

The Danger Of Car Travel For Dogs: Evaluating Your Risk

Speaker Key

SG Susan Garrett

Transcript

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SG Do you consider yourself a risk taker? I'm not like risk averse, but I'm not like crazy, but I am a quick start. I don't tend to think things through before I jump into it, but there's one area of my life. I take absolutely zero risks and that is the topic of today's podcast.

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Hi, I'm Susan Garrett. Welcome to Shaped by Dog, you know, in 1999, I quit my six figure year job to do my hobby full time. My late husband at that time was beside himself, he had sleepless nights. I didn't give it a second thought, I wanted to be a full-time dog trainer. He thought that was a crazy high risk. I'm a risk taker.

When I was 35 years old. I gave my life savings to somebody who had this great idea of an investment and guess what? Lost it all. That wasn't such a great risk, but you know today, I'm in my sixties, I'm a little wiser, but I still do crazy things in the gym. And I love riding down the Niagara escarpment super fast on my bicycle.

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So, I still kind of take risks, but I got to tell you. My dog's life, I am overtly cautious about. I take minimal risks and I take zero uncalculated risks. And that's what I wanted to talk to you about today, because I see people taking crazy risks and I think, do they not realize the chances they're taking with their dog?

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I remember being at a seminar back in the nineties, it was learning 'go to ground' with your terriers, where the terriers would go hunting under the earth. And back then, I loved to learn about new sports with my dogs. And I remember I was at this seminar, this gentleman from England was presenting and his first line of the seminar.

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I remember it as clear as day because it was there where I thought "I'm in the wrong place", because he said "anyone who doesn't think their terrier is replaceable, shouldn't be hunting them." And I thought, "well, anyone who thinks their terrier is replaceable, doesn't deserve to own one", but I didn't say that out loud. I kept that inside

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And I realized right there, and then. I would never be hunting my terrier again, ever. And so that's the kind of risk aversion I have with my dogs. My dogs are so well trained, I know I could walk them off leash pretty near anywhere.

But there's no way I would take a chance walking my dogs off leash on a road where there's a potential for them to get hit by a car. Even if the likelihood is incredibly small, that is a ridiculous risk. Why? Why? It just shouldn't happen.

The next place where I just won't take a risk. And that is the main reason of today's podcast, because I can't believe the risks I see people take. And that is the way your dog [travels in a car](#), in an automobile.



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I've narrowed it down to eight different ways. And versions and mixtures of the eight, eight different ways that people drive with their dogs in a car. And for me, there's only two that should ever be considered. And for me, there's only ever one that I would do. The number eight way, let's start right at the bottom and go all the way up.

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Can you guess what is the way that is a crazy risk to your dog? That people use as a mode of transportation for the dog. And I'm going to tell you most recent statistics, this was from 2021. And they can't really get full documentation of, this is the minimal amount of dogs killed per year is 100,000 dogs a year die traveling this way. 100,000 in the United States alone.

Are you kidding me? 100,000 dogs a year die traveling in the back of a pickup truck. That's not even including all the ones that get injured.

Like why? Why? whether you chain the dog down or not. There's just so much risk. Why? It, it behooves me. I've seen dogs going down the highway in the back of a pickup truck.

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The number seven way, that one is just mind boggling to me. The number seven way is a dog traveling down the road with their head hanging out the window. Because easily, easily, you take a swerve that dog's falling and they're out on the road. That's a no brainer. That's easy. Number two, the dogs got their head out the window and you're traveling at least 30 miles an hour, 50 kilometers an hour.

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Let's say, moderate, but I've seen dogs going down the highway like this, one little bug, let alone a stone flying up. Have you ever had a stone hit your windshield? How do you think that's gonna work out in your dog's eye? Why? Why take that risk?

I mean, I know Veterinarians everywhere will give me a list of probably a dozen other reasons why dogs heads should not be out the window, but there's two good ones right there.

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Just with slight little maneuver, falling out. The next three are kind of related, and that would be a dog traveling on your lap. Come on, guys. A dog traveling on your lap.

Can you say, airbags? Airbags and a little dog on your lap or a big dog on your lap. That's not boding well for the dog or for you my friend.

They don't belong on your lap; they don't belong hanging out a window. The number five, anywhere on your front seat, a dog does not belong out on the front seat.

Actually, I don't believe dogs belong loose anywhere in the car. And there's a lot of statistics that agree with me. Do you know that you are twice as likely to have a car accident with a dog loose in your car?

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Some States in the United States actually will fine you if your dog is riding loose anywhere in the car. It's predicted that 10,000 accidents a year happen because of a dog loose in a car.

You're distracted, the dog does something they shouldn't. Boom. There's an accident loose in your car.



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Now let's calculate in a 10 pound dog, how many people put up your hand if you have a dog 10 pounds or less? Not many. A 10 pound dog traveling 35 miles an hour. So, I don't know what that's in kilometers, maybe about 60 kilometers an hour. How many of us go that slow? Maybe in the city. A 10 pound dog going 35 miles an hour is an equivalent of 300 pounds of force.

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300 pounds of force. Should you tap the brakes, if you hit the brakes, that dog becomes a projectile. And guess what? At 300 pounds of pressure, it goes through a car window.

A dog at 10 pounds or less is not gonna fare well going out a window with breaking it with their body. Neither is a dog, 110 pounds. And guess what that projectile does to humans? It breaks bones, 10 pounds, 35 miles an hour becomes a projectile. If it hits a human, it breaks a bone.

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If you have kids in the car, well, again, you're not just taking a risk with your dog's life, you're now taking a risk with your kids' life. Why? That's what I ask. Why? What is the upside to this? I see none.

Remember Susan? Susan's the risk taker, I do crazy things. I went mountain biking in Colorado. When I had zero experience with mountain bikes. I got 10,000 feet up on a mountain and was on my way down and went, "I really didn't think this thing through."

Never, would I take a risk with my dog's life. Dogs should not be riding loose, in anybody's car. Now you can say, "well, my dog rides loose in the backseat", there's still a projectile.

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So that's my number four, not a great place for a dog is riding loose in the backseat. Because not only is it a danger to the dog, you just tap the brakes and they can go through the windscreen.

You just tap the brakes and even if they just slam against the back of your seat, they could really seriously get hurt.

But let alone that, the dog in the backseat that's loose, gets the chance to obsess about what's out the window, going back and forth, creating anxiety for themselves, creating barrier frustration, potentially turning into aggression. Why, why I ask?

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The number three way to travel in a car is behind a barred barrier. So, you see there's barred barriers. They give the dogs the whole back area.

And that at least keeps the people safe in front, but you still have your dog projectiling around that backseat where there's potentially windows that they can go out of. bars that they can get hit by. I mean, it again is a danger. I really, I just don't see any need for it.

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Now we're going to the number two way a dog can ride in a car and this one, so much safer than the six I just mentioned. And that would be seat belting your dog in the backseat, but I'm going to put an asterisk on this one, because you have to investigate the seat belts that are approved.

So, you've heard me [mention on this podcast](#) before the [Center for Pet Safety](#), that they do tests on pet carriers. On seat belts and on dog crates.



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And so, they have a couple that they would recommend. I'm going to [put the links to one](#) that I found in the show notes. And if you're watching this on YouTube, I'll put it in the description. So I recognize that for some of you, your dogs, can't go in a crate. You have a small car, you have a bunch of kids. So, seat belt is the next best thing, but make sure you're not just going to a big box store and buying whatever seat belt that they have there, no matter what.

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Here's one of the things they like to do, 'safety approved', or a 'gold star', '1998 approved safety winner', of what? They created their own contest and gave their dog harness their big safety seal of approval. [The Center for Pet Safety](#) - they have some really good steps there. They test the dogs in a low speed car accident, just like a crash test for humans, low speed car accident. And if it doesn't pass that, you know, it's not going to bode well in a high speed car accident.

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My number one way that I want my dogs to travel. And I can't remember a time my dogs haven't traveled this way, and that is having my dogs travel in a crate. And not just any crate. I like to have my dogs in a [Gunner Crate](#). Now I recognize, it's the Cadillac of dog crates. It's heavy. I like it because it's got metal bars built into the crate that you can anchor the crate down. So, a dog crate in itself doesn't mean it's necessarily safer than say a harness because there's a lot of flimsy dog crates and those flimsy dog crates can become projectiles on their own.

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So, you'll see some flimsy dog crates that have 'tiedowns' now tiedowns to me are very different than anchoring a crate, right? Doesn't it even sound a little more flimsy, right? "I tie down my crate" versus "I anchored my crate". So, when I anchor my dog crates in the car, I use the really hefty nylon strapping with the clamps that bite into the nylon that are secure, that are not going to move.

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And I anchor that to the car frame. So, there's a lot of pieces in your car frame that has hooks actually for anchoring cargo in your car. Now, not all cars have them, but a lot of them do, especially the vans. So I anchor my dogs, crates to the car frame. Another thing that I do, the back of your car and the back of a van, for those of us who have dog vehicles, the back of an SUV or the back of a van is what's called a 'crumple zone'.

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The crumple zone is a part of the car that's intended to collapse. It's intended to crash, it's intended to accordion for your safety, but unfortunately that's a part of the car where people put their dogs. So, when I'm anchoring my dogs down, I do not anchor them anywhere near the crumple zone. I always move them forward and I put my luggage and anything else I'm carrying with me behind my dog crates.

So, really secure crates, ideally something like a [Gunner](#) or something else that's approved by the Center for Pet Safety has really good dog crates, anchor them to the frame of your car and keep them out of the crumple zone.

Now I recognize you can't all run out and get Gunner's, but on the [Center for Pet Safety](#), they have other dog crates that really pass some tests and there are some others that aren't in the pet safety, but I've seen safety data on crates like the [Ruff Tough](#) crates.



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They do really, really well in crash test safety. So, I do like those if you can't get the Gunner's, but again, anchor them to the frame of your car. Don't just tie them down with a bungee because then, you know, they're not secure in an accident. They are flying all over. A crate that's anchored is safe, I think a harness that safety approved is second best. A flimsy wire crate, not a good idea. It could collapse, it becomes a skewer, it can skew. You know what, let's not even go there with our imagination. So, a secure dog crate, best way to travel.

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I recognize that maybe you need a different kind of car. I recognize that if that's not possible, get yourself a dog harness. So, think about the risks you're taking in your life and ask yourself, "should I be including the risk of my dog's life?" I certainly hope not. Let me know if I've missed any mode of transportation for dogs.

I recognize that some people even will even put them in dog carriers in a trailer at the back, not something that I'm really fond of, but I bet you it's a lot safer than being in the back of a pickup truck.

I'll see you next time right here on Shaped by Dog.

Resources:

[Podcast Episode 154: Car Vacations With Dogs: Tips To Make Holiday Road Trips Safe And Fun For All](#)

[Center for Pet Safety](#)

[Gunner Crates](#)

[Ruff Tough Kennels](#)

[Ruff Wear Load Up Car Harness](#)

[Sleepypod Clickit Harnesses](#)



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About Susan

A world-leading educator of dog trainers, Susan is also one of the most successful agility competitors of the last three decades. She has won multiple Gold Medals at National or World Championship events with every dog she has ever owned over the past 30 years. Susan was one of the very first dog trainers to share knowledge online when she opened her "Clicker Dogs" website many years ago. Susan has helped hundreds of thousands of people enjoy a great relationship with their dogs through her workshops and keynote speaking around the world, award winning books, DVDs, magazine articles, blog posts, podcasts, free dog training and dog agility video series, and online dog training programs.



A natural teacher and an entertaining speaker, Susan is world renowned for her dog training knowledge and practical application of that knowledge. Her understanding of how to apply science-based learning principles to both competitive and family pet dog training has been pivotal in changing how dogs are trained.

Susan is now helping many thousands of dog owners in 82 countries have the best relationship possible with their dogs. The real joy for her comes from bringing confidence to dogs and their owner through playful interactions and relationship building games that are grounded firmly in the science of how animals learn.



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