

Sit Happens

Tips and Techniques with Trudi Thorpe



Photo by Animax

Hi, Trudi,

I'm hoping you can please resolve an argument I'm having with my friend, Sue. We seem to be having trouble agreeing what's right and what's wrong as far as the summer heat and its effects on our dogs is concerned. During the hotter months, I've heard that you can leave your dog in a car for short periods of time, but my friend says that's absolutely wrong and that dogs can die within 10 minutes because of the rate that the temperature increases inside the car!! Sounds silly to me as I often leave Tilly, my maltese terrier x, in the car when I go into the post office or bank and she's fine.

Sue, on the other hand, has a staffy (called Boss) who relentlessly chases a ball and won't stop even on the hottest of days. Sue seems to think that he will stop when he has had enough or if he is too hot, although it doesn't always seem this way to me.

Please help!

Trisha

Hi, Trisha,

Just like kids, pets should never be left in a parked car even for short periods of time. The temperature inside a car can quickly skyrocket after just a few minutes, in fact 75% of the temperature increase occurs within the first 5 minutes of closing the car doors and leaving it, putting your dog in high risk of acute discomfort and potential heatstroke (which can certainly be fatal). Parking in a shady area or leaving the windows open a bit does little to decrease the temperature. The other thing to be aware of is that the day doesn't even need to be hot for the temperature inside the car to rise to dangerous levels. Length of time can also be thwarted by various unforeseen reasons such as being distracted by something unusual, or being delayed beyond what was expected...

Dogs are a lot less efficient at cooling themselves than we humans are and are therefore more susceptible to overheating. I therefore strongly suggest that you NEVER leave your dog in the car and that you leave Tilly at home if you have errands to do or if you're on the way home from the park, PLEASE think seriously about dropping her home first before going out again.

Happy dog tip

Dogs who get a daily workout are usually more mellow than ones that don't. Keeping your dog's mind active through games and short bursts of training can be the equivalent to 20 minutes of running at the dog park. Take five to ten minutes out to practice basic commands through positive reinforcement training armed with treats and/or clicker.

Seek out 'boredom buster' toys that you can fill with a quarter of your dog's daily food allowance so he has to really work for it. As the saying goes, there's no such thing as a free lunch.



As for Boss, running a dog in the heat of the day at the park can be just as dangerous, especially those dogs that LOVE a ball. Dogs that love a ball usually have no regard for the temperature and the drive to chase the ball commonly overrides the need to stop, rest and cool down. Heatstroke can easily occur in dogs whose owners believe that the dog will automatically stop when he's had enough. Owners need to take responsibility for keeping their dogs cool and out of harm's way. The responsibility to determine when is a good time to stop and cool down should never be left up to the dog as often they simply won't stop. Signs of distress are panting with a wide-open mouth, periodically laying down away from the owner so that the dog has control of the ball, wobbling or shaking. Signs of heatstroke are intense, rapid panting, wide eyes, salivating, staggering and weakness and ultimately collapse.

In both instances heatstroke is very much a possibility and all care should be taken in ensuring that we don't subject our dogs to these unnecessary situations.

Hope that's resolved your argument!

Trudi Thorpe runs a dog behaviour and training company, dogLOGIC, based in Sydney. As Trudi says, "DOGS, DOGS, DOGS... A childhood obsession that I never grew out of." She devises and implements individual behavioural strategies and obedience techniques based on 20 years of studying dog problems and problem dogs.

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Ask Trudi a question regarding behaviour by emailing behaviour@urbananimal.net

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