your dog's death even when the windows are down or the car is in the shade.

Dr. Chris Papantonio from the Colyton Vet Hospital in NSW agrees that this important message is just not getting through. "We still see people leaving animals in cars, just like we still see some people leaving children in the car."

The research says it all; dogs die quickly in hot cars. Many studies have now concluded that even with the windows cracked, the internal temperature of a car will rise at the same rate as with the windows closed. In fact 80% of the final temperature rise occurs in the first 30 minutes and cracking a window is not effective in decreasing either the rate of the heat increase or the maximum temperature reached.

A Stanford University study revealed that when it's only 22 degrees outside, the temperature inside your car will rise to a staggering 47.2 degrees within 60 minutes.

"At elevated temperatures, the dogs cells die and organs begin to shut down increasing the risk of an animal going into shock and dying," Dr Papantonio adds.

Most dog owners, like parents, will only crack the window for the fear of the pet escaping or theft of the vehicle. "Dogs cannot efficiently cool themselves down as well as we do. A dog can succumb to heat stroke within minutes,"

Dr Papantonio says. "We had a client transport their dog in the back of their car to the dog park. On the way, they dropped off at the shops to pick some things up and left him in the car. By the time they got to the dog park, the dog was already showing signs of heat stroke so they rushed him into us for treatment."

An animal that is over-heating, can suffer irreversible organ damage and even death. Dogs are especially vulnerable as they cool off by panting and through the pads on their feet.

Dr Papantonio also warns that some breeds are particularly at risk of heatstroke.



"Brachycephalic breeds, such as Pugs and Bulldogs, are more susceptible to the heat as the conformation of their heads prevents adequate air flow and natural cooling of the body."

The heat can be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of your pet, so if you cannot take your pet with you, please, leave them in the comfort and safety of their home."

How fast does the temperature rise in a car?

The temperature inside a car can reach higher than 50°C after only five minutes, when the temperature outside is 32.5°C (in tests conducted by the RACQ). During this test, the inside temperature reached over 75°C in less than two hours. The tests also showed that the colour of the car, the tint on the windows or even leaving the windows open did not reduce the cabin temperature by a significant amount, nor did parking it in the shade.

How should you treat a pet with heat stress?

Dogs suffering from heat stress may pant, drool and become restless. Over time, they become weak and the colour of their gums may change. They may also start to stagger and experience vomiting, diarrhoea or seizures.

Heat stroke is an emergency and your dog needs to be checked by a veterinarian. Emergency treatment is aimed at bringing the body temperature down at a steady rate; spray cool water onto your dog's body and use a fan. Don't use ice or ice-cold water as this may cool your dog down too rapidly.

What to do if you see a dog struggling in a hot car?

- Take down the cars registration.
- Call NRMA on 131 111 and select the option for a baby or animal locked in a car. They will come out immediately to get them out, regardless of you or the car owner being an NRMA member, free of charge!
- Ask nearby business if you can make an announcement just in case the owner is in a café or shopping centre.
- Wait by the car until help arrives.

Causing animals to suffer in any way is a criminal offence. If your dog suffers as a result of being left in a car, you can be fined \$5,500 and can spend six months in jail. If your dog dies as a result of being left in a car, charges include \$22,500 in fines and two years in jail.



Planning a road trip?

Take some time to prepare for your road trip with your pet so that your holiday is safe and relaxed for both of you. Following are some basic points to keep in mind when taking your dog on holiday with you.

Before the trip...



- To make the most out of your road trip, plan ahead and research the road rules relevant to the states you will be visiting.
- Make sure that your dog is healthy enough to travel and that all of their vaccinations, worming and flea treatment is up to date before setting off. If your pet takes any prescription medication make sure that you have enough to see you through the holiday. Talk to your vet for advice including paralysis tick prevention.
- Have a dog restraint properly installed in your car. Restraints can help to stop your dog distracting you and reduce the risk of injury in an accident.
- For longer journeys, it is also a good idea to familiarise your pet with the vehicle before you leave for your holiday, so you and your furry companion can enjoy a safe and enjoyable ride. You might be advised to try a few short trips if your dog is not used to travelling in a vehicle.
- Ensure your dog will be comfortable and safe during the trip, that they are not too cramped with bags and belongings and they have a suitable restraint for the car, along with a first aid kit in case of an emergency.
- Ensure you take an adequate supply of food and water, treats, water, collapsible bowl and a favourite toy/blanket, etc
- Make sure your dog is microchipped and that your contact details are up to date and recorded on the microchip register. There are six microchip registers in Australia, make sure the one you and your dog are recorded on is recognised nationally (and not just in your state). If your register is only state-based it's a good idea to also register on a national register. This is very important so that you can be contacted if your dog is lost at any point (including

interstate). Also attach an ID tag with your contact details on it to your dog's collar. If your dog has to be registered in your state, also make sure their registration is up to date.

- If you're anticipating a fairly hot journey, make sure your vehicle's air-conditioning system is functioning or look into purchasing a cooling blanket that can keep your pet's temperature down and maximise its comfort.
- If possible, have the contact details of the local vet at your end destination or vet clinics along the way (if it's a long trip) at hand in case you need to make an appointment.
- Avoid feeding your dog for a couple of hours before you travel.
- Take your dog for a walk before your journey.
- Check for pet friendly accommodation.

During the trip

- Don't let your dog ride with its head out the window or leave on your lap! This should NOT occur if properly restrained with a car harness and these actions may incur an enforceable fine if caught.
- Never leave your dog in a parked car. Temperatures inside cars can rise very quickly, even if it is cloudy outside.
- Remember to stop for plenty of toilet breaks during your road trip to avoid toileting accidents in the car and time for on-lead exercise outside of the vehicle, in a safe and secure area. Even the most well trained dog can become exuberant and unpredictable in a new, exciting environment. Keep your dog on a lead when in an unfamiliar environment, so that they are secure if they take fright at any unfamiliar sights or sounds.
- A waterproof sheet can come in handy. Carry paper towels and disinfectant in case your dog has a 'doggy accident'. Consider stopping every couple of hours so your dog can stretch its legs. You will also appreciate the break.
- Last, but not least, you should keep the journey as short as possible to avoid any unnecessary stress for your pet and subsequent disruptions.





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Checklist

Things you should pack for your dog are:

- Collar/ car restraint/harness and lead
- Your pet's regular food and treats. Don't forget a can opener if your dog eats tinned food.
- Bedding and/or a travel crate to sleep in, possible cooling mat for hot days.
- Food and water bowls. Always carry enough bottles of fresh water in case you can't find a tap.
- Your dog's favourite toy(s)
- Grooming equipment including a towel in case your dog gets wet.
- A 'pooper scooper' and plastic bags to clean up after your dog.
- Any required medications, plus a first aid kit.
- Carry a waterproof sheet, in case of any accidents.
- Contact number of your vet along with contact details of a local vet in the vicinity of your destination.
- To find pet friendly accommodation it's easiest to start by doing some online research in advance for pet friendly places.

Sources

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