TRAVELING WITH PETS
BY JOSEPH AND CAROL BERKE

It’s obvious that we Americans are in love with our pets. According to the 2007-2008 National Pet Owners Survey, 63% of U.S. households own a pet. That’s over 71 million homes! And who among us hasn’t wanted to take our “furry” family members along on our RV trips with us? According to one study, over 60% of all RVers travel with pets, so what’s stopping the rest of you?

There are many good reasons for including Fido or Fluffy on your RV travels as long they are comfortable with traveling, and as long as you plan to include them in activities. Having them along on trips can enhance your enjoyment as much as theirs, as they explore a whole new world they’ve never seen before (you know the feeling). They won’t experience separation anxiety from being left home alone, with strangers, or in boarding kennels. Having your pets with you relieves your own worries about whether your pet is properly cared for, happy, and in good health. But you don’t need a reason; if you just plain want to take your pets along – go for it!

Our Golden Retriever, Barney, was an avid RVer and camper. We only needed to begin getting the rig ready and he’d go nuts, jumping in and out of the rig, encouraging us to hurry up and get on the road. Before setting off on any trip you always gave your RV a checkup to make sure that all parts of the vehicle were in working order. Likewise, pets should also receive checkups from their veterinarian to ensure that they are also in healthy enough for travel. But let’s not get ahead of ourselves…

GETTING READY TO DEPART

To any casual observer, it looked like we just put our dog Barney in the rig and took off on our camping adventures. Traveling with pets takes a lot of preparation of both the animal and the supplies needed to keep it well and comfortable during the outing. If you have any questions, contact your pet’s veterinarian for more complete information. Providing supplies for the RV also includes all the items required for your pet. A checklist will assist you with your packing; see the sidebar at the end of this article.

ON THE ROAD

It is best not to let the pet have the free run of the RV while you are in motion. Eric and Carol Anderson from Pine Grove, California, travel in their fifth-wheel with two boxers and an Australian shepherd. “The most important thing is to take the pets out with some frequency. If you take your pets out once a year they are not as comfortable and are anxious about the trip. We also take our dogs around town in our cars to keep up their travel experiences. On the road, our dogs travel in the backseat of our crew cab. We do not let them travel in the trailer; we want them near us so we can keep an eye on them,” says Eric. Janene Butler and her family of Citrus Heights, California, used to travel with cats. “We turned the top bunk in our triple bunk fifth-wheel into a cat station where they had food, water and a litter box. We had solid kennels to put them in while traveling. We even tried cat harnesses for ‘walking’ them, which they hated,” says Janene. The Butlers currently travel with two small dogs in a Class A motorhome. Julie and Chino Yap of Pine Island, Minnesota, travel in a motorhome with two terriers and a small poodle and they soon hope to add a cat. “When the RV is in motion, the dogs have their spots so they are not moving around,” says Chino. The terriers also help keep the RV free of vermin. “One time,” according to Julie, “we were camping in the middle of nowhere in Utah and our terrier went nuts during the night. She was scratching at the cupboards, whining and generally driving us crazy. She would not give up. I finally got her to calm down and go back to bed.

The next morning, I got up to make coffee, opened a drawer and found a big fat mouse staring at me. The dog knew it was there. We dumped out the mouse and the contents of the drawer on the picnic table and cleaned it all out.” Sarah and Nick Miccio of Palmdale, California, take their two golden retrievers and two Boston terriers along in their 40-foot fifth-wheel wheel trailer pulled by a Chevy dually. “The backseat folds flat in the truck to make a big bed for the dogs to travel comfortably,” says Sarah.

KEEPING YOUR PET HEALTHY

Pet wellness on the road should be a primary objective. Steve Thomasson, D.V.M. of the Cochise Animal Hospital in Scottsdale, Arizona, suggests a thorough vet check of your pet before the trip. He adds, “You will also need to have in the RV an up-to-date record of vaccinations that include parvovirus, hepatitis and distemper. This record of vaccinations may be required in RV parks or when crossing state lines or international boundaries.

Records of significant health issues such as heart or kidney problems, allergies, or any illnesses that a veterinarian you may need to see while on the road will want to be aware of. If your pet is taking special medications, you will want to have a supply of those medications with you, along with information regarding why those meds are being given and the dosages,” says Thomasson. “You may also want to take along prescriptions for any medications that you may need to fill at pharmacies along the way.”

If your pets will just lounge around the RV and not participate in physical activities, it is still important to be vigilant about their condition. Learn to recognize illness or injuries. The predominant causes of illness are parasites, fleas and ticks. Fleas are perhaps the most ubiquitous of the insects that may attack your pet. Although there are many different ways to control or get rid of fleas, the most common ways are bathing, spraying, dipping or using a flea medication suitable for the animal.

RV PET CHECKLIST

- Leashes, muzzles, harnesses
- Seatbelts, car seats or dividers for the vehicle
- Traveling crates or cages
-Bedding
- Bowls, food and water, and pet treats
- Sweaters or blankets for cold-sensitive pets
- Dog or cat booties or foot pads
- Combs, brushes, mat splitters
- Soaps, shampoos, flea and tick spray
- Towels and rags for cleaning the pet
- Floatation devices for water-loving dogs
- Ramps or steps for small dogs to climb in or out of the RV

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lost or missing pets

It may sound like a no-brainer, but when packing up to leave a site, be sure to check that your pet is with you in the RV. John and Jackie King of Elfrida, Arizona, travel with an eight-year-old female Lhasa Apso named Mattie. “One time we left a campground and got about five miles down the road and my wife looked in the cage and - NO MATTIE! It was at this point that I remembered tying the pup to the picnic table while I was draining the tanks and disconnecting the hoses and power. We returned to the campground and found her waiting for us. She just knew we were coming back,” says John.

What do you do if you discover your pet is missing during your trip? If your pet gets out at home, and it has a sturdy collar and identification tag, it can often be recovered in the local area if someone finds them wandering. Pet identification is critical when you’re hundreds of miles, or more, away from home in unfamiliar territory. I.D. tags are the best way to help you get your pet back. Microchips and identification tags for dogs and cats are also very important, although they’re not foolproof. The chip is embedded under the skin and is encoded with all the information needed to return your lost pet to you. A tag is placed on the pet collar to let people know that your pet has a microchip. The chips work only if the person finding your lost pet takes it to be scanned; almost all vet hospitals and animal shelters have scanners. The two major microchip companies are the AVID FriendChip and the HomeAgain Microchip Identification System. Both companies operate 24/7 to respond to calls about lost pets.

pet food

The fewer changes you make to your pet’s diet, the happier it will be. If possible, bring enough food to last the whole trip, or buy the same brand of food if you need to replenish your supplies. If you cannot find the same pet food at your location, substitute a similar type of food and mix the new food with some of the pet’s regular food to reduce the shock of a new menu. The same applies to water. Bringing water from home will ensure that the pet does not drink bad water from puddles, streams, ponds or even from faucets in the new location. Again, blending the new water with water you bring from home will help reduce the shock to the animal’s system. This should reduce the onset of diarrhea or other stomach or digestive ills.

After the recent pet food contamination scare and product recalls, many pet owners are starting to cook homemade meals for their dogs and cats. Although such meals made with fresh, high-quality ingredients often taste better than prepared foods, we need to be careful what we actually cook for our pets. There are numerous books on the subject of cooking for pets. Some examples are listed in the sidebar.

pet first aid

A first aid kit is an important addition to your pet’s travel gear. Dr. Thomasson suggests that many of the items used in a human first aid kit will also work for your pet. Carol Anderson, a veterinary technician, made up her dog’s first aid kit using a tool bag. First aid kits for pets can also be purchased on the Internet or at your pet supply store. Dr. Thomasson also suggests that, for the most part, you can use the same external salves and ointments on the pets that you use on yourself, especially if you are using them temporarily or until you can see a vet.

If you have a long-haired dog, you should trim some of the hair from the bottom of the dog’s feet and from between the toes. This will reduce the chances of burrs, stickers and foxtails sticking in the hairs between the pads and causing irritation, or working their way into the pads or legs. Medicated salves are good for almost anything that hurts and should be included in the first aid kit.

The American Red Cross offers a book on pet first aid and many chapters offer pet first aid classes. Check with your local Red Cross chapter office.

good citizen fido

When you arrive at a campground or RV park, it is important to make sure that your dog, cat, or other pet is a good citizen. When outside, the pets should be in pens, on leashes, or otherwise controlled. Common courtesy requires that you prevent your pet from being noisy, and not allow them to soil the area. Often, a good obedience class will go a long way to make your dog a good citizen, socialized toward other people and other pets. Your veterinarian, local pet store, animal shelter or breed club can suggest, or even offer, obedience classes for you and your dog to attend. Cats, on the other hand, are always well-behaved, right?

medical insurance

A service that has become increasingly popular is pet medical insurance. There are many insurance companies and they can be found through the Internet or as a recommendation from your veterinarian. Pet insurance is especially useful when traveling, and away from your local vet. The insurance can reduce some of your anxiety when taking a sick or injured pet to a vet in a different part of the country.

Traveling with pets can be extremely enjoyable if no crisis arises during the trip. Making sure all the pet’s needs are included in your trip planning will ensure a safe and happy trip. Having your pets with you can be stress reducing, and may help you meet new people as you walk around the campground or hike through the woods. Bringing your pets along on your RV adventures will allow them to be included in the family fun, and provide you a great deal of pleasure for years to come.

Visit www.TrailerLifeDirectory.com for more information about Traveling with Pets.

pet food cookbooks

• Best Ever RV Recipes, Published by Trailer Life
• Dr. Pitcorin’s New Complete Guide to Natural Health for Dogs and Cats
• Real Food for Dogs: 50 Vet Approved Recipes to Please the Canine Gastronome, by Arden Moore and Ann Davis
• Crazy Kids Guide to Cooking for Your Pet, by Barbara Denzer
• Barkers Grub: Easy, Wholesome Home-Cooking for Dogs, by Rudy Edalati

medical insurance:

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