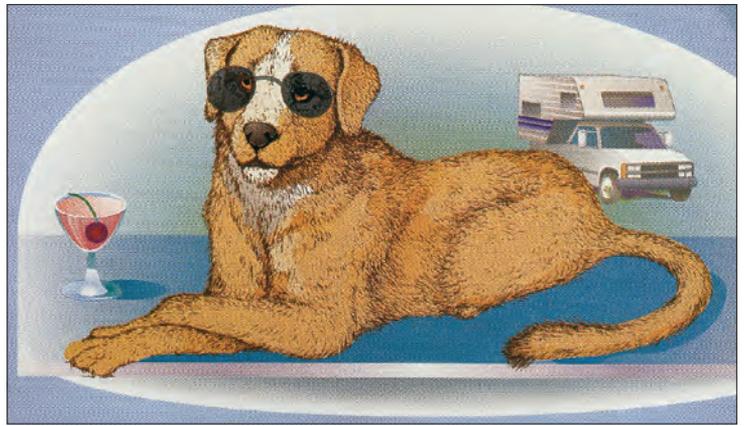


TAKING THE DOG IN AN RV



A dog is supposed to be man's best friend. For RVers who travel with pets, that's probably true, until Bowser decides to leave his calling card on the grass, bark incessantly, threaten other RVers, go wandering around to call on neighbouring dogs and chase the local wildlife. Then a pet becomes a liability that can create havoc for its owner.

Travelling with pets has its reward. Having the family pet on board gives an RV that home feeling. Whether in your favourite chair at home or on the road. Bowser or Fifi finds his or her place at your feet or in your lap. Pets (dogs in particular) usually are attached to their owners, not places, and can be "at home" wherever you are. Such devotion is sometimes hard to find among humans.

Dogs also make it easy to meet new friends on the road. Dog owners have a built-in camaraderie. Just go out walking your dog in a camping site (on the required lead, of course), and you're sure to make a few stops to admire other pooches and let your own draw complimentary comments.

But traveling with a canine isn't always warm and fuzzy. That same dog that introduced the bachelor with the German shepherd to that nice lady with the Pomeranian can cause a lot of problems for his owner, especially on campsites. A lot of those problems could be avoided if pet owners heeded a few basic rules

For the most part, RV parks welcome well-behaved pets, but in spite of putting out the welcome mat, park managers seem to fall into two categories: those who are dog lovers and those who only tolerate canine travelers. With so many people traveling with dogs, it would be financial suicide for an RV park to

PUTTING BOWSER'S BEST FOOT FORWARD

BEAUTY AND BEHAVIOUR ARE IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER, MAYBE IT'S TIME FOR SECOND OPINION

Cinders and Shadow kindly consented to their photos being used in this article as they are experienced RV dogs.

turn away dog-owning customers. With very few exceptions, dogs are "welcome" almost everywhere in the RVing community, but as one disgruntled park manager, who shall remain nameless, put it, dogs are biggest headache and she would be

happy if she never saw one on the premises again. Other park owners reported horror stories of dangerous dogs running loose and, in one instance, of some campers who took a two-day hike, leaving their two dogs behind unattended.

In spite of these problems, pets generally are welcome on campsites, but some of their habits are not. It is the pet owner who is not considerate of fellow RVers who draws attention from campsite owners. A sign on one campsite said at its best, 'This is not a bank. Please do not let your dog leave deposit'.

Unfortunately, coping with doggy deposits is the No.1 problem that many campsite owners face. Given a large campsite with pooches in more than half of the motorhomes can lead to a pretty messy situation. Of course, the dogs get blamed, but it's the owners who ultimately are responsible.

More and more campsites are providing dog runs or at least dog-walking areas, but even that isn't a panacea. One pristine RV park, where the sites are raked every day and not a speck of litter is to be found, admonishes dog owners to walk their dogs only in the dog area, but did you ever try to carry a squirming, scratching 65-pound bundle across a park to reach the prescribed area?

The obvious alternative is to clean up after your pet. Again, it's the few who don't who give all dog owners a



bad name, especially with non-dog owners who aren't always tolerant of their dog-loving neighbors. To solve this problem, many RV parks have dog stations where they provide plastic bags and deposit containers, leaving those walking their dogs with no excuses for not cleaning up after them,

It goes without saying that dogs should be kept on lead, but somehow, the message isn't always heeded. One campsite owner caught a dog running through the property dragging a lead. When the dog's owner was asked to keep his dog on a lead, the owner pointed out that the dog was on a lead.

What about the campgrounds that try to keep peace between dog owners and those RVers who prefer to travel without a canine companion? Some have resorted to establishing separate areas for the two factions, but the lead and pick-up rules are still imposed.

Michigan state parks feature pet-free areas at some of their facilities. This was done in response to visitors without dogs who complained about barking, dog droppings and animals who threatened children. John Winters, policy manager for the parks, said that there are incidences every year of visitors, and even park employees, being bitten by dogs.

When Fort Wilderness RV Park at Walt Disney World in Florida opened its famous gates, the word soon was out that if you showed up at the gate with a pet of any kind, you would be politely, but firmly, informed that your pet would have to be boarded at the kennel on the premises. There were absolutely no exceptions (maybe canaries and goldfish could slip in unnoticed). But even that 10/10/10-rated park finally succumbed and now has set aside four loops for dog owners who pay an additional fee for these sites. No doubt daily inspections are made to be sure no doggie droppings ever hit the ground.

Some amusement parks and other attractions have resolved this problem by providing kennels for daytime boarding. Owners can periodically see that their pet is happy and continue to enjoy their own activities. Communities that are heavily visited by tourists because of attractions where pets are not welcome, such as daylong train and bus tours, usually have local kennels that provide daytime boarding for pets.

Other areas where dogs aren't always welcome are hiking trails, especially on public land. Before

taking off on a trek through the woods with your pet, check with local authorities or look for signs at trailheads. The reason for this restriction usually is for the protection of wildlife as well as your pet.

Most pet owners know that before leaving home, their pets should be properly inoculated against rabies, distemper and other common pet diseases. If you are planning to leave your dog in a kennel, there is an additional shot that must be obtained to protect your pet against bordatella (commonly known as kennel cough). There also are occasions when it is necessary to see a veterinarian for minor injuries and first-aid treatment for thorns, ticks and injuries received from a run-in with critters like porcupines.

**KEEP YOUR
DOGS ON A
LEAD AT ALL
TIMES WHEN ON
A CAMPSITE
OR CLOSE TO
OTHER DOGS,
OR ANIMALS,
PARTICULARLY
FARM ANIMALS**

What about big dogs versus little dogs? Anyone who has been on the road knows that small dogs are the norm, but there are plenty of pets out there that look like they should have a saddle strapped to them. The owner of one of these behemoths is convinced that the larger the dog, the bigger the brain, making large dogs smarter than their pocket-size brethren. That logic draws plenty of



flack from the owners of small dogs that, she claims, have pea brains. But big dogs are not as universally welcome at all RV parks as are their pint-size peers.

Just how do you place a limit on the size of a dog? Some RV parks have a limit of 20 pounds. One park that caters to snowbirds had to add "when full-grown" to that limit. Visitors would show up with a puppy in the fall that became a small horse by spring. The manager said she can tell by looking at the paws if the dog is going to outgrow the 20-pound limit.

Many non-dog owners claim they prefer a life without the comfort of a pet rather than live in a rig that reeks of doggy odor and is covered with dog hair. How do dog owners resolve that problem?

First, try to find a dog owner who admits his or her dog has an odour. Dog owners insist that the aroma usually associated with a dog is a figment of the imagination of those who do not own dogs. Not one was willing to admit that the family pet emitted any smell.

The same goes for damage and destruction. No dog owner is willing to admit that their dog is destructive. The miniblinds in the RV really came from the factory bent out of shape, and their shoes were more comfortable with the toes chewed off of them.

As for dog hair, there are two choices: frequent vacuuming or wearing only clothes that match the dog's colour. One other alternative is to travel with a poodle (the breed is not supposed to shed) or a hairless Chihuahua.

The controversy about whether or not to travel with dogs will never be resolved as long as there are dogs needing homes and people wanting the companionship offered by pets. Those who prefer to travel without this companionship can only hope that RV park and campground owners can find some way to bridge the gap between them and their dog-loving, fellow RVers.

