



## HELPING YOUR DOG WITH TRAVEL SICKNESS

Car journeys are an integral part of modern life and the ability to take our dogs with us in the car whether its for vital trips such as the vets or for fun with walking further afield; is often taken for granted.

With the help of *Tamasine Smith* from *Lead Changes*; we set out some useful hints and tips below; if you and your dog find yourselves struggling with travel.

### **Dealing with extreme to moderate travel sickness**

#### **Preparation**

I have worked with a number of violently sick dogs including one who would vomit after 10m. Take it right back to square 1 and start by doing mental and fun exercises around the car and past the car first. Dogs are generally car sick from anxiety and nothing to do with motion although once moving it's best to teach them that putting their nose out of a window will mean lots of smells which often helps.

Also use scent in relaxation work (soothing sofa cuddle associating the scent with calm) and once that's established you can use that prior to a trip. The best scent to use is relaxing lavender. There is a stimulating one so you need to check which is which. A good carrier oil around dogs is coconut but do your online research and check out on some animal/vet aromatherapy sites to get the mix suggested. If you have a friendly and knowledgeable aromatherapist, have a chat with them. You then use that on your hands and during relaxing times - just stroke your dog gently. This aroma makes associations with "relaxation" done over a period of weeks WHILE training the confidence work around the car it can then be used "before" a short journey or "movement" practice where the car will actually travel and this could literally be 1-2 metres.

Also using dilute peppermint-tea and spoon of honey and letting it cool to give a few sips before travel (and while doing all the other work) helped.

#### **Activity and scent work**

It's not all about the distance travelled, sometimes even 100m is too much for dogs that suffer badly. You can start with 1 m but there is more to it than just driving a short distance.

So the idea is - yes you guessed it - teach the "learn to earn" programme first! This ALWAYS gives a dog confidence and presents them with alternative behaviour to perform and makes them part of the decision making process. When "done correctly" it



really does answer so, so many questions - because it is providing a new habit, a new default behaviour, something that requires choice and the dog to be part of the decision making process and this changes so many other things - including reducing stress and anxiety. As cortisol lowers and a dog relaxes, many other issues change. It helps them feel in control more and able to understand the process.

So once this is going well - use the scent at the end of general training sessions when relaxing with a dog. Then when you do the training - you do the Learn to Earn "around" the car and near the car with it parked and not running! When this is going well after a few days - use the scent "before" the session around the car - still parked, and still not running! You then add making games in and out of the parked car and using the entire food ration as your training rewards - so breakfast or dinner would be learnt during a training session. This is SO important and is such a valuable way of training and making new associations. Plus it makes sense to a dog - who having developed as a scavenger, has to earn all his food and you are controlling the resource, the fun and the games and NOT the dog.

Using Learn to Earn, make the games fun - do the foundations around the car and in the car, in and out of the car, with it off at first and then once all this is going well and ONLY then - with the car running. Once this is going well, repeat it all, starting with the car off at first, then with the car running, then get in the car, drive a short distance (this might be 1-2m) get out, do some more Learn to Earn foundations by the car and walk home even if home is only 2 metres away... or go on a nice walk. Repeat and repeat until you are getting 5m then 7 and so on - but be prepared that sometimes you may have to do only 4m again.

Don't keep going further each time.

The longest it has taken me to change a dog and doing it on an almost daily basis was around 1 month. We then got the dog (my own) to the beach - had a great fun day out and came home - without any vomiting and the journey was 1.5 hours. DO NOTE - once the above is going well you need to reverse this process too - e.g. park the car 1m, 4m 10m away and walk to the car e.g. at the end of your drive and THEN do some exercises or scenting and drive back to the house - play a game he likes. Increase slowly - so you can get to where you can drive and park over the road, or walk to the parked car over the road and drive back - using the various exercise at the car, around the car and in the car.

Working on scenting in the house (Talking Dogs Scentwork exercises NOT just sniffing out hidden food - there is a difference!) also makes a huge difference. It builds partnership and gives a purpose to the human plus it is highly meaningful to an animal almost entirely dependent on its nose for learning about life and getting messages



about the world. It is most helpful if the dog is scenting for cheese rather than a scented toy. Stepping this up and then playing it around the car and in the car - both with boxes and the cheese stuck on the car itself will really help dogs associate the car with fun, games and nice things.

Scentwork as a whole also builds confidence around fearful or reactive dogs and is also great for dogs of all ages to give brain work - so puppies can do it as can old arthritic dogs. It will also help humans who want to work with their dogs but are less mobile or who are even in wheelchairs etc.

### **A word on re-homing rescue dogs over distances**

Also the best way to send a dog long distance once they travel well is for the adopter to wear socks or old t shirt for a week and sleep in them as well. If the dog is in foster, they can do the same. Then these are exchanged in advance of the journey, so that the dog gets used to the new smell of the adopter before arrival in their forever home, and they will also have something from their foster home for familiarity whilst they settle in. Scent is powerful. I did this with all dogs I fostered where possible including when I flew my own dogs or flew rescues across South Africa and all new owners said it was like the dog knew them... well that's because they did! Through scent.

Remember the activities and scents we discussed above? The fosterer could also use the same scent on a scent cloth in the car when the dog travels but also alongside their socks/T shirt and the new owner's shirt when he goes on his longer journey.

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