

Pets and Car Accidents: Keeping Your Pet Safe

Dog Car Seats, Seat Belts and Crates Can Save Lives

I'm sorry, dogs. This was my last thought before slamming head-on into a concrete interstate barrier at 65 mph. My best friends weren't in dog car seats or crates; they were now flying across my van.

I wasn't sure if I would live, and I was sure that my dogs, unsecured by special dog seat belts or individual crates, were gone. I knew they should have been riding in dog booster seats or harnesses—not lounging on the bed in the back of my camping van—but they had looked so comfortable, I decided to let them do what they wanted.

There was only a fraction of a second to regret my choice. Needless to say, it's quite a jolt when you hit a concrete wall at that speed. Then we were airborne, flipping over and over, and then spinning and sliding on the van's side, the lines on the road passing by my face, until we finally came to a stop. Seconds passed. Then, a pair of golden legs was standing on my head. One of my dogs was alive! Then another set of legs came over to me—then another. All three dogs!

Passersby that stopped to help were pulling out the windshield to rescue us, but I knew the crisis wasn't over. "Stop! Don't open it!" I yelled. I had three panicked dogs with me and I was painfully aware that my open van was not safe and I should have had each in its own [dog car seat](#).

All I could think about was an interstate accident I'd come across a few months earlier. The car door had popped open after a small collision and a panicked dog sprung from the car and fled down the roadway, oblivious to his owner's cries as she chased him. Finally, the owner sank to her knees in tears as he disappeared from sight. I knew that my dogs would also flee if they got out.

"I have to find leashes!" I called out to the rescuers. The leashes had been by the rear door, but now they were lost in the wreckage. I rummaged around frantically and finally fished out three leashes just as the rescuers decided to ignore me and pull open the windshield anyway. Luckily, the rescuers were able to help me secure my dogs before they got away.

My head was bloody, and both the dogs and I had assorted cuts and bruises. The paramedics wanted to take me to the hospital, which meant the dogs would have to go to a shelter. Fortunately, I wasn't so badly injured that I couldn't say no, and after some arguing, the dogs got to ride in the fire truck with me, rather than in the animal control truck. I knew I was lucky. I also had a few lessons drummed into my battered head:

1. **Dogs should always ride in either dog car seats or crates.** Smaller pets can ride in dog booster seats. The unexpected really can happen—in my case, it was another car ricocheting off the concrete barrier and into our rear. My dogs were thrown into the sheltered midsection of the van before it started rolling, but that sort of luck doesn't happen often.
2. **Leashes should be readily accessible.** Hanging them by the door isn't reliable in a wreck. When you flip, nothing stays where it was. I should have had the leashes clipped to something, preferably each dog's seat belt or crate or by my side. Extra leashes wouldn't hurt either. In fact, I'd had extras in the van and that was how I finally found a total of three.
3. **Provisions should be made for the dog's care in case you can't talk.** I saw stars, but I wasn't knocked out. What if I had been? My rescuers would have let the