

“When it comes to car travel, there’s a range of different options..”

Well travelled!

What are the options when it comes to travelling easily and safely in the car with your dog? Alison Gallagher-Hughes considers the alternatives.

Travelling with dogs is all a matter of physics — variables and constants that need to be weighed up to maximise the comfort and safety of your dog, while minimising driver distraction.

There are many variables: your dog — his breed, height and weight, his predispositions around travel, the number of dogs you have, and the vehicle itself (model and specification) that will determine fit.

This is not lost on me because last year my canine family increased in number. The back seat hammock liner and seat belt tethers — ideal for one or two dogs — proved less so when travelling with five! When using tethers, there needs to be

sufficient length to allow the dog to move and change position, particularly over long distances, but extend these too much and you end up with something that resembles a maypole. I had to go back to the drawing board!

Rule 57 of the Highway Code states: “When in a vehicle, make sure dogs or other animals are suitably restrained so they cannot distract you while you are driving or injure you, or themselves, if you stop quickly. A seat belt harness, pet carrier, dog cage, or dog guard are ways of restraining animals in cars.”

In other words, it is not prescriptive in how you restrain your dog and there is no requirement to tether them — the



An unrestrained dog can prove a distraction to the driver.

rule primarily relates to driver focus and safety. But, as pet owners, we also want to ensure our dogs are comfortable and safe, protected in the event of a collision.

When it comes to car travel, there’s a range of different options to meet all budgets.

So, where do you start?

- **CHOICES TEND TO FALL UNDER FOUR CATEGORIES:**
- **Pet carriers/tubes/kennels.** Usually made of fabric/mesh, they are portable and lightweight so easier to remove when needed. They can be fixed onto the back seat or in the boot space of a hatchback or estate vehicle.
- **Dog cages/crates.** These come in a variety of sizes or can be custom-made. Robust and secure, they are the gold standard, offering protection as well as containment. They should be of sufficient height/depth to allow your dog to change position, but not to walk around.
- **Pet-safety harnesses/tethers.** These are the equivalent of dog seat belts, but it is important to ensure that a travel harness is used as opposed to a walking harness. Check out <https://ruffwear.co.uk/products/load-up-dog-car-harness> or <https://kurgo.uk/products/impact-dog-car-harness>. Never attach a tether to a collar.
- **Dog guards.** These are metal grilles that fit between the boot and the back passenger seats, limiting dogs’ access to the body of the car to minimise driver distraction, although drivers need to ensure that their dogs do not obscure visibility. On the downside, dog guards offer little protection for the dog in the event of a collision.

Lucy Gray, marketing manager of Travelling With Pets (www.travellingwithpets.co.uk), says that a crash-tested product would be her number one choice.

“You wouldn’t choose any old booster seat over a child seat that meets current



A dog travelling in a pet tube.

safety standards, and although there aren’t specific safety standards for pet travel yet, owners shouldn’t compromise on their pets’ safety either.

“Most modern cars now have Isofix fittings that allow child seats to clip in and be secured without the use of seat belts; we are finding that pet travel manufacturers are also starting to make use of these now, which makes sense.”

However, she accepts that buying decisions have to be balanced by practicalities and budget.

“Not everyone can afford to buy a top of the range product. That doesn’t make them a bad owner. Price can be a determining factor and there are alternative products on the market.”

Risk may be a factor in your decision-making. Every day we subconsciously undertake ‘risk assessments’ and act upon them, from securing our homes when we leave them, to crossing a road. We may consider that based on anticipated miles, the need for extra protection is unnecessary. However, an interpretation of “restraint” cannot be compromised.

“Restraint doesn’t necessarily mean that a dog has to wear a harness or that he needs to be in a cage. But your dog shouldn’t be able to jump about in the car and definitely shouldn’t be sitting on your lap, or in the footwell when travelling... but it’s surprising how some people think this is acceptable,” explained Lucy.



The main objective is to get to your destination comfortably and safely.

SAFETY FIRST

The humanisation of pets often means that comfort is placed ahead of safety. Putting little Fifi in a cage in lieu of a soft warm lap may be unthinkable for some, but it is undeniably a safer option.

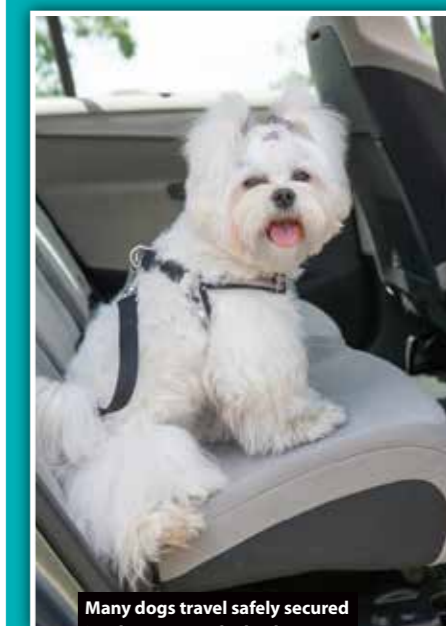
However, not all vehicles can accommodate cages and crates. Saloon cars for example, particularly those with fixed back seats, reduce available options. Harnesses and tethers, soft carriers, fabric kennels, and tubes fixed to seating or head restraints may be practical alternatives.

All have pros and cons — some have been designed for multi-purpose use or have special properties like UV protection mesh and coatings for cooling and easy cleaning. They work by restraining the dog but have fewer safety features. Your car will, of course, have its own ‘crumple zones’, which will provide some protection.

Lucy added: “All of these products have been designed to be in a car, and that’s the key starting point. They’re better options than just having the dog loose in the boot or loose on the seats.”

Although there’s no direct penalty for breaking the Highway Code, drivers could be charged with ‘driving without due care and attention’, which comes with three to nine points on your licence. It could also be used as evidence if you were involved in an accident.

Shelley Harrison, spokesperson for Agria Pet Insurance, said: “Always check with your car and pet insurance ▶



Many dogs travel safely secured in a harness on the back seat.



One happy traveller!

company when travelling with dogs, as many policies require your dog to be restrained. By law, any dog over eight weeks old who is outside of the house must be microchipped and wear a collar showing their owner's name and address. This rule applies to dogs travelling in cars too."

TRANSIT BOXES

UK manufacturer Lintran (www.lintran.co.uk) has produced dog transit boxes for more than 30 years. Customers have reported that its boxes have remained intact and saved the lives of their dogs during collisions. Containment has also prevented dogs from running loose on the highway — minimising further disruption and danger.

Owner Isobel Hopkins believes that the best place for a dog is the boot space: "We make them a nice box, made from fibreglass or white polypropylene, which reflects the heat so it keeps the dogs cool. It's easily washable and easily 'take outable' so if you need to remove it to go shopping or add luggage, it's easy to do.

"It's a nice clean, airy sort of environment.

DID YOU KNOW?
Although wire dog crates are easy to transport they may not be robust enough to protect your dog if your vehicle is involved in a collision.

Dogs get used to them very quickly because they're in a safe space and most of the time they're going off for a walk, so are keen to go in," she said.

Rubber mats are placed in the base to stop the dogs from slipping, and for comfort and familiarity a soft blanket can be added.

Isobel recommends getting a dog used to the box by putting it in the house with their bed inside, or using it as a mobile kennel.

"Leave the doors open; it's their space and they will go in of their own accord. It will fast become a restful, safe space and not seen as a punishment," she advised.

Lintran has many repeat customers. The company offers a part-exchange service and boxes that have served customers for more than 20 years and been used in five or more vehicles are regularly upgraded.

The company also manufactures custom-boxes, which have been used in vehicles for military service dogs in the Falkland Islands, for anti-poaching teams in Africa, dog ambulances, and rescue vehicles, including some for Battersea Dogs Home.

In addition to core products, there are a range of accessories available including drawers and compartments, box lifters, ramps, and bumper scratch-guards. It seems that every need has been considered.

However, sometimes more radical steps are needed — in my case, a more appropriate vehicle.

Five dogs, one saloon car... you don't have to be a physicist to do the calculations!



One of Lintran's transit boxes.

SAFE AND CALM

The 'Volvo Report: Keeping Pets Safe on the Road' identified that unrestrained dogs are more likely to be distressed during car journeys. Researchers found the pets that were safely secured had heart rates seven beats per minute slower than dogs that weren't restrained in any way.

CRASH TESTING

The PRO range of Swiss-made 4pets products boast official TUV SUD certification. To reach these European standards, products undergo rigorous assessments, including crash testing, vehicle fixings, sheering, crushing, and corrosion.



Caree is 4pets' revolutionary new transport system for small dogs and cats.

NARROW DOWN YOUR OPTIONS

CONSIDER:

- The size of your dog.
- The number of dogs you have.
- The type of vehicle/model/year.
- Which part of the vehicle you intend to use.
- Specification for good fit and fixing — be aware of sloping roofs and boot lips.

Check the Highway Code at www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-about-animals-47-to-58

THE PRICE OF SAFETY

Transit boxes and cages cost between £200 and £600.