

# Riding in a Car

**Fear and Excitement when Riding in a Car** is something that many dog owners face on a daily basis. A barking, jumping, and adrenalized dog can be anything from a simple annoyance to a very large safety concern. Our training exercise will not attempt to address the underlying issues regarding your dog's misbehavior. We will focus on a corrective process that you can manage and track to assure you will have a "happy passenger".

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## First things first:

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The bottom line is that your dog is probably calm in the house and crazy in the car. The point where your dog starts to change from "calm to crazy" is the point where you need to begin to teach. This is the point where he is just starting to become unsure of the situation and where your teaching can provide that assurance and proper direction.

Our teaching lesson is based on a socialization process that slowly progresses from "happy in the house" to "happy riding in the car". There is no time limit with any step. Each dog is different and success is defined as your dog's calm demeanor at the end of the exercise.

***Here is a quick piece of "trainer's advice":** If, at any time you move to the next step and your dog just isn't responding properly, do not "go nuts" on him. You have simply pushed a little too far too fast. All you need to do is to back up to your prior step and practice that for a little longer. Once the prior step is going well, move on again. Our teachers did the same thing with us. They would always say "Well class, let's review what we covered yesterday."*

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## Step One: (Get to the Car)

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We will begin by taking your dog from the house to the car. If you normally have the car in the garage, make sure that there is enough room to approach the car and to open the car's back door.

Place a leash on your dog and calmly walk to the door. Have him stay as you open the door and step out first. Once outside, invite him out and have him stay. Keep him calm and praise him for being a good boy. Slowly walk towards the car but not directly for it. Stop and turn away several times so that the car does not appear to be your obvious destination. Walk around the car several times and stop at the back door.

Open the back door while you keep your dog stationary at your side. Walk around the car several more times, stopping at the open back door for a moment. If your dog seems hesitant or agitated, slow the step down and spend more time walking farther away from the car. Always praise him when he is doing well.

This step is successfully completed when your dog can calmly walk up to the open rear car door.

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## Step Two: (Get in the Car)

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You are now ready to get your dog into the car. You can use several methods to accomplish this. First, you can have him at the car door and coax him up by patting on the seat and/or using a small treat or toy to have him jump on the seat. You can have a family member sitting on the other side of the car who is coaxing and/or inciting him with a treat to jump on the back seat.

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You can also have the family member take the leash and gently tug (small jerks) on the leash to entice him into the car. If he is unable to get into the car by himself due to size or age, you can gently pick him up and place him on the seat.

If he is overly agitated once in the car, back up and allow him to be at the car door entrance. Place treats just inside the car door (seat, floor, etc) where he can easily reach from his current position. As he becomes more comfortable with the treats, move them farther inside until he is fully inside the car on the back car seat. Always praise him when he is doing well.

This step is successfully completed when your dog is calmly sitting in the car in the back seat.

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## Step Three: (Calm in the Parked Car)

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Your dog is now calmly sitting in the back seat. Strap him in so that he is secure for travel. (We suggest an integrated system that hooks his harness to your seat belt mechanism.) You remain next to him in the back seat while a family member starts the car and performs all the steps to prepare the car to back out of the driveway. Besides starting the car, this will probably include turning on the climate control, adjusting the seat and mirrors, and turning on the radio. Praise him when he stays calm.

Remain in the car for two to three minutes to assure that your dog is acclimated and calm with these new sounds and sensations.

This step is successfully completed when your dog is calm in the car for several sessions.

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## Step Four: (Car Pulls onto Driveway and then Back in Garage)

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It is time to put things in motion. Back the car to the end of the driveway. Put it in park for about a minute. Now, pull the car back to where you began. If your dog is showing signs of agitation, have him focus more on you by talking to him in your normal tone or distract him with one of his favorite toys. If he is overly distracted, stop the car, take him out, and walk around the yard for several minutes before trying again. Always praise him when he is calm.

Repeat the process of having him in the back seat while the car is backed down the driveway and back several times.

This step is successfully completed when your dog has no issue with getting in the car, being fastened in, and experiencing the car in motion.

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## Step Five: (Short Road Trip, then Home)

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We are now ready for a short "road trip". This time, do not stop at the end of the driveway as you are backing out. Proceed on to the street and drive around the block twice. Make sure that you come to a stop several times and make several turns. Pull back into your driveway and park the car. Un-clip your dog from the safety device and take him back inside. Praise him for a job (and road trip) well done.

This step is completed when your dog has shown that he can repeatedly (for several days) go on short road trips and behave.

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## Step Six: (Longer Road Trip, then Home)

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Time for a longer road trip with more distractions. This step is the same as step five except that we will be going on a longer road trip. Drive where there are more noises such as honking horns, different engine noises, etc. Plan your route to include more sights such as cars, people, buildings, etc. Try to include traffic lights, train crossings, off ramps/on ramps, etc. End the exercise back home. As before, praise him for a job (road trip) well done.

This step is completed when he does not overtly react to being in the moving car exposed to the general sights and sounds of the road.

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## Step Seven: (Road Trip, Stop Somewhere, Then Home)

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Road trips usually end with a destination different than the starting point. We will add that feature in this step. We are now going to repeat most of our last exercise (in the car, back out of driveway, drive with normal sights and sounds), but we will stop somewhere along the way. I might suggest somewhere that is not filled with people or loud noises. A quiet part of a parking lot is a good location for this exercise.

Stop the car and take him out. Walk him around the car two or three times. Have him sit or stand calmly by the open rear door. Invite him back into the car, properly attach him to his safety device, and head home. If he becomes agitated, attempt to find a quieter location for your next attempt. Praise him during the trip when he is remaining calm and behaving.

This step is completed when he can travel in the car to a location, get out at that location, get back in the car, and go home while staying calm.

You have now resolved Fear and Excitement when Riding in a Car.

***One last thought:** This training exercise has shown your dog that, just as he feels safe with you in your home; he can feel safe with you in the car. You have accomplished this by guiding your dog slightly out of his comfort zone while affirming he is still safe and protected. You have kept the process slow to allow him to build up his confidence and trust in you.*