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EDITOR'S PICK

FEATURED

There's no place like home for the holidays: Make travel less stressful for Rover and Mittens this year

By TAMMY BAIN

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The decisions can be overwhelming: Do you take Rover on a road trip to your in-laws' house, some hours away? Or does the pooch stay home and keep Santa Claus company when he comes down the chimney?

And, if you do take Rover with you for the holidays, how do you keep him safe in the car? What kind of other dogs, grandmas, reindeer and toddlers will he encounter on his travels?

The Telegraph spoke to animal professionals about traveling with your pet and what to do when you arrive. Here's their tips.

Jenn Milne, an animal rescue volunteer and a dog groomer, always suggests crating your dog. If the dog expresses anxiety and wants a completely enclosed space, place a towel on the crate, she said.

This isn't locking your pet up, so long as they can lay down comfortably.

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“They’re nine times out of 10 completely calm,” Milne said. “Most animals, they crave that security. It’s like a den space.”

Milne also suggests buckling the crate into the car. That way, “if you’re in an accident, your crate isn’t flying across the interstate,” she said.

If you can’t stand the thought of Rover not getting to look out the window, another option is a pet seat belt. According to the American Kennel Club, a dog seat belt is a safety harness that has room for a seat belt buckle. Not all dog seat belts are safe — a study by the Center for Pet Safety found that some will not prevent your dog from flying off the seat.

The American Kennel Club suggests looking for a dog seat belt that has “thick, padded straps to distribute the impact force as widely as possible.”

“Tethers should be short and secure at the dog’s back, not the neck,” the American Kennel Club suggests. “Your dog should be able to comfortably sit upright or lie down while restrained.”

The Center for Pet Safety specifically states that Sleepypod Clickit Sport, Sleepypod Clickit Terrain and ZuGoPet The Rocketeer Pack are crash-test certified.

If you go the crate route, Milne doesn’t recommend placing food and water inside the crate, “because they usually just spill it.”



If your dog has enough room to lay down comfortably, like Bird Dog does here, he’ll be OK — and safe — with staying in a crate on a long road trip this holiday season, his owner, pet professional Jenn Milne, says.

Tammy Bain / The North Platte Telegraph

On most road trips, dogs don't exert enough energy to need to stop for a drink. Still, plan your stops in accordance to their usual food and bathroom schedule, and give them chances to get outside and stretch.

Put Rover in a harness instead of a collar, because it won't tear away if he panics and runs, Milne said. And never take Rover off his leash. Not only does this make it easier to keep him close, but if he does run, a dog with a leash trailing behind him is easier to spot and describe than one without. This also goes for traveling with cats.



Titus doesn't mind road trips in this Kurgo car seat. His owner, North Platte native and Ogallala High School graduate Lauren Thompson, will use it to visit her family from Bern, Kansas, with Titus this Christmas.

Courtesy of Lauren Thompson

Before you ever get in the car, there's other steps to take.

"Obviously, the first thing to do is microchip," Milne said. "People say, 'My dog never leaves the yard,' or, 'We always stay in the house.' You can't plan for disasters or emergencies."

Most microchip readers, often found at veterinary clinics and some rescues or shelters, can read any microchip, said Dr. Jessica Meduna, a veterinarian at Tender Hearts Veterinary Center. Microchipping has helped find a lost cat who was passing through Nebraska from Washington, and a cat brought to the shelter who wasn't feeling well and needed veterinary attention.

Microchips aren't the only answer. If Rover can't stand wearing his tags, travel with them, as well as the documentation of his last rabies shot. You can also purchase an embroidered collar, Milne said. A collar with tags helped find Oskar, a cat passing through North Platte during his owners' move to Florida.

Also, keep recently updated pictures of your pet in the event that they do panic and run, or get lost. Yes, feel free to take lots of selfies with Rover the day before your Christmas road trip — it's for his safety.

If your pet gets a little motion sickness or anxiety, there's short-term medicine available at the veterinarian.

"We typically stay away from tranquilizers and just reduce the anxiety," Meduna said.

Once Rover arrives to family Christmas, he has lots of new friends waiting to meet him — including, possibly, other dogs.

"Take both dogs on a short walk and let them meet outside of the home," Meduna said.

After the dogs have sniffed each other and become acquainted, keep Rover on his leash inside the new home as he greets everyone, smells them and says hello.

Keep Rover's crate assembled and in a safe, quiet place, Meduna said. This way, he has somewhere quiet to go when he needs to just get away.

If there's any concern at all when Rover meets children, "definitely (keep) constant supervision," Meduna said.

"No one wants an incident, or a bite."

Also know your dog. Rover can appear to be smiling in a lower-lipped, half-smile way. This means he's actually tense. Dogs are also uncomfortable when they're shaking or showing more whites of their eye, Meduna said.

Keep in mind, a noisy holiday celebration can be overwhelming. Take Rover on a short walk "to kind of regroup," Meduna said.

With the stress of family gatherings, maybe you will appreciate the brisk walk, too.

Remind your loved ones that no matter how much Rover turns on his puppy eyes, not to give him food, as it will cause an upset stomach. Make sure you bring Rover's food along, even to places that have dogs — switching pet food brands will make him sick, Meduna said.

Milne suggests never traveling with a cat unless you're moving. Cats acclimate to environment, not people, she said. This means a holiday celebration in a new place with new faces — not to mention travel time in between — is sure to be uncomfortable. Still, Meduna knows of cats who love meeting everyone and going places as much as a dog.



Slippery had to move to North Platte from Omaha in 2016. Slippery does not recommend taking cats on road trips, unless you're moving to a new home.

Joan von Kampen / The North Platte Telegraph

So if you do take Mittens along, give her the same kind of getaway you gave Rover, like a kennel or her own room, Meduna said. Know that a safe haven for a cat is often, well, a tree. Mittens may see Grandma Doris' decked-out Christmas tree glammed up for the holidays and decide to climb straight up to hide.

Or, "sometimes there's something really interesting on the tree," Meduna said.

Remember that tinsel on a tree isn't safe for cats to eat, so before you travel, ask Grandma Doris to skip the tinsel this year.

Keep in mind, Mittens and Rover both may decide the strings of dried fruit and popcorn would also make a tasty Christmas treat, Meduna said.

At Tender Hearts, the tall Christmas tree is purposely decorated with crash-safe ornaments that often appear on the floor in the morning after staff locks up for the night.

"We have some patients who like to eat the tree," Meduna said.

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