

Boating with Your Pet

Spring has finally arrived and if you are not lucky enough to live in Florida, where we boat most of the year, most landlubbers all over the country are thinking of getting their boats ready for the coming boating season.

With boating comes the thought, will my dog or cat be able to join the family in its fun? The answer to that is, maybe "yes" and maybe "no." It depends on the pet and your patience in acquainting your pet with your boat. Some pets do get seasick just like some people do. A pet that has adjusted to long car rides is more apt to be okay, than a pet that gets sick in the car from a ride around the block.



Pets that have never been boating need time to get exposed to the ins and outs of boating, a little at a time. The best time to start is now, while the boat is either in your yard or in dry-dock.

But, before you start ask yourself the following questions:

- » Will your pet tolerate a harness and a leash?
- » Is your pet old and has lost some of its agility?
- » Is your pet fairly calm or does it get overly excited?
- » Does your pet get carsick?
- » Will your dog bite or nip at stranger?
- » Is your cat scared of strange sounds and of people?

The next question is "how do you prepare your pet" for this wonderful adventure? First of all, your pet has to get used to the boat and that can be done while it is in your yard or in dry-dock. Remember, if you are taking your pet away from home, it needs a harness and leash (yes, a harness, no collar.)

Why a harness? A cat or dog can slip out of a collar and be gone in a blink of an eye; a harness is more confining and safer. Once they are used to the feel and smell of the boat, start the motor, so they get used to the sound and are not frightened.

Next purchase a floatation device (life jacket) for your pet, there are many on the market and they do save pets lives. Let your pet become accustomed to wearing it; start with short periods of time at first. It also will be worth the effort and time to allow your cat or dog to try swimming with it on. Believe it or not some dogs cannot swim. Pets do fall overboard many times. The life jacket will keep your pet afloat even if it is exhausted or suffering from hypothermia. Most devices have handles on the top for easy lifting out of the water. Pets when wet are heavier than when dry. Once you have the boat in the water, take your pet aboard and let it feel the motion, start the motor and do not leave the dock. Let the pet absorb this experience.



Once you can see your pet is fairly comfortable, take a short jaunt, keeping the harness and leash on your pet for safekeeping. Do this for several days; expanding the time spent on the boat, while keeping a watchful eye on your pet. If all goes well, you just might have a sailor on your hands. Many cats adapt to the life at sea very well, some do not. The same goes for dogs, some are world travelers, and others want to be home on dry land, where they feel safe and secure. Do not force your pet to become a sailor, if the desire is not there. Pets like people have their likes and dislikes and should be respected.

If Miss/Mr. kitty has decided that life at sea is the place to be, there are some things you need to consider for their comfort and things you will need for port entry.

- » Harness and leash needed on board and generally in all ports of call.
- » Medical records, recent vaccinations, rabies shot and a physical report.
- » Identification with all phone numbers, boat name, call letters, etc. Microchip also advised.
- » Litter box also attached, so it will not move. Use clumping litter for less cleanup and garbage.
- » Life jacket, hard on cats as it restricts motion, but should have on board as a safety measure.
- » Plenty of fresh water and more than enough of its favorite pet food.
- » Pictures of the cat in case it gets lost.
- » Check all ports of call, if you are cruising to foreign port check for their requirements.

If you are traveling with your dog many of the same things should be considered.

- » Harness and leash, take several in case one gets lost.

- » Identification, all phone numbers, call letters, boat name, dog's name. Microchip is suggested also.
- » Dog license, all medical records, recent shots and rabies certification.
- » Pooper-scooper, all ports require you clean up after your pet.
- » Plenty of fresh water and usual food.
- » Life jacket to wear in bad weather or if your dog is an explorer on board.
- » Pictures of your pet, should it wander away
- » Someone to keep a watchful eye on the pet at all times.

These items can be found at any other pet store that sells pet boating products. Taking your pet when you are going out sailing just for a day or for an extended period of time can be loads of fun, providing you adhere to certain safety measures.

For more information about boating safety and education contact your local Auxiliary Flotilla at <http://www.uscg.mil/> or <http://www.cgau.org/>. Enjoy the season, your pet and your boat.

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