



# The Alarming Truth About Dogs in Cars

Story by Jennifer M. Brauns / Illustration by Danny Wilde

Autumn is finally upon us and the morning and evening air is beginning to take on a bit of a chill. As the foliage turns from green to gold, and soon to brown, the delightful scent of dried leaves will fill the crisp fall air. Considering that a dog's sense of smell is thousands of times more sensitive than our own, it must bring inexplicable joy for our furry friends to hang their head out of a car window and take it all in while their ears and tongue flap in the breeze.

Here comes the fly in the ointment. While few people set out to get into an auto accident, fender benders and serious accidents do happen. We wanted to find out just how safe dogs in cars really are—or aren't—during an accident. The truth will likely change your mind about where and how your dog rides along in the future.

This article was instigated by a report we saw last year claiming that many popular pet restraints were independently tested and found to be woefully inadequate. Many dog car harnesses have come on the market in the last 5–10 years, each claiming to keep your dog safe. But how do they really perform?

In this investigative report, *Mile High Dog* endeavored to uncover the truth about what happens to dogs in cars during an impact and how well dog car harnesses do or don't hold up in crash tests. We found the results to be quite alarming. Whether you already use a dog restraint system or not, we implore you to read on.

Enter Carl Goldberg. For many years, Carl lived up Sugarloaf Road outside of Boulder at 8,000 feet in the mountains. One morning while driving down the precarious winding road into town, he encountered a car driving on the wrong side of the road and heading straight toward him. He hit the brakes hard hoping to avert a collision. Despite only traveling 15 miles per hour, his beloved 125 pound chocolate Lab was thrown from the back seat through the windshield and landed on the hood. Luckily the dog survived.

Needless to say, Carl didn't want his dog to ever ride in the car again without a safety device. He visited his local pet store, but the products available at the time were not particularly well made and didn't fit very well. This simply wasn't good enough, so Carl consulted Dr. Joe Evans, a veterinary orthopedic surgeon in Nederland. With Doc Joe's input, Carl designed and patented an orthopedically-sound and ergonomically-correct safety harness for dogs. His design was so revolutionary that he received a broad-based patent in 1996 and two subsequent patents.

## The Best Dog Car Harness You've Never Heard Of

Since 1996, Carl has quietly sold more than 4,000,000 harnesses under the name Roadie by Ruff Rider. To his knowledge, nobody has ever lost a dog using his device. In 1999, Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine said, "Without a doubt, it is the best

harness we've ever seen." So why haven't we seen or heard more about this awesome product? That's an interesting story as well.

To better understand the efficacy of car safety devices for dogs, we first looked into how crash tests are performed and by whom. Back when Carl was developing his product, there were no safety standards for dog car harnesses. Unfortunately, that has not yet changed. A human seat belt in the U.S. is required to have a 5,000 pound tensile strength (breaking point) based on an average passenger weight of 150 pounds. By comparison, the European standard is 7,000 pounds for human seat belts. The average weight of a canine passenger is only 65 pounds, much less than most humans.

Carl chose to use materials that met the higher European standard for his harness. The Roadie has a tensile strength between 6,800 and 9,200 pounds, depending on harness size. He uses custom-woven material identical to that used by the military for parachute straps. Truly, he spared no expense to create the best dog car safety device available and it exceeds U.S. human seatbelt safety standards.

Years later, in 2011, the Center for Pet Safety, a non-profit research organization was established. Lindsey Wolko, the organization's founder and CEO, had previously sold the Ruff Rider Roadie. She asked him to join CPS, but he declined as he didn't feel the tests they wanted to use were stringent enough.

In addition to tensile strength standard differences, CPS was only testing dog safety harnesses on a sled device which simulated hard braking. There was no test to determine how the product would perform during an actual impact and it was not tested in a real car. As you can imagine, testing becomes extremely expensive when you literally total a car for each test performed. Carl had already flown to Germany, bought crash cars and paid to have his harness tested using the higher European standards at a renowned crash test facility using real cars and a crash test dummy dog.

Alternately, CPS was using baby car seat standards (not seatbelt standards) for their dog harness testing. Carl felt that because they were not crash testing in real cars, in his opinion, they were testing to a lower standard. He did want to be sure that his harness had been tested using the exact same standards, equipment and methods CPS had used, for comparison. He independently contracted with the same MGA facility in Michigan to test his Roadie harness.

CPS evaluated dozens of harnesses in their first round of tests. Only three, including the Ruff Rider Roadie, received a full pass. CPS subsequently revised their standards and retested many of the products, as well as some which were new to the market. In this second round, only the newer Sleepypod Clickit Utility received

*Continued on page 14*



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Continued from page 13



The Ruff Rider Roadie Travel Harness

a full pass. The new standards didn't allow for any movement of the dog on the seat in a hard brake or impact. At 30 miles per hour, a 60 pound dog, on a hard brake, will move 10 inches forward and hit whatever is in its path with approximately 1,200 pounds of force.

Using the revised testing standards, the Roadie passed on tensile strength, but not on dog body movement. Carl's harness incorporates static line technology like that used in fall arrest devices for emergency personnel and military parachutes. This allows the Roadie to absorb 20 percent of the force on impact.

In fact, this forward movement is necessary to dampen the overload forces which greatly reduce the impact and possible injury to the dog. This is why 4,000,000 Roadie users in 30 years have not yielded a single known injury or fatality. No other harness features this impact reducing technology. It also uses a special figure-eight configuration to channel overload forces to a dog's chest, one of the strongest parts of the canine anatomy. Most importantly, the device was designed with input from a veterinarian to not injure dogs. It is made of much stronger materials than other harnesses and is intended to be worn throughout the day, not just in the car. "I will put my harness up against any test," Carl told us. Unfortunately, it didn't meet the revised CPS testing standards as it allows dogs to move around a bit for maximum comfort. Carl felt strongly that if a harness was too restrictive, it would be a battle to get owners to use.

If you aren't yet using a car safety harness, or if you are using one and are not sure if it is safe, we hope you'll consider the Ruff Rider Roadie. As we learned, just because a harness says it was tested or even crash tested, that doesn't mean the product necessarily passed the test. It also doesn't imply that the harness was assembled and the components tested together. For more information on buying a truly safe dog travel harness, please visit [www.ruffrider.com](http://www.ruffrider.com) or call 720-276-0077. We wish you and your pets safe travels!



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