



According to popular opinion, a dog is man's best friend. While that may be true under most situations, during some moments when a dog rides along on a road trip, neither man nor beast may feel particularly friendly.

Dogs are creatures of habit. They're comfortable with everyday routines, regular meals and special places to sleep. They don't like unfamiliar surroundings, sudden noises and other disruptions. So, when you plan to take Fido out for a ride, whether it lasts several hours or several days, first acclimate the dog to what's involved in the trip.

1. Practice makes perfect: During the week or so before the trip, take your dog out several times for a ride. If Fido is used to shopping and other short hops, all you need to do is get the dog used to longer ones. Do it with consideration. Put his mat or sleeping basket on the back seat of the car, along with food and water bowls on the floor nearby. A favorite rubber bone or toy can help the dog feel secure. Drive around in heavy traffic, where there's considerable noise, stops and starts. When you're back on your driveway, honk the horn several times to imitate possible on-the-road noises.

2. Caging: If your road trip companion is a small, nervous breed, it may be advisable to set up his back-seat area with a cage. It should be tall enough for him to stand and take a few steps. If the dog has never experienced a cage before, be sure to take several short practice in-cage drives before the long road trip.

No matter what size your nervous dog is, there's a chance he could jump free from the back seat in a panic and interfere with the driver. Worse, he could go out the open window into traffic. Keep him caged while on the road.

3. Healthy dog: Before a long road trip, be sure he's in good shape. Have a check-up at the vet to pick up any medications he may need. If the dog is having any urinary or bowel problems, reconsider taking him along.

3. Pit stops: Schedule breaks at least once every two hours for food and potty. Find an isolated woodsy spot, and exercise him on a leash. If in a city, use a scraper and bag to clean up after him.

Be sure the dog has a chance to exercise when you stop. It's always safest on a leash whenever you're in an unfamiliar area. Keep him away from other animals, strangers and small children.

4. Dog safety: Never let your dog off the leash when there's heavy street or highway traffic nearby. Don't leave your dog in the car with windows completely shut, especially in summer months.

5. Accommodations: If your road trip includes overnight stops, check internet sites for motels along your route that accept pets. Some will allow dogs in the rooms, usually at increased rates, while others maintain kennels near the motel building.

Taking your dog on a road trip can be a pleasant experience. If you make sensible plans and take appropriate precautions, you'll be able to share new sights and adventures together.