



## The Soggy Dog Blog: Dogs Aren't Cargo

The weather in Wisconsin is finally starting to warm up (at least a little), and our thoughts turn to BBQ's and picnics, traveling, and getting out to enjoy the fresh air with our four-legged friends. Wisconsin lags behind the greater part of the country in warming up, so this blogpost probably should have been written earlier in the year – but it was just last weekend that something I saw inspired me to post this, and reminded me of an email we received last fall while my husband was very ill.

Last fall, we received an email from a *SportingDog Adventures* viewer telling us about how much he had loved his dog – yes, past tense. He had a habit of popping her in the back of his pick-up truck on the way to and from his favorite hunting spots, but this past fall would prove to be her last trip. Just a ten minute drive proved fatal for his beloved dog, who jumped (or was unintentionally toppled) from the back, never to be found. This past weekend, in our own small town, I was driving behind a small pick-up truck with a panting dog in the back, pacing back and forth freely, a scene that reminded me of that devastated young man's email from last fall.

Dogs are *not* cargo and do not belong tossed as such in the back of a pick-up truck! The dangers are just too great. Dogs of all sizes, ages, and training backgrounds belong safely secured in a kennel or crate if travelling in the back of a truck, or inside the vehicle with the human passengers.

*Even Well Trained Dogs Can Jump Out.* Our dogs have master hunt titles, and I would *never* put it past them to leap from the back of our F150. Between being afraid or excited, coupled with all of the interesting sights and smells, there's nothing stopping your dog from deciding to have a look about, ultimately jumping to his death from the impact or from being hit by another car.

*Accidents Happen, Especially Close to Home.* We've all heard the statistics about the higher incidence of accidents happening close to home. That means that your dog isn't safe even on a five or ten minute ride in the tailgate. You're not doing your buddy any favors taking him on that trip to the local hardware store Saturday morning if he's riding in the back and some idiot hungover from the night before slams into the back of your vehicle.

*Don't Forget About the Elements.* Even if no other drivers existed, your dog has other potential threats when riding in back. Temperatures that don't seem that high to you are going to be a lot more intense in back, beating down on your dog's furry head and baking the metal floor of the tailgate touching his paws. Debris flying through the air, even at slow speeds, can lodge in his eyes. Think about riding a motorcycle with no sunglasses or goggles and no helmet, barefoot, and in a fur coat, and then you'd be close to what he's up against.

*Plan Ahead.* If you have a small cab on your truck and plan to take along or pick up additional passengers leaving no room for your dog inside, leave him home! He'd rather be alive and well at home than bleeding to death on the side of the road. If you plan to hunt him, he's likely to be dirty and wound up at the end. If you don't want a dirty, wound-up dog inside the cab with you, all the more reason to

plan ahead and bring his crate. If you have to take the crate out to make room for hauling something else, take the time right then to put it back in after you offload.

*Have the Right Gear.* Not all kennels are created equal. Before investing in a kennel or crate for your pick-up, do your research. (Very few have any kind of crash test ratings.) Do a Google search for “crash tested dog kennel.” Safer kennels are going to cost more, but isn't it worth it? Your dog is both a financial and emotional investment worth preserving. Consider not only the crate itself, but how you will secure it. Make sure the kennel is secured with bungee cords or ratchet straps, or has a way of being mounted or secured to your BedSlide or other tailgate organizer. An unsecured kennel is no better than none at all. A flimsy wire crate unsecured in the bed of your truck is just a death trap.

*Make it a Habit.* Just like you should be fastening your seatbelt on every trip, no matter how short, your dog should always be secured. Don't make exceptions because “it's a short trip” or because you “don't have time.” Would you toss your baby in the backseat because you “don't have time” to strap him into his carseat?

We've come a long way in the U.S. in terms of our awareness of animal health. We have Lyme Disease vaccines, grain-free pet foods, and sulfate-free pet shampoos, but in many ways, we're still lacking in our understanding of pet safety. You may or may not feel as though your dog is your “child,” but regardless, his life is in your hands. Hopefully, you value that life more than you do job site material or hunting gear, because those are the only things that belong unsecured in the back of your truck.