

## Training Cats and Dogs to Love Car Rides

### Overview of Behavior Modification Terms and Processes

We can train animals to love procedures and other things that they dislike or even hate by combining the process of counterconditioning with desensitization.

With classical counterconditioning we train the pet to associate the handling with things she likes such as food, treats, petting, or play so that she's in a positive emotional state rather than feeling fearful or angry. We generally combine counterconditioning with desensitization, meaning that we start by introducing the handling or aversive stimulus at a level that the pet barely notices and then gradually increase the level. The goal throughout the process is that the pet always acts as though she doesn't even notice the handling or stimulus that she previously disliked.

With operant counterconditioning, we train the pet to perform behaviors that are incompatible with the undesirable behavior. Ideally the pet earns rewards and enjoys performing the behavior so that she's simultaneously learning a positive association with the situation. For instance, we may reward a pet for remaining stationary and calm while you perform a given procedure or have her hold her nose to a target while she is handled.

Further description, examples and pictures of these terms and processes can be found in *the Low- Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs & Cats* book and DVD set.

### Part 1: Safety

Dogs and cats should be kept safe in vehicles either by confining them in travel crates or seat belting them in place. Without restraint, some dogs won't wait until arriving at the park to start playing; to them, the car is their moving playground. Other pets are just a nuisance in the car and can distract the drivers enough to cause a car accident. Additionally, if the driver is forced to suddenly swerve or stop, unrestrained pets are easily injured.



Cats and small dogs can travel in their safe-haven carrier, which should be belted to prevent your pet from being jostled about. A rough ride can cause your pet to become fearful of riding in cars.

One alternative to a travel carrier is to have the dog on leash with someone holding the other end or

seat-belted so that your pet remains somewhat stationary.

## Part 2: The First Car Ride



**Step 1:** Make sure your pet is hungry before your first car ride; it is best he has an empty stomach. Give treats during the ride so that your pet associates the ride with good things. If she is hungry, she'll eat the treats once she is somewhat relaxed.

**Step 2:** Deliver the treats sequentially or just toss a bunch into the crate or onto the seat. If you're driving to a veterinary visit, limit the number of treats given in the car so your pet does not get satiated; since food may be used for counterconditioning at the hospital, too.



**Step 3:** If traveling alone, consider using the Treat&Train® (a.k.a. MannersMinder) to dispense treats for both dogs and cats. This works best if they have already gone through part of the protocol for traveling and the animal has been previously trained using the Treat&Train®. For dogs who learned to down-stay using the Treat&Train®, require your dog to lie down first before having the machine automatically release treats.

Be sure that the first ride is short so that your pet doesn't have time to get nauseous. Additionally, consider the driver's driving skills—don't make your pet sick with fast turns and sudden stops. End in a location that your dog or cat likes. For most cats, this means returning home. For dogs, this can mean the park, a playmates house, or back home. Practice these short car rides until your pet acts relaxed all the time, then increase the driving distance. Usually, after only a few rides, dogs will be comfortable in the car; cats may require a few more trips. After working with your pet through these few simple steps, your dog or cat will enjoy car rides, which will make both short rides and long trips more relaxing for everyone.