

RVing with your Dog

It seems that everyone takes their pets, especially dogs, with them on their RV trips, and those who live in their RV's full time often have one or more dogs or cats with them.

But... like everything in life, taking our dogs (or other pets) with us demands a certain level of responsibility to the dogs and the people around us (not to mention ourselves). This article is meant to give you a perspective on the troubles you might encounter, and some of the solutions to traveling with your dog (or other pets). From now on, I'll refer to dogs only, but often the advice applies to other forms of furry companionship.

WHY TRAVEL WITH DOGS?

First, why do people like to travel with dogs? I'm sure there are many reasons. Maybe some of the reasons will give us an insight to some of the problems that crop up. Here's a list I've compiled that I'm sure is not complete and may not apply completely to you, but it may help.

- 1) We don't have any place to put the dog while we are gone. It's too expensive to board the dog, with rates for boarding skyrocketing.
- 2) We'd be alone without our dog.
- 3) He couldn't stand for us to be away that long. He'd probably die.
- 4) We never go anywhere without her.
- 5) He will make good protection for our RV when we are away from it.
- 6) Aunt Lulu has never seen Fido, and we'd love her to see Fido before he dies.
- 7) FIDO has never seen Aunt Lulu, and we'd love him to see her before she dies.
- 8) The kids will have something to do (walking the dog) and someone to play with.
- 9) We need to have the dog(s) to give us an incentive to walk every day.
- 10) We are full-timers and have always owned a dog. Why should this lifestyle stop us from owning one?

You get the idea. Dogs are an integral part of many people's lives. Unfortunately, for both species, this doesn't always work out well.

PROBLEMS WHILE TRAVELING WITH YOUR DOG

What are some of the problems that people might experience while traveling on the road? Many are the same as if you are home:

- 1) Lack of attention to the dog.
- 2) Lack of leadership by the owner.
- 3) No set rules.
- 4) Leaving the dog alone during the day.
- 5) Leaving objects around that are dangerous to the dog.

Some problems that might occur more often while traveling than staying at home:

- 1) The dog is hurt during a rough stop or accident while traveling.
- 2) The dog picks up a virus or bacterial infection from a strange dog or from drinking bad water or eating trash on the roadway.
- 3) The dog bites a strange dog or strange person.
- 4) The dog is bitten by a rattlesnake on a hike and you have no idea where the nearest vet is located.
- 5) The dog disturbs your neighbors only 5 feet from your RV by barking constantly while you are sightseeing.
- 6) The dog becomes ill and there is no veterinarian or other aid available nearby, and your regular veterinarian would not be able to help him without seeing him.
- 7) The dog breaks out of the RV at a rest stop and is (God forbid) hit by a car or lost.
- 8) The dog breaks his leash or eats through it while outside the RV and wanders away. You spend hours searching for him and may never find him before you have to return to work.
- 9) The dog chews up the inside of the RV while you are gone.
- 10) The dog gets under your feet and causes an accident while you are driving the RV.
- 11) The dog is stolen.
- 12) You run out of FIDO's favorite food and substitute a new food, with the dire consequences that only a dog lover can appreciate and get through.

13) And so on.. you get the idea!

OK. You probably won't experience most of these crises, or at least only one or two minor ones, but they are all possible and you should be prepared. Some preparation can help. You can prepare for some contingencies in advance, and as a better-informed pet owner, you can prevent others as you travel. Let's first discuss what you should take, in addition to FIDO.

PREPARING FOR TRAVEL

Neutering Your Dog

Due to the wide variety of dogs you'll meet on the road, the increased chance for roaming, the dangers of aggression, and the extreme hassle that having a litter might represent to an RVer, having your dog spayed or neutered before you go on the road makes a lot of sense.

Most people can see the benefits of spaying a female dog--avoiding unwanted litters--but don't know the many medical and behavioral benefits of having their male dog neutered:

Neutered dogs are:

- 1) healthier.
- 2) less likely to develop prostate problems and testicular tumors.
- 3) less likely to roam and fight, thereby having less risk of injury and infection, saving you expensive vet bills from your dog's injuries.
- 4) more content and better behaved.
- 5) less annoying and embarrassing from the urge to "mount" furniture or people's legs. (This is a dominance display and won't disappear in all dogs.)
- 6) less aggressive against other animals.
- 7) less likely to escape from the RV and roam the strange neighborhood searching for a female in heat whose scent he has picked up. Neutering relieves this sexual frustration and lets the dog relax and enjoy being part of your family.
- 8) more likely to live longer, healthier lives, save you a great deal of potential trouble and cost, and be a more content family member.

Dogs do not have a *psychological* sex drive. They do, however, have a *physiological* sex drive that is removed by neutering the dog. Any "mounting" of

furniture, people's legs, and other dogs by a neutered dog is strictly about power—not sex.

Neutering is a relatively safe and painless operation done by a licensed veterinarian. It can also be inexpensive if you find the right pet clinic or human society clinic.

Pre-Trip Planning

Consider taking your dog to the veterinarian for a pre-trip exam. Be sure that all vaccinations are up-to-date and that his heartworm preventative is current. Dogs are quite susceptible to heartworm infestation due to mosquitoes that you'll likely encounter on the road. Some medicines also protect against fleas and ticks at the same time (like Revolution). Purchase all medications that your dog will need. Also get a supply of motion sickness pills if needed. Be sure you ask for copies of your dog's health and shot records to carry with you in case you need them during your trip. (Especially if you travel out of the country.)

Consider buying a book on pet first-aid and read it. If you have access to the Internet, consider printing a list of veterinarians near your destination, and maybe a couple along the way.

Consider writing instructions for your dog's care (food eaten, amount, time of day, etc.) should you become incapacitated. Also include a list of people who should be contacted in case of emergency. Keep a copy of these papers in an easy-to-find place in the RV, and carry a set in your purse or wallet.

Training

One of the best investments in time and money prior to your first RVing trip will be a dog obedience class. If you have already been to one, you probably know what we are talking about, but it might be a good time to review what you learned. Actually, dog obedience class is really a misnomer. Most such classes are really 'people with dogs' training classes. If you and your dog know how to behave together, your travels will be MUCH more rewarding. Being able to control your dog, on and off the leash, will add a margin of safety to your travels. Our dog responds to both hand signals for distance behavior (sit and come), and voice commands. Having a dog that doesn't obey just adds a level of discomfort you don't need on the road. Remember, dogs respect a leader. Be the leader and don't let the dog take the lead from you or your troubles will just multiply over time.

By the way, taking the lead does NOT mean punishing your dog to train him/her. If you train your dog using positive methods (like the "clicker" training method and providing treats when he behaves as told), he/she will respond and learn much more quickly and will WANT to come to you when you give the

command. Everyone is much more relaxed, and your dog feels like (and is) a true family member.

PACKING FOR THE TRIP

Every dog has its own requirements, but this will be a general list for you to check before you leave.

1) **Food and food bowl.** You'll want to take the same food that your dog eats while at home. It's hard enough for him to adjust to the traveling; don't make him adjust to a new food because it's more convenient for you. (You'll regret it!) If he eats a special food, order enough in advance to cover the travel period, plus a few days. Be sure you take his favorite snacks; you might have to bribe him along the way. Pack the food in containers that are mouse-proof, humidity proof, and spill proof. If you feed him wet food, be sure that you have the right containers to store any excess without spillage in your refrigerator. Remember to take a can opener for wet food.

2) **Water bowl.** Ideally, you can buy a Smart Bowl from PetsMart for \$7 to \$10 for your trip. The Smart Bowl (or something similar) has a lip that keeps water from spilling out while you are traveling. You will probably want two of them, one for outside and one inside. It will reduce your stress level, and there is less probability of spilling water in the RV. Also take a small bowl and a canteen that you can take on hikes with you. Dogs need a lot of water, especially when running in hot weather.

3) **Leash and collar.** Be sure you have a 5- or 6-foot leash. Most leash laws require this as a maximum length. It won't hurt to have a spare leash stored in your car (if you tow your car) in case you forget the one in the RV. The 20-foot retractable cord leash is not a good choice. Take a stake and a 10- or 15-foot tether for tying him up outside the RV. Be sure his collar will not break if given a real heavy and sudden tug. (Our 80lb Golden Retriever broke two plastic snap collars when challenged by squirrels wandering by the RV.)

4) **Identification tags.** Ensure that he has his dog license if you are required to have one in the area that you're going to. (Actually, he should have one anyway.) Be sure the collar has an identification tag that spells out your current (cell) phone number and the dog's name. You can get one at a local PetsMart. We had our dog injected with a chip that helps identify him in case he gets stolen or lost. Be sure you take the information with you of who to call if your dog is lost, and be sure that the company that manages the ID chip (if your dog has one) has your current phone and contact information. Carry a large photo of your pet for use (for flyers) if you lose him.

5) **Medicines and first aid.** Take hot-spot medication (like Sulfodene) if your dog is prone to hot spots, triple antibiotic ointment, hydrocortisone spray (for

insect bites, hot spots, cuts), eardrops (if you normally use them), heavy gauze and masking tape for pad or leg injuries, and a good supply of any medicine that is normally prescribed for your dog. Assume you might be up to a week late coming home when deciding how much to take along. Include a first-aid pamphlet.

6) **Importance of vaccination records and tags.** These will be REQUIRED if you go into Mexico or Canada but are certainly useful in any situation where you are challenged by a local authority. If his shots are out of date or will expire on the trip, see to it that your dog gets them at least a couple of weeks before the trip (you don't want side effects on the first day of the trip.) This is especially important if your dog bites someone. Proving that he has been vaccinated against rabies (and when) will save a lot of pain and suffering for the victim and maybe save you from a lawsuit or having your dog put in quarantine for a couple weeks.

7) **Bedding.** Take anything that your dog normally sleeps on. You'll need to make his sleep area seem familiar and comfortable while away from his normal spot. Be sure you scope out a place for him to sleep that is cozy. Often dogs like places that are cool (near the door or on tile), especially during hot weather. If your dog normally sleeps in a crate, take that with you.

8) **Favorite toys and chew items.** Your dog may be nervous. Take the normal toys that will help him feel the familiarity of the surroundings. Consider a plastic box to contain them in the RV.

9) **Pooper scooper or bags.** We save Wal-Mart bags and use them for picking up the poop. If you are more discerning, buy the black "glove" plastic bags made for this purpose. Not all RV parks provide them. If you don't go to Wal-Mart, I suspect that Neiman-Marcus bags will work in a pinch.

10) **Towels and carpet pieces.** We use old towels to dry our dog after he has been walked in the rain (sometimes this is necessary). We also lay out some old carpets at the entrance of the RV to soak up some of his wet and dirty feet as he enters.

11) **Grooming tools.** Take his brush and other tools you normally use for grooming. They will be useful to get out the strange and wonderful stickers and pieces of weed you'll encounter on the road. You might want to pack his shampoo as well. They get awful dirty while hiking and running through the bush.

12) **Pads and/or Wet Vac.** If you are taking a puppy (like we did initially), take things to help with the messes that a newly trained (or not) puppy might make. You can buy pads now to put on the floor to catch puppy mistakes. Unfortunately, these pads were not available when our dog was a puppy, so we actually took a small Wet Vac along to clean the carpet. Maybe a specially formulated

disinfectant with a pleasant smell would also help. Carry plenty of paper towels, too.

13) **Ramp.** If your dog is old or small, you might need a ramp. Of course if he is really small, you can pick him up and place him in the RV. If he is larger, consider a ramp. Test his ability to get into and out of the RV prior to departure.

14) **De-skunking kit.** You'll want a way to neutralize the odor from a skunk when Fido gets curious about the big "cat" that wanders under the RV at night. Here's the latest formula from the web: 1 quart of 3% hydrogen Peroxide, ¼ cup Baking Soda, 1 tsp liquid soap. Mix in bucket and soak the dog's fur. BE CAREFUL to avoid his eyes. Use a sponge immediately around the eyes. For big dogs, you may need 4 or 5 times this amount.

15) **Cooling Apparatus.** Take a spritzer bottle of water, stored in refrigerator, for quick cooling of an overly warm dog. You might consider buying the "cooling pads" that cool the dog off while providing a soft surface. (Type in 'Pet Supplies > Dogs > Beds & Accessories > "cooling"' at Amazon.com for ideas.)

16) **Cold-weather Clothing.** For the more sensitive dogs (or humans), sweater and dog boots if needed.

17) **Fan.** Take an electric fan with narrow protective mesh and extension cord for hot days inside or outside.

Assemble as much of this as possible a few days in advance, so you'll have time to buy anything you need at a place you are familiar shopping at and at lower prices than an RV park or convenience store in the middle of nowhere. Give some thought to how you will store and organize (and later find) these items.

Rules of the Road and Common Sense

Rules for pet behavior at RV Parks and National or State Parks were developed from a process of experience and common sense. They are meant to be guidelines to avoid many of the problems you read about above. Do yourself and others a favor and read and follow the rules, especially when they make good sense.

Here are a few ideas that might help.

WHILE ON THE ROAD

The following sections are applicable to all pets, but for purposes of clarity and ease of reading, we are using a male dog as the subject.

1) When you open the door of your RV, be sure your dog is behind you and in a calm, submissive state. If he is just too excited, be sure he has a leash on that is being held by a person or tied to a solid object. It is just too easy to lose a dog this way.

2) Some dogs just don't travel well. Consider conditioning the dog by going for short drives first. Have the dog accompany you into the RV as often as possible before you leave for your trip. Consider a mild sedative from your veterinarian if the dog just can't deal with it. Your life will be a lot less stressful.

3) Many dogs are pretty frisky while the RV is moving. If you have a dog that moves around quickly, consider keeping him in a crate, at least part of the time, in the RV (but not a fifth wheel or trailer), or in a travel harness (doggie seat belt) if you feel it's necessary. He could get under your feet and cause an accident, jump into your lap at the wrong time, or as happened to me, lean on the seat adjustment controls while you are driving.

4) Consider your dog's bathroom habits and determine how much he should eat or drink just before leaving on your trip.

5) Always have water available for your dog while traveling. If in a motorhome, use the Smart Bowl discussed above. If in a vehicle pulling a fifth wheel, stop often enough to give your dog water every couple hours, or keep a Smart Bowl in the truck for him.

6) Keep in mind that while many say that a dog can several hours without relieving himself, a dog, like us, becomes uncomfortable after a couple of hours. Don't torture your dog by making him wait until you decide you want to stop. Plan several short stops about two to three hours apart to allow your dog to get a little exercise and to relieve himself. Besides, remember that such stops are social events for your dog. The sniffing and marking are an important part of their lives. And remember—you need a break from driving, too.

7) Be sure you use ONLY the "Pet Area" at Rest Areas and that you carry a pooper scooper or bag (Wal Mart or special poop bag) to pick up the mess. None of us likes to walk around the area and step in or smell fresh dog poop.

8) When walking your dog at Rest Areas or other off-road places, use a short leash and be very aware of what your dog is doing. People discard EVERYTHING along the road, and many of those things are dangerous to dogs. Also, be aware of oil and liquids in parking lots that might be anti-freeze. Most is poisonous to dogs. Also, in many areas of the country there are snakes in the bushes around rest areas.

9) Be careful around other dogs at Rest Areas. Not all dogs are trustworthy and many are in a high state of awareness and nervous. Best bet is to just keep your

dog away from other dogs. It's also a good place to spread diseases across the country too.

10) This is obvious, but don't put your dog in a fifth wheel or trailer while you're driving. Too many things can go wrong, including things falling on your dog or your dog chewing up the inside of your mobile home from extreme fright from all the noises and movements and separation anxiety.

11) If you are tempted to leave your dog in your motorhome, your tow car, or your truck while sightseeing or eating in a restaurant, please consider how hot it might get in just one hour. Even on an 80-degree day, the temperature can reach 105 degrees in 10 minutes inside a car. The temperature has even been recorded at over 215 degrees inside a car on a hot summer day (water boils at 220 degrees). Extreme heat can kill or make your dog very ill. If your dog is overcome by heat, cool immediately with cold water and ice and seek medical attention from a veterinarian as soon as possible. Install a small 12V fan and turn it on in your car, truck, or RV, and leave the windows open for a reasonable amount of air to enter. We turn on our ceiling fans and open all the windows in our motorhome when we go shopping, as an example.

12) While walking your dog in wild areas, often near campgrounds or RV Parks, be aware of the dangers in the area. Many areas contain bears, cougars, badgers, wolverines, skunks, rattlesnakes, poisonous spiders and other dangerous vermin that can harm your dog. Ask the owner or manager what dangers exist in that area and then watch your dog closely to avoid potential problems. It's best to keep him on-leash in these areas so you have maximum control.

13) Be aware that all National Parks, and many state and local parks do NOT allow dogs on trails, and some Forest Service areas require them to always be on-leash. This is done for the protection of the other hikers and the fauna in the area. Stiff fines are often levied when owners are caught ignoring these rules.

14) The back of a pickup truck is no place for a dog. More than 100,000 dogs are killed each year from falls out of vehicles, and numerous vehicle crashes are caused as drivers try to avoid hitting these animals. Commercially made harnesses and tethers are available to restrain a dog in the back of a truck. Also, the metal bed of a truck can be very hot during the summer and can burn your dog's pads or expose him to high temperatures. Keep these things in mind when you want to throw your dog in the back of the truck and take him with you.

WHILE AT THE CAMPSITE OR RV PARK

Since most of your time will be spent at your destination, let's review the etiquette that is expected of dog owners in an RV Park or campground and the possible dangers of being at a campground or RV park.

1) Walk your dog often to provide him with exercise and the release of the stress of being in a strange place. Use a short leash and beware of other dogs that may be resting under an RV or behind a bush. Not all dogs are friendly to their own kind, and not all humans love dogs the way you do.

2) Give him breaks often whether he is IN the RV or OUTSIDE the RV. Avoid forcing him to urinate or poop in the immediate vicinity of the RV. Dogs don't like to spoil their den. They're forced to do it, however, when you tie them up and ignore them for the day. Take breaks often and walk them. It doesn't have to be a long walk every time.

3) Always take a plastic bag on your walks to pick up his mess. The quickest way to get the wrath of close campers or owners is to leave the mess around where they can smell or step in it. Also, mind where you let him urinate. Planted flowers, steps, playgrounds, and other places where humans normally walk are forbidden places. By all means clean up around your own campsite.

4) Use a stake to tether your dog outside the RV. Use a relatively short line (in most cases, 10 feet or less) depending on how close the next camper is parked. Your neighbors do not want your dog in their "yard." Also, be sure he can't get into the road. Try to avoid obstacles that he will wrap himself around. This isn't always possible, so check on him about every 15 minutes or so. Be sure he always has enough shade to avoid the hot sun on warm days. In the winter, be sure he has sufficient padding to lie on to keep the cold from the ground from cooling him too quickly, and be sure he has a shelter from the cold wind.

5) Be sure the dog has plenty of clean water when he is outside. Check every time you go out. Dogs often knock their water over with the tether.

6) If your dog is human- or dog-aggressive, keep him on a short tether or in the RV. Remember that you are responsible for any damage or injury done to another person, small child, or dog.

7) Control your dog's barking whether he is in the RV or outside. Continuous barking can be very disturbing to your neighbors. (Consider using Bark Sentry (www.BarkSentry.com) software that we have developed to help you with this.)

8) Don't leave your dog alone outside at all when you are not nearby or in the RV. He could be stolen, injured, suffer from heat exhaustion, be aggressive to others, become a barking nuisance, or suffer from anxiety separation. The second best place for your dog when you are not around is inside the RV with plenty of ventilation and water. The best place is with you.

9) Keep in mind the possible night visitors to a campground or isolated RV Park. Our dog has been "skunked" twice in such places while tethered outside in the

evening. We now bring him inside at dark. Cougars, bears, raccoons, coyotes, skunks, and wild dogs can also be threats in the evening to tethered dogs. Do NOT leave uneaten dog food outside overnight. That will invite unwanted creatures to your RV.

10) Minimize the time you leave your dog alone inside the RV. We have found that about 3 to 4 hours is the maximum that we are comfortable with leaving the dog alone. We usually give him a long walk prior to leaving so that we leave him tired. He'll usually sleep. We use the "Dog Sentry" to tell us how he behaves while we are gone.

11) If you leave your dog in the RV, be sure you leave plenty of windows open and fans running so that the ventilation is adequate depending on the temperature. If you choose to close up the RV and turn on the air conditioning, think about what will happen to the dog if the RV Park or campground loses power (which happens often in many parks). If it's a very hot day and we leave the air conditioner on, we also leave our ceiling fan on to at least move the air. Others leave one or two windows open a crack in case the air conditioner goes off. Consider taking the dog with you when it is hot, if you can be sure he will not be left in a hot car or truck alone. Put a label or sign on the door of your RV announcing that a pet may be in the RV and put a phone number on it for contact in such emergencies.

12) Find out where the nearest veterinarian resides and get his phone number. The owner of the park may not be available when you need the veterinarian.

13) Provide rules and boundaries for your dog in the RV. Decide what they are and enforce them. If you don't want him in the bedroom, be sure you are consistent in keeping him out. If you don't want him on the ledge above the driver's area, keep him off. If you don't want him on the couch, work with him to achieve that behavior and enforce it EVERY time.

14) If you must let your well-behaved dog off-leash on trails, be sure you can control him by voice or hand signals. If you see another human or dog (or other animal), call your dog to you and put on his leash until it passes. We have trained our dog to come to us immediately using the word "LEASH." He comes to us, sits, and allows us to put his leash on. He often gets a treat for the behavior.

15) If you are walking along roads or Jeep trails, be sure your dog will sit or come to you as soon as you see a motor vehicle. Have him sit, or leash him, until the danger has passed. Our dog will now sit on the side of the road when he sees a car passing on a road. (He's not used to living in cities.)

16) If your dog does get lost, immediately call any services you use for pet registration (e.g., if your dog has an imbedded chip, etc.). Notify the campground office and ask other campers for assistance in locating your pet. If he is gone for

an extended time, make and copy fliers with your dog's photo and your contact numbers, and distribute them in the area, at veterinary offices, pet supply stores, and convenience stores. Notify the local animal shelter, police agency, and obedience club. Leave a personal item, such as clothing you've worn that contains your scent, outdoors at your site.

RV MAINTENANCE WHEN TRAVELING WITH PETS

When you travel with your dog, you may get more dirt as well as wear and tear on your RV. Consider these tips for keeping your RV clean and comfortable for both you and your dog. (Remember that your dog has a nose that is many times more sensitive than yours!)

- 1) Bathe or groom your dog prior to travel. Trim nails and brush the loose or shedding fur.
- 2) In wet weather, keep a towel by the door to wipe mud, rain or snow off your dog's paws before he goes farther into the RV. Give him a treat after each "cleaning" and he'll not mind.
- 3) Place a rug or foot mat outside RV door, put another one on the steps going into the RV, and lay throw rugs over the carpet at the entrance of your RV. Vacuum or shake them daily.
- 4) Spray a stain-repellant product on furniture fabrics or cover chairs and sofas with throws or sheets. My wife made a nice looking fabric that fits over our leather couch that we sprayed with water-repellant. Clean loose fur from furniture with a pet-hair-removal device.
- 5) Use a carpet remnant, a piece of plastic, or a disposable placemat under your dog's food and water bowls.
- 6) Clean up pet "accidents" immediately. If you are traveling with a young dog that is still being housetrained, cover mattresses with waterproof pads and wrap table legs in plastic to prevent marking or chewing.
- 7) Treat carpets with an insect growth inhibitor (IGR) type flea preventative from your veterinarian.
- 8) Choose one compartment outside and a cabinet inside where you can store your dog-related items.

Carry Febreze or other deodorizing product so that you can rid your RV of pet odors, especially when you have non-pet owners as guests.

I know this is a lot of information to consume and carry out for a trip, but it's not as bad as it looks. Just print this out and use it as a checklist, or create your own list from this one. You can be assured that the more prepared you are for your pet's participation in your travels, the happier your travels will be—for you and your pet.

Happy Travels!

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