Safety first when driving with pets in the car

Many people can recognize the familiar image of a car traveling down the road with the head of a seemingly happy dog hanging out from the front passenger seat. Traveling in such a way may seem harmless, but doing so can be detrimental to both pets and their owners.

According to Paws to Click, a community that aims to inspire pet owners to travel responsibly with their pets, allowing pets to travel in cars without employing a harness poses a significant threat to everyone in the car. The group notes that an unrestrained 75 lb. dog will exert about 2,250 lbs. of force in a crash in which the car is traveling at just 30 miles per hour. Such force can injure others in the car as well as the pet. In addition, unrestrained pets may challenge first responders in an effort to protect their owners after an accident has taken place.

It makes all the sense in the world to harness pets when taking them along in the car. After all, drivers and their passengers wear seat belts, so why not provide the same safety net to pets? But Paws to Click notes that 84 percent of dog owners drive with their dogs in the car without using restraints. This despite the fact that American Veterinary Medical Foundation advises all pet owners to properly restrain their pets before departing on a car trip, no matter how short or how long that trip is expected to be.

In addition to properly restraining pets on car trips, pet owners can take these steps to ensure their pets are safe.

· Don't take pets along on car trips unless it's absolutely necessary. It can be fun to take a pet with you everywhere, but the AVMF advises pet owners to leave their pets home when possible. Pets that are not suffering from separation anxiety will be fine at home without their owners. Pet owners whose pet owners are exhibiting signs of anxiety should address the anxiety so pets are comfortable at home alone. Taking pets everywhere is not a cure for separation anxiety.

· Do not leave pets unattended in cars. A study from the Louisiana Office of Public Health found that temperatures in a dark sedan or a light gray minivan parked on a hot, but cloudy day reached higher than 125 F in just 20 minutes. The study also found that cracking the window in such situations had little effect on the temperature inside the vehicle. On hot days, leave pets at home. Owners who must take their pets with them should never leave them in the car, as temperatures inside vehicles rise quickly, putting pets' health in jeopardy.

Many pet owners are tempted to take their pets with them on car trips. But that should only be done when absolutely necessary and safety must be the utmost priority when traveling with pets in a car.

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