

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On The Positive Side

Be careful not to leave a pet in the car

By Dr. Judy Long / For the Sun-News

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Spring has returned to the Mesilla Valley. Mexican poppies and Spanish Broom are turning gardens into gold. Mulberry trees shower us with allergens. The Bad Winds cover our yards with somebody else's topsoil. Birds are making a racket, and the sun is hot. We feel like going places.

Yes, our faithful companions want to go with us in the car. Of course they do, they want to accompany us anywhere and everywhere. They beg. For the pleasure of their company, we open that car door.

Flying down the highway, with the windows open, a dog is in heaven. If he has ears that will flap in the breeze, all the better. Comfortable in the familiar back seat, he settles down for a nap when we park the car. He's unaware of danger - and maybe, so are we.

Think of your car as an oven. It heats up like one. When the temperature on the sidewalk reaches eighty, the temperature inside the car can reach 100 degrees or more - if it's parked in the shade. In direct sun, double that. Figure in time of day, remembering that heat builds up over the course of the day. We can't even predict the possible maximum temperature that car can reach.

It takes 11 minutes for my oven to reach 350 degrees. At this temperature I can cook almost anything. Cook, bake, roast - take your pick.

Extreme temperatures that any car can reach in minutes can cause heat stroke, seizures, permanent brain damage, even death, in the beloved pet that we have left in a closed car. Like a child, a pet can tolerate body temperatures over 105 degrees for a very short time without suffering damage. Dogs or cats that are older, or overweight, or have a short muzzle are even more susceptible.

Signs of overheating include heavy panting, a deep red or purple tongue, rapid pulse, glazed eyes, staggering or unsteady gait or vomiting. Any of these signs means your animal should get veterinary care as soon as possible. It may mean the difference between life and death.

So, as the weather gets warmer, resist the temptation to leave your pet in the car. Don't fall for the begging look. Leave your pet at home.

Judy Long is a retired professor and member of the board of directors of the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico.