

# How to Keep Your Car from Looking (and Smelling) Like a Kennel

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Two skunked St. Bernards in a Honda civic. A white **German Shepherd** in a brand new Escalade with dark interior. A dog walker's van that spends every day packed with dogs fresh from the (muddy) Colorado trails. In a decade of running *Smudge Car & Dog Wash* in Colorado Springs, Colo., Robert Wulfe has seen—and cleaned—it all.

Like Wulfe, any pet parent can attest that life with a dog can easily turn your car into a host for unpleasant odors, mud and furballs. But with a bit of preparation, maintenance and know-how, you can keep your car from looking and smelling like a kennel no matter how often your dirty dog rides in it with these road-tested, expert-approved tips.

## Start From the Ground Up

Adding a set of heavy-duty rubber mats to your vehicle's floor can help contain anything your dog brings into the car (or anything that comes out of your dog while he's in the car) and protect the carpet beneath them, Wulfe says. He recommends purchasing mats that have been laser-cut to fit your car's make and model, though any durable, non-slip rubber mat that can be easily hosed off will add a layer of protection to your car.

## Contain the Canine Chaos

If you know you're heading somewhere your pup will get especially muddy, sandy or wet, bring along his crate and line it with an easy-to-clean mat or blanket, says Amy Schumann, marketing and communications manager at *West Paw Designs*, a Bozeman, Montana-based company that makes eco-friendly dog toys and beds.

Keeping your pooch in the back seat or rear section of the car can also contain the mess, says Paul Banker of *Outward Hound*, a Colorado-based manufacturer of dog toys and gear. If your pup often makes a move for the front seat, there are a range of metal barriers designed to keep your dog from escaping the backseat, he says.

## Take Cover

Covering your car's seats is critical, says Celine Witherell, communications manager of Dr. Beasley's, a line of earth-friendly car care products (named for the founder's Malamute, Beasley). Store-bought dog car seat covers range in quality and price, or if you don't want to invest much, a thick bed sheet will do the trick, she says. The key is to spray the cover and your upholstery with a protective coating you can find at auto shops or online to further prevent damage to your car.

Car upholstery protectant is similar to what you would spray on rain gear to help boost weatherproofing, she says, and makes upholstery easier to clean by putting an additional barrier between the contaminant and the surface. Or you can get your pup their very own *dog car seat*.

"Say you're headed to the lake with your dog," she says. "With a protectant, you can more easily wipe off the mud and water he leaves on the seats. Plus, it prevents the fabric from absorbing the odor."

Don't try to scrub dog stains and mud out of your upholstery with soap and water, as you'll want to avoid adding more moisture to the stain if possible, Witherell says. Unless you have a professional-grade vacuum to suck all the water out, it can create stinky mold.

## Tackle the Hair

Surprisingly, the hair left by fluffier breeds like shepherds and huskies can be easier to remove than the stuff left behind by smooth-coated dogs, Wulfe says. It's the shorter hair that weaves itself into carpet and upholstery.

"You can vacuum over it forever and it won't budge," he says. "But if you put on a suede gardening glove, wet it, and rub over the area in circles, it lifts the hair out. Then you can vacuum it up."

Carpet stones (similar to a pumice stone) are also great for the same task and cost about ten dollars, he says. And don't forget the old standby. "Lint brushes are a dog owner's' best friend," Shumann says. "Invest in a lot."

## Be Prepared

Assembling a kit to keep in your car for wiping down your pooch before he hops in while you're out and about can help save time later. Keep a few old towels in the car and practice a "pre-boarding" wipe down to get most of the mud and dirt off your dog before he hops in, Schumann says, adding that this can save you from more extensive cleaning down the road.

Wulfe suggests also keeping a bottle of water in the car for rinsing especially messy paws. Keep the towels and water bottle together with dog poop bags, water bowls, a dog leash and other items that are always good to have on the road.

The final tip for keeping your dog mobile, er, car from devolving into a kennel on wheels? Use enzyme-based air fresheners, Witherell says. "The enzymes capture the smelly molecules and remove them. Don't use a product that adds scent, use one that takes it out."

By: *Shara Rutberg*

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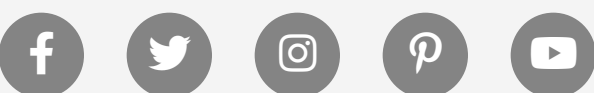
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