



Rutland Dog Training

www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

Car Trouble by Adam Beral

Every once in a while my Labrador Daniel refuses to get in the car. He's a little heavy to pick up but I need to be able to bring him to the vet or the park. Can you help?

First things first – are you certain this is a training problem and not a medical one? If you haven't already, book Daniel into your vets for a check-up. It may be that he has some joint pain that is making it uncomfortable for him to jump up. Does he show reluctance jumping up in any other circumstances? You don't mention how old Daniel is, but the intermittent nature of the behaviour may suggest an underlying medical condition such as arthritis that only presents when exacerbated by conditions such as damp or cold. If this is the case, there are medications that can help to relieve any discomfort. It may be that a ramp is an easier way of getting him into the car, for both of you!

Assuming that the problem is behavioural and not medical, it is time to 'think dog'. How does Daniel view your car? Is it a happy place he cannot wait to get into because good things always happen to him there? Or is it a place that he gets into just before he walks into the vets and gets needles jabbed into him? Many dogs' early experience of cars is very negative. Often their first experience of a car is when they are taken away from their litter mates. Subsequent trips to the vets to have their vaccinations only cement their belief that the car leads to painful experiences!

To train a dog to travel willingly in a car is to change the way they view the experience emotionally. Take time to convince Daniel that the car is a source of positive experiences. Take his food bowl to the car and have him eat his dinner in the car every day. Take him to the car and sit in the boot with him giving him lots of fuss.

Before long, he will be more than eager to jump into the back of your car as he expects something good to follow. My dogs often spend hours in the back of the car, happily chewing on a bone or licking food out of a kong. It is one of their favourite places to be, because they are expecting a treat when they are there!



Rutland Dog Training

www.rutlanddogtraining.co.uk

All of these initial stages of training are best done without actually travelling anywhere, or even starting the engine. As he becomes more comfortable with the experience, then you can start running the engine without going anywhere. The next stage is to do a short trip once around the block or to the nearest park for a run. By working through the stages gradually, you can be sure to build up Daniel's confidence and therefore change his behaviour in the long term. Good luck, and do let me know how you get on!

Originally published in the Rutland and Stamford Mercury, 8th October 2010