**FOUR WHEEL PHOBIA**

Does your dog dread a spin in the saloon so much that he refuses to get in? Or, is he a poor traveler that braves the torments of the road? David Appleby helps to make your hound a happier passenger.

Some dogs just do not want to get into a car at all. This can be for a number of reasons. Fear of traveling is one of the obvious ones. This is not normally the result of an incident, like a road accident, but more commonly because of a negative association with car travel, like being sick. If a puppy learns this association on one of its first journeys, it may stay with it. This may cause apprehension about getting in a car again, in anticipation of being sick, even in adulthood.

Sometimes the fear does not result from a learned association, but from a simple lack of experience. Owners are often advised to keep their puppy at home until its vaccinations are complete, which can lead to all sorts of problems. One such problem being that the owners do not bother to take their puppy in the car because they do not intend to take him out at the destination.

Consequently, the puppy's first experience of the car, (apart from the initial journey home from the breeder's, which can be a traumatic experience anyway), comes quite late in the development of its ability to cope with the world in general. Suddenly it's put in a small room that not only moves, but also accelerates and stops without warning, throwing its contents from side to side.

Of course, some people have little reason to put their dog in the car because they exercise it close to home. As a result, the associations the dog develops can be negative ones, such as trips to the Vet for injections.

To overcome a dog's fear of getting into the car, try to make the process into a game which the dog will enjoy, even if it takes a little bit of persuasion. You need to be determined not to give up!

Start by opening the two rear passenger doors so that, to the dog, the car looks like a tunnel. With you dog on a lead, climb in and do not look back. There may come a point at which the lead tightens because it refuses to move, but keep the tension on the lead by pulling gently, (i.e. not so hard as to drag your dog), and remain absolutely silent.

As a result of your efforts to get out of the car on the other side, your dog will eventually have to get in. When it does, continue to look the way you are going, but lavish it with lots of praise! When you climb out your dog will follow you. Run around to the side you first got in and repeat the process over and over again! Who needs the Jane Fonda workout?

Your dog will gradually become so excited about this new game that it will start to jump in before you. At this point you can begin to take longer breaks, sitting on the back seat and giving lots of fuss! If you have a hatch back or estate car, put the back seat down and open the rear door. Change the game to where you get in the side of the car and out the back, or vice versa. Rest periods are now taken in the luggage compartment!

EN ROUTE DISTRESS

By the time you have worked off a few pounds, your dog will be happier getting in the car. This can be reinforced by feeding all its meals in the car for the next few weeks. Initially, with the engine off and ultimately with it running, (though do not attempt to drive if your dog has recently eaten, as it may cause it to be sick!)

So, now we have a dog that's happy about getting in the car, but how can we get it to enjoy traveling?

The majority of dogs who are anxious about car travel never get to a point where they refuse to get in one. They will, however, pant anxiously throughout the journey and even salivate copiously, which is a physiological response to anxiety, as is vomiting.

What if the vomiting is a physical response to the movement of the car, in the same manner as sea sickness is induced by the movement of a boat? In this case, the nausea is triggered by the movement of fluids in the inner ear. If this is the problem, medication may be required. If you suspect that travel sickness, rather than anxiety, is the difficulty, it would be wise to discuss the matter with your Vet. Once a successful treatment has been found, taking several long journeys in quick succession often works.

If your dog's distress is caused by anxiety, a different approach is needed. If the condition is severe, your Vet's help may be necessary. Either for anxiety reducing drug support combined with the program of counter conditioning they advise and/or, by referring you to a behavior counselor such as a member of the Association of Pet Behavior Counselors.

If the condition is not severe, you can try and help your dog overcome its problem on your own. The objective is to develop a pleasant association with car travel. Aim for short outward journeys that end somewhere your dog enjoys, the park or countryside for example. Homeward journeys can end to a portion of its daily food. It is crucial that the journeys increase in length slowly. This may mean driving your car part of the way and walking the rest on the outward journey, and vice versa on the way home.

In time, distances can be increased and, obviously, the more time and effort put in, the quicker the results will be.

Happy driving!