

When you have to brake suddenly, you may not be in danger of going through the windshield, but sitting in the car seat with your feet flat on the floor, the first thing you do when you feel the car decelerating is to brace yourself with your foot. A dog doesn't have this advantage. Roaming around loose in the vehicle, he is at the mercy of Newton's First Law: An object in motion will tend to remain in motion until an external force is applied to it. More simply put, during a sudden change in velocity, your unrestrained dog will fly forward until he hits the dashboard, the back of your head, or the windshield.

Loose dogs in cars cause many traffic accidents each year. This has prompted many dog equipment manufacturers to produce and sell dog seat belt harnesses. BUT, here's something else I bet you don't know (we didn't—until we researched it):

MANY OF THE CAR SEAT BELT HARNESSSES SOLD FOR DOGS ARE NOT CRASH-TEST RATED TO SAVE YOUR DOG'S LIFE IN AN AUTO ACCIDENT.

In the case of a crash, the buckles or stitching on these types of harnesses can break, leaving your dog unsecured and possibly causing injury. There are seat belts for dogs that are made and tested for impact. In a 30mph collision, the car occupants exert 20 times their body weight on any restraint system. This means that the harness restraint system for a 20 lb dog has to be able to hold 400 lbs. of sudden force! Does your dog's seat belt look like it can hold that?

Unfortunately, many companies are selling dog seat belt harnesses that are only meant to prevent the dog from moving around in the car and bothering the driver. That will no doubt cause fewer accidents, but wouldn't you also like to know that your dog could SURVIVE an accident?

There are several seat belts on the market at this writing that are accident rated. These are the C.A.R.E. (Canine Auto Restraint Equipment)



Petey, DSA, posed for the design of the official DSA Travel Safety merit badge, prior to our research. Can you see where this seat belt would be likely to fail in a serious impact?

harness, by Champion (www.CanineAuto.com); Pet Buckle Safety System (www.immioutdoors.com/petbuckle/index.htm), and the Roadie, by Ruff Rider (www.RuffRider.com). In the future, I'm sure that more people will become aware of the need for a harness that not only restrains the dog, but protects him in an accident, and there will probably be more companies that will produce accident rated seatbelts. Also at this writing, 26 States require dogs to be restrained when riding in vehicles. More are sure to follow. Please visit the Dog Scouts of America website www.dogscouts.org for up-to-date information on how to keep your pet safe. The Dog Scout Camp Online Store stocks some of the harnesses mentioned above.

If you choose to use a seat belt harness for your dog, you will need to be sure he won't back out of it and can't get tangled in the attachment lines. The biggest complaint about the harnesses that attach to the vehicle's seat belt is that the dog tends to get tangled when he turns around. One way to avoid this is to get an equine trailer tie and attach it to a solid piece of the vehicle (like around the back of a bucket seat or snapped to where the seat is attached to the vehicle). The trailer tie may be 'overkill' for a toy breed, but should be considered for any dog over 20 lbs.

Another consideration for keeping your dog safe is where you put the seat belt restraint. Lots of people like to have their dog ride in the front seat, beside them, when they drive. Most cars have front air bags, and the reason we buckle our infant children in the back is because the front seat airbag was found to pose a serious health risk to a child in a car seat. The same is true for your dog. The deployment of the front seat air bag can injure or kill your dog. If you have a switch to turn it off, you must remember to do so. If you are not able to turn off your air bags, you should buckle your dog into the back seat.

All the components of a restraint system have to be able to withstand a huge sudden force. If your dog is not restrained, he is a missile that is likely to go through the windshield or hit the dashboard with tremendous force. You should also be able to get your dog out of the car quickly in case of a fire or other hazard like a chemical spill. The quick release snaps on the equine trailer ties are great for this! These are also called "panic snaps." These snaps can hold a lot of weight (they're made for horses). If your SUV is turned over and your 100 pound dog is dangling from his restraint, you or someone giving aid will not have to lift the weight of the dog to get the seat belt undone, like you would with a traditional clip. You just push the piece of metal in the direction of the arrow, and it will release.



The DSA Travel Safety Merit Badge