

Pets on the go: furry friends go along for the ride

BY TOM TRACEY

Special to the Record-Eagle

With so many folks considering pets as part of the family, their comfort and safety while traveling has become just as important.

“As people put their children in car seats and seat belts, they are now following suit with their pets,” said Brenda Rattray of Animal Lovers in Grand Traverse Mall.

Owner Noreen Newberry agrees. “People are becoming more aware of safety now.”

For this reason, a variety of pet-related vehicle products have become available to meet the needs of pet and owner alike. They range from serious to silly, from practical to just plain fun.

Beginning with the serious; pet restraints. The use of devices such as seat belt harnesses and pet car seats not only ensure the safety of the animal, but that of the driver too.

“They keep pets away from the pedals or from causing a distraction to the driver of a car,” said Rattray.

Seat belt harnesses distribute the weight of the pet across multiple points of the body in the event of a sudden stop or

collision — something a simple collar cannot do.

Another way to restrain pets inside a vehicle is to use a car seat. The Snoozer portable mini-sofa is for pets who demand comfort and style while riding around town. Snoozer has a fleece-lined seating surface, a slide-out accessory drawer (for storing food and water) and slots for securing to a vehicle’s seat belts. Rated for 30 pounds, Snoozer is roomy enough for multiple small animals, and can be used at home or in a vehicle.

“It also gives the smaller breeds the ability to look out the car window,” said Newberry.

On the silly side are Doggles — stylish sunglasses designed to protect a dog’s eyes when sticking its head out the car window. Popular with dogs with a need for speed, Doggles are available in a variety of frame styles and interchangeable lens colors to fit the mood of the day. Rattray says Doggles are popular with pet owners who wish to make a fashion statement and accessorize their pet.

Some practical pet accessories were demonstrated by



Record-Eagle/Douglas Tesner

Pet Supply Plus in Traverse City carries a line of travel items for pets including Kennel Cab’s, Port-A-Bowl, safety seat support belts, retractable leash with built in bag dispenser and pooper scoopers.

Kelly Olman of Pet Supplies Plus in Traverse City. To make life easier for the pet on the go (and their owners), soft-sided wheeled kennels are now available that look like airline carry-on bags. Also practical

are airline accessory kits, which retrofit existing kennels with the necessary items to meet airline cargo requirements (such as proper decals and food containers).

An example of seamless pet portability from home to car to airplane is the Pet Mate. The Pet Mate is a soft-sided, collapsible mesh kennel that stows under an airline seat when not in use and is designed for jet-setting pets under 22 pounds.

“Everything from barrier gates to seat covers sell well to SUV owners. I recently saw a ramp that is designed to go from the back of the truck to the ground to help disabled or older dogs get in and out of high vehicles easier,” said Terry Fortine, owner of Pet Supplies Plus.

To make the most of limited vehicle interior space, her customers are buying a variety of collapsible food bowls, spill-proof water containers and soft storage bags.

Don Byers of Square Deal Country Store in Traverse City also notices a trend in bringing Fido along for the ride. His store carries cargo barriers, portable food and water con-

tainers and other pet travel accessories.

“Mostly, we sell these items to people with summer homes up here who are returning to Florida, or to people who travel to dog shows,” said Byers.

For those who prefer to let their pet do their thinking for them, the Outward Hound dog backpack includes a hidden key ring — just in case pet owners lock themselves (and their pet) out of the car. This backpack wraps around a dog using quick-release buckles, and contains roomy compartments to store whatever the dog deems necessary for a road trip with its master.

And just because a pet accompanies an owner on a road trip doesn’t mean they have to go without. On the fun side are the special touches pet owners apply to make vehicle trips more enjoyable for their pets.

“A lot of pet owners take a case filled with their favorite toys with them, like Frisbees or balls, or have a box of goodies stashed in the car,” said Fortine.

Tom Tracey is a local freelance writer.

Top ten unusual gadgets for cars

BY TOM TRACEY

Special to the Record-Eagle

As the largest direct marketer of “everything automotive,” the venerable J.C. Whitney catalog lists just about every automotive gadget imaginable (including some beyond imagination). A few of the more unusual items available from the catalog (or on-line at www.jcw.com) include:

1. LED (Light Emitting Diode) exhaust tips, which allow flickers of light in colors like coral pink and neon blue to shine through holes in a stainless steel exhaust housing.

2. Train roar back-up alarm, which automatically activates whenever the vehicle is shifted into reverse. A likely secondary benefit is the scattering of pedestrians.

3. 12v portable blender, which claims to “mix your favorite frozen drinks when you’re on the go.” It will also chop nuts, which is good because we all know that drinking and driving don’t mix.

4. Elephant hood ornament in 14k gold-plated finish. Unfortunately, light-up eyes are not

included — you’ll need to step-up to the illuminated ram’s head for that.

5. Propeller hitch cover, which conceals the empty receiver and spins as the vehicle is driven. No claim is made as to the floatability of the vehicle after installation.

6. Complete Jeep body, which bolts on to replace the current one. The fact it is sold by mail order would indicate some long, salty winters downstate.

7. Dash cover custom monogrammed with your choice of Tweety birds: “Tweety with attitude” or “winking Tweety” — depends on whose driving.

8. Exhaust cutout with dash-mounted control, which allows bypassing the muffler altogether for more power (or getting even with loud neighbors).

9. Chrome-plated oil filter cover. For attracting crowds at the local oil change establishment.

10. Green knob battery disconnect, which renders a battery useless for starting a vehicle. Ideal for establishing an alibi if calling-in late for work.