

Introducing your puppy to the car

Puppies generally need to be acclimatised to car travel, the motion, sound and other stimuli that come with cars such as wiper blades going, the sound the windows make when they are down, the sound of the boot closing, the traffic around them etc can be all new.

Unless the breeder of your pup has introduced your puppy to travelling in a car on their own, the first long car journey is likely to be when they come home with you. This can be a bit scary as they are leaving everything that is familiar, so the first journey isn't always the most positive for the puppy.

Puppies can become travel sick or stressed while travelling, they may drool, be sick, urinate / defecate and can be restless / struggle to settle.

Sickness can be intermittent, which can be frustrating but try to identify what triggers there may be e.g. length of journey, time of meals (do they have an empty stomach? Sometimes feeding them a very small amount a little while before they travel may help settle their stomach) or your puppy's emotional state before travelling may impact on what sort of journey you have.

A structured plan to gradually get them used to the car will help your puppy learn that the car is great while also helping with the motion sickness. Before you start, consider where your puppy will be in the car. They need to be secured either in a crate (be aware that the material crates get very hot in a car and are often not suitable), in the boot with a dog guard or by a car harness attached to the seat belt.

Comfortable bed

Often dogs struggle if they slide around and find it difficult to relax, a padded bed with sides may help support them, such as a sturdy material donut bed that's not too soft and squishy.



Some things to note

- If your puppy only ever gets driven to the vets for vaccinations etc, they won't associate the vets or the car with a positive experience. Many vet surgeries are happy for you to visit frequently just for your puppy to have a fuss and a few treats from the staff.
- If they wear a car harness, your puppy should wear this at other times e.g. when playing or having a relaxing chew at home so they don't associate this going on with going in the car.
- If they are in a crate in the car, you need to make sure they are confident being in their crate when it is in the house first. To help with this you can feed their meals in there, leave new toys in there to find, occasionally drop treats in there when they aren't looking, give them nice things to chew when in there etc.
- If you notice your dog is concerned about traffic generally, you will need to build their confidence with this separately.
- Adaptil collars/spray or rescue remedy may be helpful when used in conjunction with a training plan. When used on their own, their effects may be limited.
- If travel sickness persists, please consult with your vet.

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Plan

Don't skip stages, even if you think your dog is ok with getting in the car etc as we need to start from the beginning and re-teach them about the car.

1. Open all the doors and boot, allow your puppy to approach the car and have a good sniff around. If your puppy is very avoidant of the car, roll a food reward near the car, allow your puppy to take it, then call them further away from the car and reward them. See if they will re-approach the car again on their own (without a food reward being rolled near it), if they do, praise them and again reward them further away from the car. It is important not to lure your puppy closer to the car with food, rather praise them for approaching and then move further away and reward.

Your puppy should learn that approaching the car = reward

2. Play a game with your puppy's favourite toy, occasionally throwing it towards the car. If they are confident with this, progress to throwing it into the foot wells and letting your puppy go and find it.
3. If your puppy is able to climb onto the seats without risk of hurting their joints, encourage them to do so with a game with their toy. If they need to be lifted, lift them into the car, sit on the seat with them and have a game or play guess which hand the treat is in etc. if they are unable to play or take food rewards, then go back a step as they are still not relaxed being in the car.
4. Now play the same game but turn the engine on without going anywhere.
5. If your puppy likes their food, save some of the meal for feeding in the car, don't use the pup's entire meal for this as we don't want them to be really hungry. Do this for several days.



6. Progress to turning the engine on.
7. See if your puppy is now comfortable enough in the car to lick a tasty filled Kong/LickiMat in their crate or bed in the car. Again, turn the engine on.
8. Build up to a very very short trip round the block and back home before your puppy becomes worried / finishes their Kong.
9. Increase the distance slowly, driving to a nice walking spot where your puppy can have a sniff and explore before returning home.