



PARKSIDE

CLIENT INFORMATION HANDOUT

CAR CRAZY CANINES

Although most dogs take to cars with the enthusiasm of their owners, many take bad and are sometimes dangerous passengers. Bad travellers generally fall into two categories – the excitable and the fearful, and they all naturally demand different treatments.

THE EXCITABLE/HYSTERICAL TRAVELLER

- Most dogs enjoy the car and enter with their tails up in anticipation of the ride, or the journey's end. Some lose control and display a variety of excited behaviours of which whining, incessant barking, pacing, jumping and salivation or panting with associated loss of response to usual commands are the symptoms. Whilst physical restriction of the dog behind a dog guard may reduce the danger of carrying such passengers, effects on the driver's concentration persist. The following suggestion are relevant in the treatment of most cases:

VISUAL CONTACT

- Many dogs are excited by the sight of traffic, people and dogs or simply the blur of object being passed. The owners of saloon or estate cars, restriction of vision by leashing the dog below the window level will reduce such stimulation. This is achieved by fitting a HALTI on the dog and attaching it to a permanent short leash tied to the rear framework of the front passengers or driver's seat. The dog soon becomes accustomed to THEIR SEAT which may be the rear seat itself or for smaller breeds, the rear seat foot well. Improved behaviour can bring the reward of greater freedom.

FOCUSING ATTENTION

- As with many nervous or excitable behaviours the car crazy canine loses response to even well learned obedience commands. Often they simply do not hear or they interpret frustration, cursing or shouting by the owners as excitement on their part too! The unfamiliar loud screech of a DOG STOP ALARM is a particularly effective attention getter. Its use may facilitate response to order restoring commands such as SIT or LIE DOWN. Correct response should be rewarded. Breeds such as collies and Cocker Spaniels are more sensitive to the DOG STOP ALARM than say Labradors, for which a jet of water may be a more useful alternative.

HABITUATION

- The incidence of hysterical canine travellers varies according to patterns of car usage, occurring most frequently where the car is regularly used as a link between home and exercise area. The car becomes predictably associated with the excitement of going out but the journey itself delays fulfilment... In-car hysteria occurs least where cars are used semi-continuously or irregularly for taking the dog to a variety of places, some related to exercise, others resulting in being left alone inside. Improvement should follow if being in a car becomes less predictable; therefore practice varying the length of journeys to both familiar and unfamiliar

places. Leave the dog alone inside the car – suitably restrained if destructive with the engine initially off but later running, then continue with the car moving slowly in a safe area e.g. private driveway – **DO NOT PROCEED** at any stage until the dog is calm.

THE ANXIOUS/NERVOUS TRAVELLER

- Acute anxiety about car travel or even entering the car may manifest by trembling, panting, whining, increased heart rate and vomiting. These unfortunate behaviours may be in response to a fear of the engine noise, smell of the car, from movement or fear of the swiftly passing outside world.

TREATMENT USUALLY INVOLVES SLOW ACCLIMATISATION AS FOLLOWS:

- Accustom the dog to being near and then in the car with the engine off. Feed him and carry out basic training in the car, and play ball games etc. which involves the dog running through or in and out of the car. Repeat later with the engine running.
- Leave the dog alone in the car for short periods of increasing duration, later with the engine running. Upon release always reward and praise him and take him for a walk.
- Advance the car for short but increasing distances, followed by turning off the engine, rewarding the dog and taking him for a short walk. Whilst many anxious travellers may never be able to tolerate long journeys, they should improve to accept short car rides. On no account should such desensitisation be carried out so fast that the dog panics – PATIENCE.
- Short term sedative therapy may be useful for severe cases, or during the initial phases of treatment. This should be fully discussed with your veterinary surgeon.

Maintain a careful written log of your dog's progress so that therapy may be adjusted to best effect. Treatment must be an individually tailored strategy and if the above treatments do not solve the problem a more detailed analysis will be required. Please call us to arrange a consultation after discussing the problem with your veterinary surgeon.

Extracted from Dr R. A Mugford 1987

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