

Driving with Harvey the carsick dog

By Andrea Cooper

It was time, we both decided. Time to take the relationship to that next level and get a dog. Dave and I had been living together for nearly two years and had just returned from three months doing the big kids trip around Europe. Throughout the whole trip we had discussed the type of dog we wanted—I was happy to get a mutt, perhaps even something like a bitzer cross mongrel. But Davo, being the outdoorsy and fitness fanatic wanted something a little more energetic. We talked about



Weimaraners—too ditzzy I decided. My idea of getting a Dalmatian was discussed and then rejected due to Dave having a bad experience as a kid. I wasn't keen on German Shepherds and Dave was having no discussion about a Standard Poodle.

It was on a walk through the streets of Florence where we both made the decision on the breed—German Shorthaired Pointer. We spied this magnificent and noble creature being walked by its owner over the Ponte Vecchio. Perhaps it was the beautiful scenery that got to us or perhaps it was how this stunning dog walked beside its owner. From this point on we were excited to return back to our little house in Surry Hills. We would resume being grown-ups back in Australia and looked forward to having the responsibility of a new puppy.

For weeks we looked in the pet pages of the Trading Post but we were disappointed that no listings appeared for German Shorthaired Pointers. We'd all but given up hope when we saw an ad from a breeder who had a six-month old male available. A lengthy conversation with the breeder determined that this dog was a very energetic but friendly pup, not yet de-sexed and had been returned to the breeder from its initial owner. No real reason was given except that the family that originally bought him had a change of heart.

We were to drive down south to meet the breeder and the dog—who went by the name of Harvey. Dave got a little huffy when I relayed the final stages of the conversation of the phone call to the breeder. She had indicated that we would only get the pup if she, her husband and their two children felt that we would be suitable. In hindsight it was a very responsible attitude the breeders' took, though at the time we felt we were being grilled and our lives put under a microscope.

We were questioned about how much we knew about the breed (very little). What type of jobs we had—Dave was in recruitment and I had just returned to my job working for a small ad agency in Chippendale. How much exercise the dog would receive? This is where Dave got really excited and explained that he would take the dog everywhere—hiking, the beach, morning and afternoon walks in Centennial Park. My dog-loving boss had even suggested that my new pup could accompany me to work. Plus we loved weekend drives and Harvey would always accompany us. Harvey wouldn't really be a stay at home dog, he would be our go everywhere dog.

After an hour-long interview, we were given the green light that we would be taking Harvey home. A financial transaction was made and a tip sheet on what Harvey was being fed was handed to me. That evening's portion of dry food was placed in a zip-lock bag so that Harvey would have familiar food. There was even a card that noted Harvey's exact time of birth, how many days after his eyes opened, vaccination certificates and when he was last wormed. An old familiar blanket was also loaded into the back of the car and were tearfully waved off by Harvey's very first family. As we got to their front gate, breeder mum ran towards the car and indicated she had a final farewell. "Ah", she sighed "There's something else you should know about Harvey. He gets a little car-sick. But don't worry, they normally grow out of it."

CAR SICK. What did that mean? Dave and I braced ourselves believing that poor little Harvey would have a couple of up-chucks and feel a little queasy. We barely got to the Princes Highway before we realised what car sick Harvey-style was all about. Great gobs of foaming drool started forming around his jowls. By this stage he had made his way from the back seat to squirming onto my lap. A six-month old GSP is not exactly lap dog but Harvey wormed his way onto my lap with dogged determination.

How to alleviate car sickness in dogs

Just like Harvey, most dogs do grow out of car sickness. To help your dog or puppy cope with long or short trips, avoid feeding for at least two hours before the journey. Try to drive smoothly, avoiding sudden turns, quick stops and accelerations. Your vet can prescribe a motion sickness drug called Acepromazine. This is very effective for longer trips as it has a sedative effect. It's not recommended for shorter trips—like driving to the park as your dog will be groggy and stumble along like he's tipsy.

Acepromazine isn't appropriate for certain dogs and your vet will advise if this is right for your dog. Human motion sickness or travel pills that are readily available from your local pharmacy should never be used on your pet.

A proper dog harness that you can belt in minimises the amount of motion that a dog will endure. Fresh air also helps car-sick dogs feel a little better and gives them something else to focus on.

Taking the fear out of travel for cats

A road trip from Sydney to Coffs Harbour isn't the time to test your cat's travelability. Buy a good quality cat travel carrier and leave it out so that she can explore it and perhaps even cat-nap in it days ahead of time. This will make it more familiar when you do need to take her on a trip. Accustom her to the travel experience by making small trips in the car. Give plenty of encouragement with favourite small treats or play time with a favourite toy.

Some cats will travel easier when they don't have visual stimulation, so a light towel draped over the carrier is a good idea. Never allow your cat to wonder freely and unrestrained in a car. Frightened cats will invariably end up under your feet and this is a recipe for disaster.



Did you know birds can suffer with motion sickness?

Sounds crazy doesn't it but it's not such an uncommon problem. Proper bird travel carriers are an excellent investment—even if Polly's only going to use it for her annual vet check. Bored beaks can make short work of the wrong carriers. For smaller birds, a small animal carrier is an excellent option. These are available from many pet stores and are reasonably priced. They have a sturdy hard plastic bottom and metal sides and latched top.

Perch position is important as the perch should be as close to the bottom of the cage. This means that if your bird loses its balance, it won't be far to fall and lessens the risk of injury. Only hang soft toys in the cage.

Fresh ginger calms human tummies and works for birds too. A few slices in their travel food dish is a nice peppery treat. For longer trips provide soft foods like cut grapes, celery, sliced oranges and pomegranate—these moist foods can also help in re-hydration on longer or warm weather trips. Food dishes should always be secured into the carrier so that they don't become missiles in the event of a sudden stop. Ice cubes in the water dish are a good idea to avoid big spills.

Always carry a water-filled spray bottle to aid in warm weather re-hydrating. The spray can also distract an over excited or noisy avian passenger. For a weekend vacation, take along bottles of home water—a sudden change in water quality can cause upset tummies.

Never, ever leave a bird unattended in a car and remember that not only dogs die in hot cars!

“Stroke him and let him know he’ll be home soon”, suggested Dave. Patting his head and his soft floppy ears had no effect on the amount of foaming dog slobber that ended up on my lap. With no towel to mop up the goop meant that by the time we reached our house, my jeans looked like I’d had some industrial accident. I was saturated and it didn’t help that Dave thought this hilarious. I staggered through the door, squealing as I threw my jeans into the washing machine, and dived under a hot shower. Meanwhile, Dave showed Harvey around his new digs.

For the most part Harvey settled into our home life well. The three of us soon established a routine where we would all go to Centennial Park for morning romp—all three of us; dog butt-sniffing—Harvey’s favourite activity; ball chasing—which was mostly me chasing the ball as Harvey displayed no interest in retrieving ball unless attached to a water fowl (but that’s another story). Then after getting ready for work, Harvey would be leashed and take the walk from Surry Hills to my work in Chippendale. Most evenings Dave would collect us both, and like clockwork, as soon as we turned into Cleveland Street, Harvey would start up the drool machine.

Short trips weren’t too bad, it was the longer ones that were the problem. Harvey would start quaking, shivering and the foaming drool would last the whole trip. His desire to nestle in my lap was uncomfortable for me and dangerous for Harvey. We bought a car harness and Harvey would be secured in for longer trips. There was a never-ending rotation of towels on hand to try mop up the slobber. We had to make frequent stops to re-hydrate our little guy. Litres of water would be gleefully gulped only to make the foamy re-entry over the car’s upholstery and windows.

Dave and I had to leave Harvey for a week in New Zealand to attend a friend’s wedding. My close work-mate, Veronica put up her hand to look after Harvey while we were away. She lived in Mosman and was happy to drive Harvey to work each day so that he’d maintain his normal routine. We thoughtfully disclosed Harvey’s car queasy behaviour, but Veronica valiantly assured us that this wouldn’t be a problem.

Poor Veronica, she had no idea what she was unleashing on the interior of her car. Morning, bumper-to-bumper traffic and an unfamiliar car seemed to throw the drool-o-matic Harvey into overdrive. Needless to say, on our return we slipped her some money for a full car clean. It was the least we could do, the interior of her car looked like a large army of slugs had been left to explore the back windows.

Being the more ‘alternative’ kind of girl (read hippy-chick), Veronica had tried all sorts of ‘soothing’ unguents and oils on Harvey. During their treks into the city, Veronica had played a variety of New Age music—everything from rainforest tinkly music to monastic chants. Rescue Remedy was administered before each trip and lavender oil had been spritzed behind his ears and other pulse points. It took days before Dave stopped complaining that Harvey smelled like Toilet Duck!

Every weekend Dave would drive the car to our back gate and clean the sodden interiors out and try to make our humble car look like a normal vehicle. It was

one of these clean out sessions that the unthinkable happened—Harvey disappeared. Dave was ashen faced when I came downstairs calling Harvey. My normally responsible and careful partner had left the gate open. Harvey could run like the wind and we lived only a block and a half from three busy streets—including Cleveland Street. I felt sick with terror and I know Dave wasn’t far behind me.

We quickly phoned all the vets we could think of in a 10K radius and gave them a full description of Harvey. Many were helpful with advice and suggested we make up photocopied signs with a clear photo of Harvey on it. We would drive to the nearest Kinko’s and make a bunch of signs up and plaster our neighbourhood. Dave was busy trying to estimate how much reward we would offer as I locked the gate. And that’s when I heard the cry from Dave.

“Harvey! Quick, he’s here! Harvey what are you doing in there. Oh good boy.” And there, sitting in the car, was Harvey, on his position in the backseat, passenger side.

We estimate Harvey had been sitting in the car for nearly an hour. Our carsick dog had decided that he wanted to go for a drive. And that’s exactly what our happy family unit did. Dave and I got in the car and drove to Norton Street to get a late summer afternoon gelato. Harvey too got a scoop and his own cone. As we sat in the late afternoon Sydney sun, you wouldn’t have found three happier beings on this Earth.

Like our vet advised, Harvey did eventually grow out of his car sickness. He was apparently a late bloomer—he was over a year old when it finally stopped. We didn’t realise it immediately, just one day Dave looked in the rear view mirror and said “hey have you noticed Harv isn’t a drool dispenser anymore.” It wasn’t long after that Dave decided to upgrade to a new car.

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