

# Your dog doesn't hate the car.

*He just needs this.*



The small dog car anxiety guide  
for owners who've tried everything.

**FREE GUIDE — 5 CHAPTERS + CHECKLIST**



01 Why small dogs struggle

02 The 5 triggers

03 Desensitization protocol

04 Perfect car setup

05 When it goes wrong

WELCOME

# Sound familiar?

Every car ride feels like a small betrayal. You need to get somewhere — and your dog loses it. Shaking before you even leave the driveway. Barking the whole way. Pacing, panting, staring at you with those eyes that say please, make it stop.

You've tried everything. A blanket. A toy. Treats. Calming sprays. Cracking the window. Nothing sticks — and you arrive everywhere already exhausted and guilty.

Morulini used to bark himself into a trachea collapse on every drive. I tried everything too. This guide is what finally worked.

*Picture next Saturday. You open the car door. Your dog walks in, circles twice, tucks under the blanket, and sighs. You drive for 20 minutes. You look in the mirror. They're asleep. That's where this goes.*

I know because my dog Morulini was exactly this. This guide is everything I learned trying to fix it — and what finally did.

Car anxiety in small dogs isn't random. It's a specific mix of triggers — motion, vibration, exposure, and lack of a safe contained space — that can be addressed one by one. Most anxious small dogs can become calm car companions. This guide shows you exactly how.

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### **Your 30-Second Quick Win**

Try this right now, even before your next car ride:

*Put a worn t-shirt or hoodie of yours in your dog's sleeping spot for 2 days. Then move it to the car, at seat level. Your scent tells their nervous system: this space is connected to my safe person. It's free, it's instant, and it works.*

It won't solve everything. But you'll notice a difference on the very next trip.

# Why Small Dogs Struggle More in Cars

It's not just personality. Small dogs have physiology and history working against them in the car.

## **The size factor**

A 10-pound dog experiences road vibration very differently than a 60-pound dog. Their smaller bodies can't absorb low-frequency vibrations the same way — what feels like background hum to you can feel relentless and overwhelming to them.

## **The height problem**

Placed loose in a backseat, small dogs are at floor level during turns and stops. They have no visual horizon to orient to — a primary driver of motion-related anxiety. This is the same reason humans get carsick when they can't see out the window.

## **The confinement paradox**

Small dogs are often bred for companionship and proximity. Loose in a large car interior, they don't feel free — they feel exposed and uncontained.

Counter-intuitively, a snug, enclosed space often dramatically reduces anxiety, not increases it.

### **Why burrowing works — the science**

When a dog burrows under a blanket or presses into a tight space, three things happen in their nervous system simultaneously.

- Deep pressure stimulation — gentle, even pressure on the body activates the parasympathetic nervous system (the "rest and digest" state), reducing cortisol and heart rate. It's the same mechanism behind weighted blankets for humans.
- Denning instinct — dogs are descended from den animals. An enclosed space with a low ceiling and walls on multiple sides triggers an ancient hardwired signal: I am contained, I am safe, nothing can approach me from behind.
- Proprioceptive grounding — feeling physical boundaries around their body helps anxious dogs understand where they are in space. In a moving car with no walls,

they feel unanchored. Enclosed, they feel located.

This is why a loose blanket thrown over a dog rarely helps — it provides warmth but not pressure or structure. The blanket needs to wrap around them, not just cover them.

*What to watch for: Yawning repeatedly, lip-licking, or ears pinned flat before you've even moved are early signs of anticipatory anxiety. If your dog shows these on the driveway, the anxiety starts before the car does.*

# The 5 Anxiety Triggers

Anxiety rarely has a single cause. Here are the five most common triggers for small dog car anxiety – and what actually helps.

## 1. Motion & vibration

- Elevate your dog so they can see out the window – visual cues help calibrate their sense of motion
- Use a raised, secured seat rather than the flat floor
- Avoid starting and stopping abruptly – smooth acceleration genuinely makes a difference

## 2. Sound & engine noise

- Low, constant sound (like brown noise) can mask jarring road noise
- Avoid audiobooks or podcasts with sudden loud voices – your own calm voice beats all of these
- Keep the radio off for the first few minutes of a new trip

### **3. Lack of containment / feeling exposed**

- A cave-style seat or enclosed bed gives anxious dogs a sense of a den
- Walls on 3 sides and a roof overhead are calming — this mimics how dogs naturally shelter
- Avoid wide-open baskets or flat beds for anxious dogs

### **4. Your own energy**

- Dogs read stress in your body odor — rushing before the car is contagious
- Sit in the parked car with your dog for 3 minutes before driving, doing nothing
- Calm, bored energy from you is one of the most effective anxiolytics for dogs

### **5. Negative association history**

- If most car trips end at the vet, your dog has learned the car = unpleasant outcome
- Mix in short, fun destination trips — even a 5-minute drive to a park re-trains the association
- Feed high-value treats exclusively in the car for 2 weeks to build positive pairing

# The Desensitization Protocol

This is the most reliable long-term fix. It's slow — but it works. The goal is to systematically rebuild your dog's emotional response to the car from scratch.

## The 2-Week Reset Plan

Days 1–3: The car is a treat station. Don't drive anywhere. Just open the car door twice a day, toss in high-value treats, and close it. Your dog doesn't need to get in.

Days 4–5: Sit in the car, engine off. Treats, calm talk, no movement. 5 minutes max.

Days 6–7: Engine on, no movement. Just let the engine idle. Treats. Nothing scary happens.

Days 8–10: Drive to the end of the street and back. That's it. Lots of praise.

Days 11–14: Gradually extend. 5 minutes □ 10 minutes  
□ 15 minutes. Always end somewhere fun.

*Most dog owners skip the early steps because they seem too simple. Don't. The whole protocol depends on keeping your dog under threshold the entire time – never letting them get to full panic. If they show stress, you've moved too fast. Go back one step.*

# 04

## Setting Up the Perfect Car Environment

The physical setup matters more than most people realise. Here's what a truly anxiety-reducing car environment looks like for a small dog.

### **Position**

Backseat, driver's side or centre — never passenger floor. Elevated enough that your dog can see out the side window. Forward-facing is preferable to sideways.

### **Containment**

An enclosed or semi-enclosed seat is ideal. The walls provide tactile reassurance — your dog can lean into them. A loose blanket in an open seat gives no structural support and often makes anxiety worse because your dog slides around on turns.

### **Scent**

A worn item of your clothing in or near the seat. Free, takes 30 seconds, and has a measurable calming effect for most dogs. Refresh it every 3–4 days.

## **Temperature**

Dogs run hot. A car that's 72°F feels warmer to a dog than to you, especially a nervous one whose heart rate is elevated. Err slightly cool. Never leave them in a warm car, even briefly.

## **What NOT to do**

- Don't let them sit on your lap in the front seat — unsafe and stimulating
- Don't use strong-smelling air fresheners (overwhelming to a dog's nose)
- Don't play loud music to 'drown out' their anxiety — it increases stimulation
- Don't comfort with excessive worried talking during panic — it inadvertently confirms the threat

## When It Goes Wrong Mid-Drive

You planned well. You did the setup. And then five minutes in, your dog is spinning, panting, or in full panic. It happens. Here's what to actually do in the moment.

### **Don't spiral yourself**

Your dog is watching your nervous system as much as anything else in that car. One slow, audible breath and dropping your shoulders is information you're sending them. Stressed owner = confirmed threat. Calm owner = maybe it's okay.

### **Pull over if you safely can**

If you're on a quiet road and the panic is escalating fast, pulling over for 2–3 minutes is not giving up — it's smart. Turn the engine off. Sit quietly. A 3-minute pause often resets a dog completely.

### **Don't reach back and fuss**

Repeated anxious check-ins — 'it's okay baby' in a worried voice — actually tell your dog that there IS something to worry about. If you speak, keep your voice low, slow, and boring. 'You're fine. We're just driving.' Like you mean it.


### **Give them something to do with their mouth**

A long-lasting chew or lick mat can interrupt a building anxiety spiral — chewing and licking both activate the parasympathetic nervous system. Keep a small pot of peanut butter or a frozen chew in the car for exactly this moment.

*The one thing NOT to do: never stop the car and let them out as a direct response to barking or whining. That teaches them that making noise ends car rides. If you're going to stop, wait for even a 2-second pause in the noise first.*

### **When to talk to your vet**

If your dog is vomiting regularly in the car, injuring themselves trying to escape, or showing panic that lasts more than 30 minutes after the ride ends — that's beyond what behavioural training alone can fix. Your vet



may recommend short-term prescription support for travel while you work on desensitisation in parallel.

Anxiety that severe isn't a training failure. It's a medical issue and it deserves medical support.

## BONUS

# Pre-Trip Checklist

*Run through this before every car trip with your anxious dog.*

## Setup

- Enclosed or semi-enclosed seat in place  
walls on 3 sides minimum
- Worn clothing item in or near the seat  
refreshed within 3 days
- Seat secured so it doesn't slide on turns
- Temperature comfortable – not warm

## Before you get in

- No rushing or stress energy from you  
your calm is contagious
- Offered a high-value treat getting in the car
- Skipped strong air fresheners today

## During the drive

- Music low or off for the first few minutes

- Calm voice if you speak to them**  
avoid worried or overly excited tone
- Drive smoothly – no sudden acceleration or braking**

### **After the trip**

- End somewhere positive when possible**  
park, friend's house, good walk
- Praise calmly, not excitedly**  
calm in = calm out

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## You've got this.

Car anxiety is one of the most fixable things in a dog's life. It takes a few weeks of deliberate effort – but the payoff is real. No more guilt every time you need to go somewhere. No more dreading every trip. No more arriving places already frazzled.

*Just a small dog, curled up in his cosy seat, finally safe.*

*You already know your dog better than anyone. You knew something was wrong, you found this guide, you're doing the work. The last piece is just making sure their physical setup matches everything you now know they need.*

# Every fix in this guide.

*Designed into one product, for dogs exactly like yours.*

## The Original Cuddle Cave

CH.2 — CONTAINMENT

### Enclosed Cave

Den feeling — walls on 3 sides

CH.4 — SCENT

### Soft Plush Interior

Holds your scent — dog's and yours

CH.4 — SETUP

### Secure Zip

Can't bolt mid-drive

CH.1 — HEIGHT

### Elevated Position

Horizon view — less panic

CH.4 — SAFETY

### Safety Straps

Dog & seat locked in place

CH.4 — NO SLIDING

### Secured Base

No sliding on turns

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