

Day-One Dog Training with Howard Weinstein 🐾🐾

Car Safety: Are ANY Crates, Carriers or Harnesses Actually SAFE?



Many crates and car harnesses for dogs—and smaller travel carriers for various pets—look pretty flimsy. Do these things really keep our animals safe in cars?

If you have pets who ride in the car with you, this is a very important question—and most people don't know the real answer.

First, it's simply dangerous and inadvisable for pets of any size to travel unrestrained in vehicles. Not only do loose pets distract drivers; but in case of a panic stop or accident, pets riding on a seat or human lap go flying and may be injured or killed. In addition, even a small

unrestrained pet can become a hazardous projectile and cause serious injury to human passengers. For the same reasons children use car seats and adults use seat belts (if they're smart), pets need safety restraints.

It's long been recommended that smaller pets should travel in body harnesses or soft carriers which interface with a car's shoulder belt, or in a travel carrier (or crate, for larger dogs). Those options keep pets in place during normal driving, reducing distractions. And in case of accident, it was believed they might reduce the likelihood of pet injury.

How did we know if these harnesses and carriers would hold up and protect our pets in an accident? As turns out, all we had were manufacturers' claims—unlike child-safety restraints, little if any independent, objective evaluation had ever been done on pet restraints.

That changed when pet-safety advocate Lindsey A. Wolko founded the Reston, Virginia-based **Center for Pet Safety** in 2011 (www.centerforpetsafety.org). CPS is a registered non-profit research and advocacy organization, dedicated to companion animal and consumer safety. Ms. Wolko got involved in pet safety literally by accident—when a travel harness failed to protect her own dog from injury during a highway panic-stop. After her dog recovered, she looked for a better product, but discovered to her dismay that there were no safety standards or required testing for pet products. She also learned that the Consumer Products Safety Commission didn't monitor or regulate marketing claims related to pet product safety.

So, with sponsorship support from pet-friendly automaker Subaru, CPS set out to be the first independent group to test harnesses, carriers and crates, using rigorous standards and simulated crash tests similar to tests done to evaluate child-safety seats. They even created life-size crash-test dummy animals, ranging from small to large (*at right*). In exhaustive tests on a broad sampling of these products, most of them failed, proving deficient in design and performance.

However, on their website, CPS notes that they are not trying to attack manufacturers for selling well-intentioned products. Their point isn't that manufacturers are ignoring safety standards—it's that there *are* no existing standards, through no fault of the



CPS crash-test dog "simulants"

pet-product companies. By doing thorough independent evaluation of current products, CPS hopes to spur establishment of real safety standards, with the goal of helping companies make better products.

Still, even without the guidance of safety standards, some currently available products did well in the crash tests. While some top performers are pricey, others are more affordable—and it's hard to put a price on the safety of a beloved pet.

The CPS website gives all the detailed results on how specific products did on the tests, including some eye-opening slow-motion videos—showing what actually happens to a pet in an accident or short stop, and exactly how various restraint products failed.

To read the reports and check out the videos yourself, go to www.centerforpetsafety.org and click on the **Test Results** section. The information you learn could save your pet's life!

Bottom line? There are a few products which live up their protection claims. But even if you can't afford one of the top performers, *any* restraint is better than *none*. At the very least, they'll keep pets safer in normal driving, and make it much less likely pets will distract drivers. That alone can help you avoid trouble, since distracted driving is a leading cause of accidents, injuries and death on the road these days.

If the Center for Pet Safety is successful, then safer pet-restraint products may become available in the future.

