

# ASK MADAME GOOD DOG!



By Sasha Futran

## Plan Ahead for those “Travels with Charley”

*Dear Madame Good Dog:*

*I'm going to visit my daughter in L.A. in a couple of months with my two dogs. I plan on driving straight thru getting there and taking the slow scenic route with an overnight stop or two on the way back. We haven't taken a long road trip in a few years and I'm not sure how my dogs will deal with all this. Any suggestions?*

*– Travel Shy*

Good for you in planning ahead so you and your fellow travelers will have a pleasant, successful trip. Management and planning are key to happy traveling with dogs.

Along with thinking through the supplies you'll need (first-aid kit, regular and collapsible bowls, food, water, beds, favorite toys, treats, brush, baggies, shot records, and reservations), it is important to imagine the effects of travel on your canine companions and the behavioral issues that may arise while you are on the road.

Long-distance travel can be stressful for dogs, even those who love going places near the home front. It's a break in the routine dogs rely on; they have no idea where they are going, why or what will happen next. Being left somewhere unfamiliar like a hotel or your daughter's home (you aren't going to leave them in your car!) while you're eating, sightseeing or visiting a museum can cause anxiety in dogs that don't normally have home-alone issues. You may need to find restaurants with outdoor seating that allow dogs and skip the museums. You'll probably find yourself spending a lot more time in the company of your dogs than you thought.

Your pet's good manners should be reliable before you start the trip. With two month's lead time, though, you can still work on some issues that might arise. Since you aren't John Steinbeck and Charley, who were well practiced in long journeys, acclimate your dogs to some aspects of travel. Take them on longer drives than usual and to outdoor restaurants. Leave them alone at a friend's house for short periods while you and your friend go out for coffee. You also have lots of time to train your dog in the essential outing behaviors: *sit, down, stay, heel* and recalls.

It's a good idea to have contingency plans for various eventualities as well. Last summer, I went for a visit to southern California with my dogs. I left early to avoid being in the hottest areas in the middle of the day and to arrive in time for evening plans with

friends. I encountered unusual traffic and my dogs were stressed for the first time when traveling. We also found ourselves repeatedly at a standstill next to noisy, hulking trucks that terrify one of my dogs. So I stopped for more frequent and longer breaks than planned, picnicked with the dogs in grassy spots, and canceled my evening engagements.

The best way to keep stress down while traveling is to start with well-exercised dogs and make stops every two to three hours at an off-leash area, giving them a romp and potty break. Break out a map as well and plan those stops. There may be stretches that have few resources or are too hot for midday romps. Make sure you give them water, and park in the shade so they don't have to get back into a hot car.

Using treats to reward good behavior, ask your dogs to respond to a variety of commands when you stop for meals and romps. Familiar routines of *sit*, *down*, *stand*, *shake*, and *stay* will keep them mentally distracted and turn what might be a new and therefore scary situation into something delicious, familiar and fun instead. Have a variety of tasty and time-consuming things for them to chew while driving as well.

There are also safety issues to consider. Don't let your dogs travel at high speeds with their head out a window. And if you are going to use seat belts or crates or put a divider between the front and back of the vehicle, get those devices in use now so the dogs can become accustomed to them.

I have met too many people who should know better and still leave their dogs in cars for long periods of time, so I need to repeat: Don't leave your dogs in the car while you are out enjoying various activities. It isn't safe in hot weather or the sun even on a cold day, and you have no idea how other people and kids might interact with the dogs.

Simply put, plan the trip around the dogs' needs, but don't neglect the needs of animals and humans they will encounter on the way. By asking *Madame Good Dog* for advice, it sounds like that is just what you are doing.

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