

Q: Our kids are grown and on their own, and we're empty nesters. Now we take at least four road trips a year. My spouse always insists that we leave our dog in a kennel while we're gone. I usually agree, but Bowser has been a member of the family for nearly 20 years, and I believe he deserves to go with us on our next trip. It will be just a two day drive to a beautiful beach area where dogs are allowed. We'll be there a week, and I know Bowser would have a great time. How do I convince my spouse?

A: Bowser at 20 is elderly, but if you want to take him, first have a check up by a vet. If the dog is healthy, but must take regular prescription medications, be sure to pack an adequate supply for the trip. If your dog is very nervous and easily frightened, ask the vet for medication to give for such emergencies.



Maybe if Bowser gets a clean bill of health from the vet, your spouse may be more willing to take him along. Before you go, a few precautions. If the dog isn't used to long, overnight road trips, take time to acclimate him. Take several five- or six-hour practice runs. Let him out of the car every 60 to 90 minutes for a run and potty break, and give pats, words of encouragement and a snack reward.

If your car has enough room, take a comfy pet cage. Equip it with a cushion, water bowl, snacks and favorite toy. Keep Bowser in the cage when you're on major highways and jammed in noisy city traffic. Don't allow him to lean out an open window while the car is moving.

Once on the road, do exercise and potty breaks for the dog at least once every two hours, preferably when you'll need to stop for your own potty breaks, to fill the gas tank and for a meal. If weather permits, look for a gas stop with picnic tables. Enjoy a reassuring and relaxing open-air meal with your spouse and canine companion.

Before you leave home, check for motels en route and at your seashore destination that allow dogs in the rooms or keep in a kennel on motel property. Keep in mind that intelligent preparation for your dog's needs can make your road trip a pleasant one. Then, you'll be rewarded when you see old Bowser splashing like a happy puppy in the surf.