It’s no secret that dogs love going on car rides. Whether you spot them in the back of trucks, hanging their heads out the window, or reclining in the passenger seat, dogs can be found travelling in cars all over the US. You might even have a designated seat for your own dog.

While most all the dogs you see on the road are having fun, they generally have one thing in common: they are unrestrained. Only 2% of pet owners that travel with dogs do so safely, with their dog restrained and protected from the dangers of the road. The safest canine commuters are the ones you can’t see so easily - the dogs contained inside sturdy crates, or lying quietly on the back seat in a secure harness and tether.

Most pet owners wouldn’t dream of leaving the driveway without buckling up themselves. But when it comes to dogs, the majority ride unrestrained, which may serve as a distraction to the driver. Unrestrained dogs may jump around the vehicle, climb into the driver’s lap, or obscure the view of the road. Drivers can be just as distracted by dogs as they may be by texting - in fact, some 30,000 accidents a year in the US are caused by dogs hanging out in the front seat. Unfortunately, during quick stops, loose pets can become projectiles that injure human passengers. Due to their smaller size, dogs can also be injured or killed by front airbags, just like young children.

So, the best place for your dog is in the back seat or cargo area - but how to keep him there? With a quick search online, the number of commercially available pet restraints for vehicles may seem endless and overwhelming, but not all of them are created equally. Picking the right restraint depends on a couple of factors, including the size of your dog, the size of your car, and, of course, your wallet. As you might expect, it would be difficult to find a crash-proof crate for your great Dane that will fit in your Honda Civic.

Ideally, whether you’re searching for a harness or a crate, look for one that’s been crash-tested, just like a human product. The Center for Pet Safety is a non-profit organization that has reviewed and crash-tested a variety of products marketed to contain and restrain dogs in cars. Their findings cover crates, car seats, and harnesses, and provide owners an unbiased look at the science of keeping your pets safe. Harnesses and crates designed to restrain pets are not required to undergo crash testing prior to marketing and sale in the US, and poorly designed products may do more harm than good when accidents happen.

It would be amiss to address the subject of dogs in cars without mentioning the pickup truck. A drive around any Southern town on a nice day yields many sightings of big trucks with dogs in the back - it’s about as American as apple pie. While some dogs stand and quietly sniff, it’s not uncommon to see dogs jumping from side to side or standing on the gear box, slobbering and barking in a happy frenzy. If you ask around, you probably know someone who has had a dog fall from a truck bed, or at least know someone who has witnessed it happen. Injuries to dogs due to ejection from the bed may be just as severe as those of dogs hit by cars, usually
involving fractures to the long bones of the leg, such as the femur. One study found that most injuries sustained during falls from truck beds required surgery, and some required full leg amputation. A ride in the bed seems fun and convenient, but loose pets risk painful and expensive injuries.

In summary, both the American Veterinary Medical Association and the Department of Motor Vehicles recommend that dogs be restrained safely by a crate or harness and tether while travelling in the car. While it may seem like this takes all the fun out of car rides for your pet, rest assured that Fido will still enjoy loading up to take a drive - the drive will just be that much safer for both pooch and people.

**Works Cited**


Paws to Click. Website. 2017.
