



FEAR OF RIDING IN THE CAR

by

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Similar to people, dogs can get car-sick, especially as young pups. Repeated uncomfortable journeys can cause your dog to become anxious and stressed about traveling in a car. To avoid this, make your first journeys together very short and gentle; do not come to sudden stops or take fast turns that might make Fido queasy.

If your dog is anxious about traveling, simply getting into the car will become stressful to him. We have to give him plenty of experiences of being in the car and everything not only being OK but actually being really fun! To do this, pick treats and games that are particular favorites of Fido's. Save these reinforcers only to be used in the proximity of the car. Let's say Fido particularly enjoys playing with squeaky toys. Start by playing with squeakies outside of the car with the back doors open. Put several squeakies into the back seat of the car, or wherever Fido is to travel. Then toss one into the car, inviting him to chase it in. Treats can also be used. At this stage, leave the doors open and invite him to come and go freely from the car, tossing squeakies in and having him follow them. Encourage him to stay in the back seat for a little while by playing or giving him special treats while there.

The following are approximations of the next steps in the process. Continue playing games together and having treats with each step. Repeat each step until Fido is showing happy, relaxed behavior before going to the next step:

- ✓ Close one backdoor to the car with Fido inside. Continue playing/tossing treats into and out of and around the car.
- ✓ Close both backdoors to the car with Fido inside. Get in and out of the car, tossing treats or toys.
- ✓ Have someone climb into the driver's seat with Fido in the back seat. Get in and out of the car.
- ✓ With someone in the driver's seat, put the key in the ignition and turn it only part way, where the electricity in the car comes on but the motor does *not* turn on. Get in and out of the car.
- ✓ With the car on, use electric windows, radio, seats, lights, etc. Turn the car off.
- ✓ Now put the key in the ignition and turn the motor on, but *do not move* the car. Stay idling for a little while, then turn the car off and get out of the car. (Make sure that gas fumes do not build up which might make Fido feel sick.)
- ✓ Turn the car on, move a few inches, stop and idle. Turn the car off.
- ✓ Now that you're moving, take gradually longer trips, maybe around the block, maybe to a favorite park that's close by so that Fido gets a very special surprise from the trip.

Some additional notes...

- Don't keep increasing the length of your trips. Randomize: make sure that some trips are still very short.

- Have these first short trips take your dog someplace he *loves* to go, like the dog park or over to play at a best friend's house.
- Feeding too much during early trips around the block can cause motion-sickness, so try to rely on toys, very occasional treats, and lots of verbal praise.
- It's best to have two people for these sessions, one driving while the other attends to Fido.

NOTE: At each step, watch Fido's body language. Is he getting comfortable in the car, looking relaxed? Is his tail wagging or is it low and tucked? Don't move to the next steps until Fido looks happy and relaxed. Should his stress spike, indicated with such signals as panting, a tucked tail, salivating, etc, take a step back and work up more gradually and thoroughly. Remember to not require too much in any single session. Quit while you're ahead and while things are traveling in a positive direction.