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# Best Dog Car Seats, Carriers, and Restraints of 2024

In our quest to find the best dog car seats, we consulted with the experts at the Center for Pet Safety to learn about their testing to determine the safest choices.

BY [KATHERINE KEELER](#) PUBLISHED: APR 8, 2024

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✓ TESTED BY [GANNON BURGETT](#) Associate Testing Editor, Hearst Autos



CAR AND DRIVER

If you have a pet, you understand they're more than just a furry roommate—they're family. As pet owners, we're responsible for their food, water, and safety at home, but how do we best care for them in our vehicles?

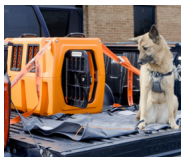
Despite the pet industry's [staggering financial worth](#), when it comes to pet products there's a jarring lack of oversight for safety and testing standards. Every pet product claims to be safe, but tiptoeing through the marketing jargon for dog seats is like carefully stepping through a poop-laden yard. At midnight.

In our quest to find the best dog car seats and restraints, we turned to the [Center for Pet Safety](#) (CPS) for insight. This group is widely regarded as the only nonprofit consumer advocacy organization dedicated to pet safety. We spoke with founder and CEO Lindsey Wolko about CPS's rigorous testing and certification programs that separate pet safety facts from marketing fiction.

Wanna go for a ride? Here are the best dog seats you can buy.

*Looking for more pet and dog car stories? See our tests of the [Best Dog Car Seat Covers](#) and [Best Car Vacuums!](#)*

## Our Top Picks

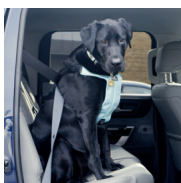


### BEST PET CAR CRATE

#### Gunner G1 Kennel

[Read more](#)

\$550 AT GUNNER.COM



### BEST PET HARNESS

#### Sleepypod Clickit Sport

[Read more](#)

\$109 AT AMAZON



### BEST FOR AIRLINE TRAVEL

#### Diggs Travel Pet Carrier

[Read more](#)

\$195 AT AMAZON

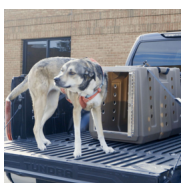


### BEST FOR CATS AND SMALL DOGS

#### Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed

[Read more](#)

\$208 AT AMAZON



### BEST BUDGET CRATE

#### Cabela's GunDog Intermediate Kennel

[Read more](#)

\$350 AT CABELAS.COM

## Things to Consider

We love our pets—and we're sure you love yours too. But it's important to know that, like your child (it is your fur baby, after all!), your pet should always be secured—and, preferably, contained—when your vehicle is in motion. That is to say, those simple, open [dog car seats](#) (like home dog beds) are not enough; the same goes for dog car booster seats. The CPS does not recommend them, and we wouldn't use them for our pups, so we declined to include them in this test or this article.

If you want to truly ensure your pet's safety while in the car, here's what you need to know about car dog seats, carriers, and harnesses.

### Safety and Independent Testing

While consumables like pet food, treats, and pharmaceuticals are subject to premarket standards, dog car

seats are not. This lack of regulation means that any restraint can claim to be safe for your pet.

To ensure your pet's safety, the [Gear Team](#) recommends choosing a dog car seat, restraint, or carrier certified by the leading independent pet product testing group, the **Center for Pet Safety (CPS)**. Every dog car seat mentioned in this article have met the CPS's strict criteria. The guidance in this article is directly from CPS, and we thank them for their mission and assistance in creating this informative piece.

## Type

Dog car carriers, commonly referred to as a "dog car seat" no matter what type of device is used, generally fall into three categories: **crate**, **carrier**, and **harness**. A dog [crate](#) is generally used for larger dogs and placed in your SUV hatch or truck bed, then secured with tie-down straps to anchor points. A dog [carrier](#) is for smaller dogs and cats (generally under 18 pounds), portable, and secured to the rear seat using seatbelts and headrests. The last is the [harness](#), which rests on the upper body and is secured by the seat belt—a dog's seat belt, if you will.

Again, if you're shopping for a cheap, simple dog seat or dog car booster seat, you'll need to look elsewhere. This article is about dog safety seats, and ensuring your pal's safety while it's riding in your vehicle.

## Fit

**Harness:** The industry standard for harnesses is the "two-finger fit," meaning that a harness is a good fit if you can comfortably fit two fingers between it and the pet's body. CPS implements this fit standard in its testing.

**Carrier:** When choosing a dog seat, pay close attention to the weight rating and the measurement of your dog's body. A pet can feasibly fit into the weight rating but may be too leggy to fit comfortably inside. If you are unsure, weighing and measuring your pet is recommended. Carriers are usually suitable for both cats and dogs.

**Crate:** A snug fit is critical for crates. This [video](#) from Gunner Kennels does an excellent job of demonstrating the importance of a snug fit for your dog. Too much room leaves your dog vulnerable to additional g-forces within the restraint system, so ensure you get the correct measurements and the right-size crate for your animal.

## Travel

While these restraints are tested for vehicle safety, they are also ideal for other types of **travel**. If you and your small pet fly regularly, consider a duffle-style carrier that fits onto luggage and underneath plane seats.

## Price

You may be a little shell-shocked by the **prices**, but your best friend is an investment. Companies that offer safety-certified products have spent considerable time and money to prove their product will protect you and your pet. Also, it's important to remember that if your pet is injured in an accident, the vet bill will likely far exceed the price of the car seat.

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## How Dog Car Seats & Restraints Were Evaluated

When purchasing a dog seat for your car, safety should be every pet owner's primary concern. Cost and convenience can be factors, but they should never be the deciding ones. Given that crash testing with live pets is not feasible, we relied on the expertise and data from a leading pet-product advocacy group. However, subjective analysis is also crucial.

We asked the *Car and Driver* staff to bring their pets in for a photo shoot on testing day. Our work mainly consisted of installing the seats into our long-term Toyota Tundra to understand the ease of use and features that each seat offered. In this test, our role as the Gear Team was to evaluate the following aspects:

- **Installation**
- **Features**
- **CPS safety testing guidance**

*Note: All products featured were purchased using a personal account. Companies were not made aware of this test.*

## How the Experts Test Pet Car Carriers

GANNON BURGETT | CAR AND DRIVER

The [Center for Pet Safety](#) grades on a point system for specific elements and uses high-level measurement tools like digital calipers and high-speed cameras to assess their work. The testing elements below are not the entirety of their scientific approach to testing, but they are intended to give you a good idea of what they are looking at to ensure safety. All products are tested at 30 mph.

### **HARNESSES**

- **Tested on second-row benches**

- Excursion distances (how far the pet launches forward)
- Strap movement (how much does the harness loosen during impact)
- The legs of a pet cannot come loose during impact, the harness cannot break, and any product with an extension tether is immediately disqualified

## CARRIERS

- Tested on second-row benches
- Excursion distances (how far the carrier launches forward)
- Carrier lift (measuring the largest angle between the bottom of the carrier and the bench seat)
- Stitching and zippers must remain intact
- Strapping at anchor points cannot tear or rip
- If any part of the carrier fails, allowing the pet to escape, the carrier automatically fails

## CRATES + STRAPS

- Tested on carpeted sled machine (to simulate rear SUV hatch and truck bed)
- The doors and windows must remain closed and locked
- The crate and straps cannot fracture or break in any way
- All crates must be anchored down with straps that the company provides

## The Best Pet Car Seats, Harnesses, and Restraints



BEST PET CAR CRATE

### Gunner G1 Kennel

[\\$550 AT GUNNER.COM](#)

[\\$550 AT AMAZON](#)

CREDIT: GANNON BURGETT

<b>PROS</b>	<b>CONS</b>
Several sizes available	Tie-down straps sold separately (+\$100)
Small size is certified for second-row installation	Considerably heavy
Lifetime warranty	Pricey
Made in USA	

It's rare that we open a box and are immediately impressed, but that's what happened with the **Gunner G1**. [Gunner](#) car kennels are designed and marketed with hunters in mind, yet we see no reason this crate wouldn't be an excellent fit for anyone with a dog. We'd be hard-pressed to find a city-, suburban-, or country-living pet owner who wouldn't be captivated by this crate. It's that good.

The double-wall, rotomolded design results in sturdy walls. The robust door features three locking points—one key and two slider locks. And it comes in small, medium, intermediate, and large sizes. The small G1 is certified for the back seat and rear installation, while the other sizes must be in the truck bed or cargo hold only. Basically, the Gunner G1 car kennel is a tank and is clearly built to last. But quality comes at a cost, and its materials and construction also mean it's relatively heavy and quite cumbersome.

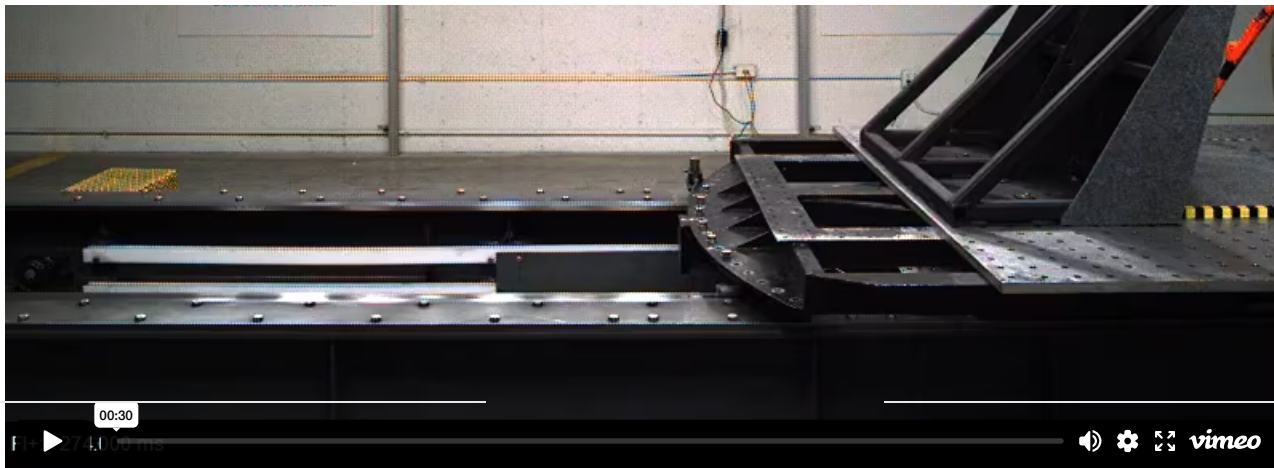
### Safety Testing

Gunner has done its work in research, development, and safety. In the video below, you'll see some sliding about, but the carrier's shape remains intact, the straps stay attached, and the door stays secure. Gunner has also tested with other third-party facilities, including running this enlightening [drop-crushing test](#) to simulate crumple zones in a car accident.

Notably, the G1 needs to be strapped down, of course, and Gunner's accessory straps will set you back another \$100. Now, while it would appear normal ratcheting cargo straps might work just fine to secure the crate, CPS does not certify non-OEM equipment. So, use your own straps at your own risk. (Moreover, CPS notes that the Large G1 did not pass its safety certification process.)

Still, there is plenty of anecdotal evidence by real users on the company's [testimonials page](#). Real dogs in Gunner kennels are coming out unscathed after some pretty gnarly pickup-truck accidents. If that doesn't convince you that Gunner kennels are the best car pet crates you can buy, we don't know what will.





**BEST PET HARNESS**

## Sleepypod Clickit Sport

**\$109 AT AMAZON**

**\$138 AT SEARS**

CREDIT: GANNON BURGETT

**PROS**

- Plenty of color options
- Doubles as a walking harness

**CONS**

- Max pet weight is 75 lb
- The tightening/loosening mechanism takes some getting used to

If you're looking for a walking harness and a safety-certified car restraint, the **Sleepypod Clickit Sport** is the perfect choice. The front portion of the harness is lined with a shock-absorbing padded vest. The back portion is typical of most walking harnesses, except for the addition of two automotive-grade seatbelt loops connecting the harness's top to the bottom. Using the vehicle's seatbelts, you run the latch plate through the two harness loops and into the buckle, and now you have a properly secured pet.

We were initially apprehensive, thinking a restraint on a dog's back might be agitating. Yet, when we secured Bodie to the seatbelt, he seemed perfectly content, and we could see it wasn't pulling with much pressure. The seatbelt is not meant to lock, so your pet should be able to sit up, lie down, and shift position comfortably. It turns out that

what we thought would be a problem wasn't much of one, at least for Bodie.

While we (and Bodie) were pleasantly surprised by the Clickit Sport, we must admit the harness's double-looped strap system required serious brain power. Instead of pulling out your hair like us, we suggest you watch this [instructional video](#) on how to do it.

## Safety Testing

For the harness testing, CPS looks at "excursion measurements," meaning they are concerned with how far the pet will travel after impact. Paying attention to the red and yellow flags shows that the chest generally stays within the first flag. This is partly because of the seatbelt locking up but also, in part, because of the tight double-loop strapping mentioned above. CPS marks the initial buckle placement during testing and measures the loosening distance after impact. After realizing this was a testing parameter, it makes sense why the harness uses such a complex adjustment design.

Regarding harnesses, we were surprised that the product didn't come with an extension. Like many people, we imagine dog restraints in cars with a harness attached to the seatbelt buckle or headrest. **However, it turns out this setup is categorically unsafe for your pet.** "Extension tethers are extraordinarily dangerous," Wolko says. "If a brand includes an extension tether or component, they are automatically disqualified from participating in [CPS testing]." Wolko emphasized this in our interview. Read more in our FAQs.







BEST FOR AIRLINE TRAVEL

## Diggs Travel Pet Carrier

[\\$195 AT AMAZON](#)
[\\$195 AT DIGGS](#)
[\\$195 AT WALMART](#)

CREDIT: MICHAEL SIMARI

### **PROS**

- Luggage compatible
- Easy to clean with removable pad
- Sturdy construction
- Several color options

### **CONS**

- May not fit under some airline seats

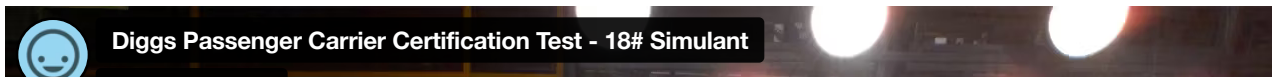
The **Diggs Travel Pet Carrier** was designed with both automotive and airplane travelers in mind. The carrier stacks on top of your roller luggage, secured by a firm strap on the carrier that threads through the handle. It has several storage pockets to access your passport, phone, leash, etc., quickly.

Staff photographer [Michael Simari](#) took the Diggs home to test with his cats. "My cats immediately checked it out and even went in on their own, which *never* happens," Simari says. "They avoid carriers at all costs." After a few days of acclimation, his cats freely entered the carrier, and he could buckle them up in the car. While we know this is anecdotal and every pet will be different, if a couple of carrier-apprehensive cats were comfortable after a single weekend, we reckon Diggs is on to something.

For installation, there are three anchoring points to consider. First, you wrap the waist belt around the bottom of the carrier and loop it through two swivel clamps. Next, connect the chest belt over a clip loop at the carrier's top. Our main beef about the Diggs is that it didn't come with instructions, so we had to go digging online for this [TikTok how-to](#). This was not a huge barrier for us, but it could be a big deal to someone who isn't digitally proficient.

### Safety Testing

For testing carriers, CPS is concerned with how far the carrier launches forward, the lift angle, and whether or not any features like zippers and stitching failed. In the footage, you can see the red and yellow flags that show the farthest a carrier can travel and still pass, and the Diggs Travel Pet Carrier stayed well behind the limit.





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**BEST FOR CATS AND SMALL DOGS**

## Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed

**\$208 AT AMAZON**

**\$220 AT WALMART**

CREDIT: GANNON BURGETT



### **PROS**

- Suitable for both cats and small dogs
- Plenty of color options
- Removable lining for easy cleaning

### **CONS**

- Round shape awkward to carry with shoulder strap
- Limited to 18 lb and under

If you appreciate functionality and a unique aesthetic, the **Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed** might suit you. Its round shape sets it apart from other carriers on the market, and in our professional opinion, pets somehow seem even more precious in a round carrier than a square one.

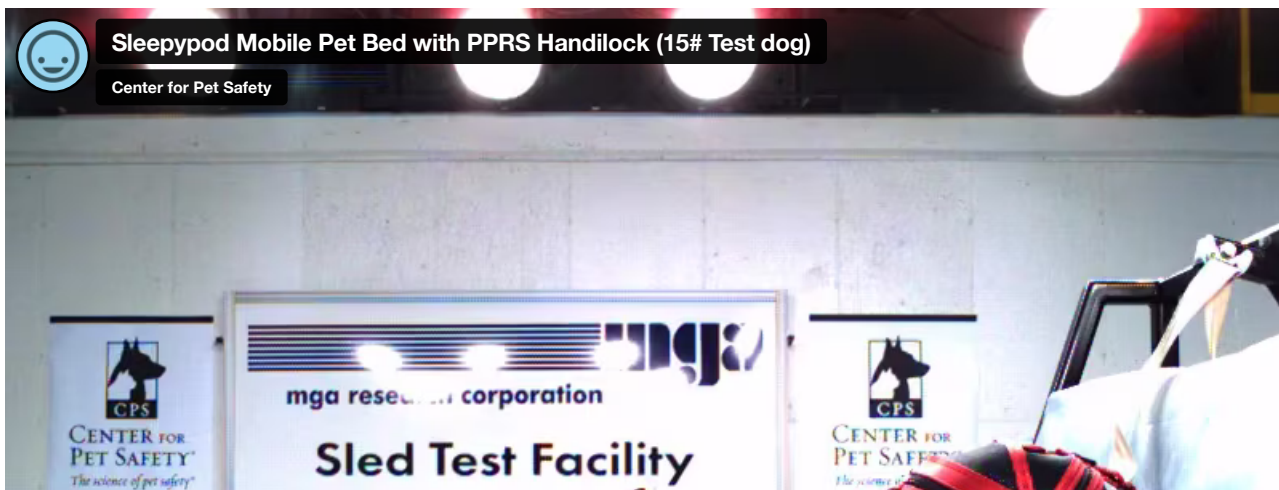
We especially liked that the Sleepypod doubles as a bed, seamlessly integrating the carrier into your pet's daily life. Since getting a cat into the car can be stressful, we appreciate that the Sleepypod considers the entirety of a pet's relationship with the carrier. Adapting the bed into a carrier is easy—slip the mesh dome over the bed, zip it up, and your pet is now secure in a safe space.

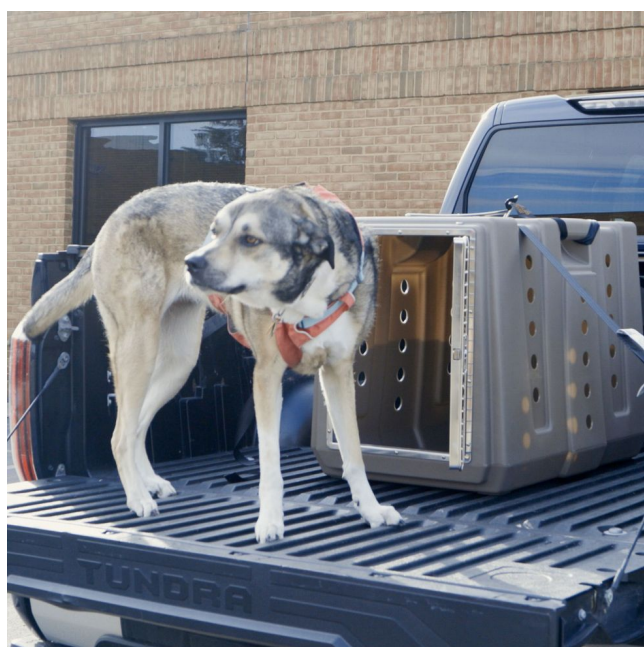
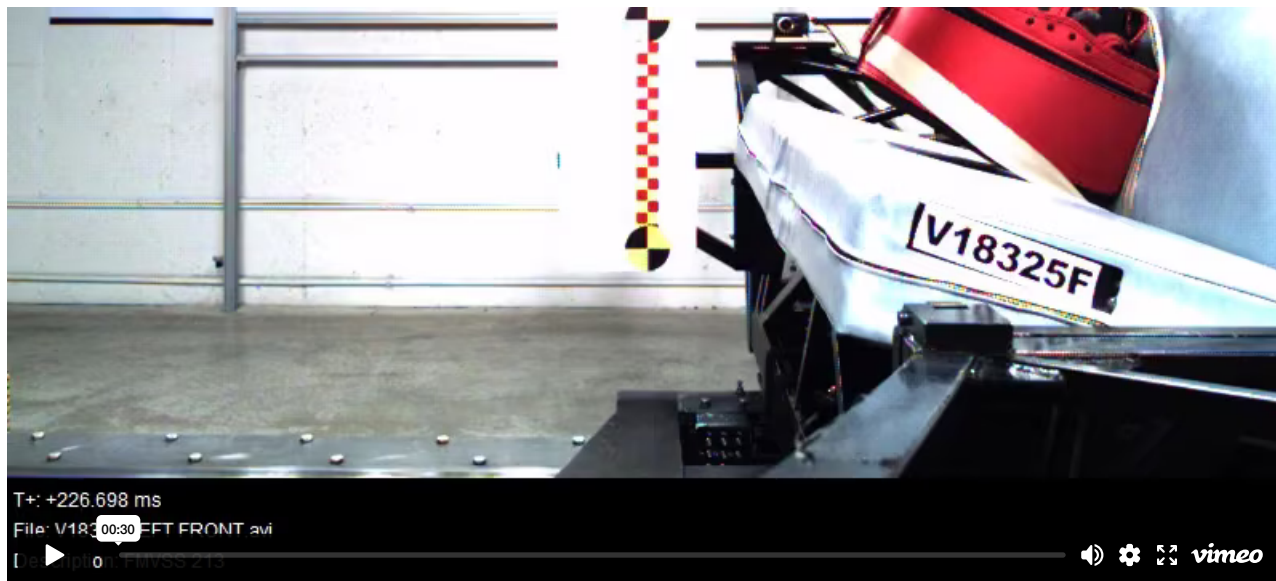
Installation is straightforward. The lap portion of the seatbelt wraps around the bottom of the round bed, and the shoulder portion is routed through the security strap at the top of the dome. The only difficulty we had with the carrier was fitting the security straps back through the plastic clips. We figured it was a tight squeeze to meet safety standards, but it was definitely a struggle.

## Safety Testing

During impact testing, forward motion is relatively contained by the safety belt attached to the lap and shoulder strap. The rebound lift is minimal, and the hefty zippers and straps remain intact even with the pet noticeably rebounding inside.

Sleepypod has tested all its products with CPS. While we are specifically featuring the Sleepypod Mobile Pet Bed, it's important to note that the [Sleepypod Atom](#) (five stars), [Sleepypod Mini](#) (five stars), [Sleepypod Air](#) (four stars), and both of their harnesses are also CPS certified.





**BEST BUDGET CRATE**

## Cabela's GunDog Intermediate Kennel

[\\$350 AT CABELAS.COM](#)

[\\$350 AT BASS PRO SHOPS](#)

CREDIT: GANNON BURGETT

**PROS**

- Safety straps included
- Affordable

**CONS**

- One color
- Locking pin is critical to safety; don't lose it

GunDog is Cabela's line of hunting-dog accessories, and the **Intermediate Kennel** might be your best bet for an affordable crate. This crate is like other ones you're probably familiar with—a single-wall molded plastic crate with a stainless-steel door. The handles are part of the molding, making them sturdy and easy to move. Plus, it's lightweight, so our testing team found it easy to shift around.

While the GunDog doesn't have many standout features, its simplicity is its strength. In a world of bells and whistles, Cabela's has kept it straightforward. It comes in one color, includes straps, uses an additional manual slide lock for security, and is molded as a single-body construction. It's nothing flashy, but the price reflects that. It's

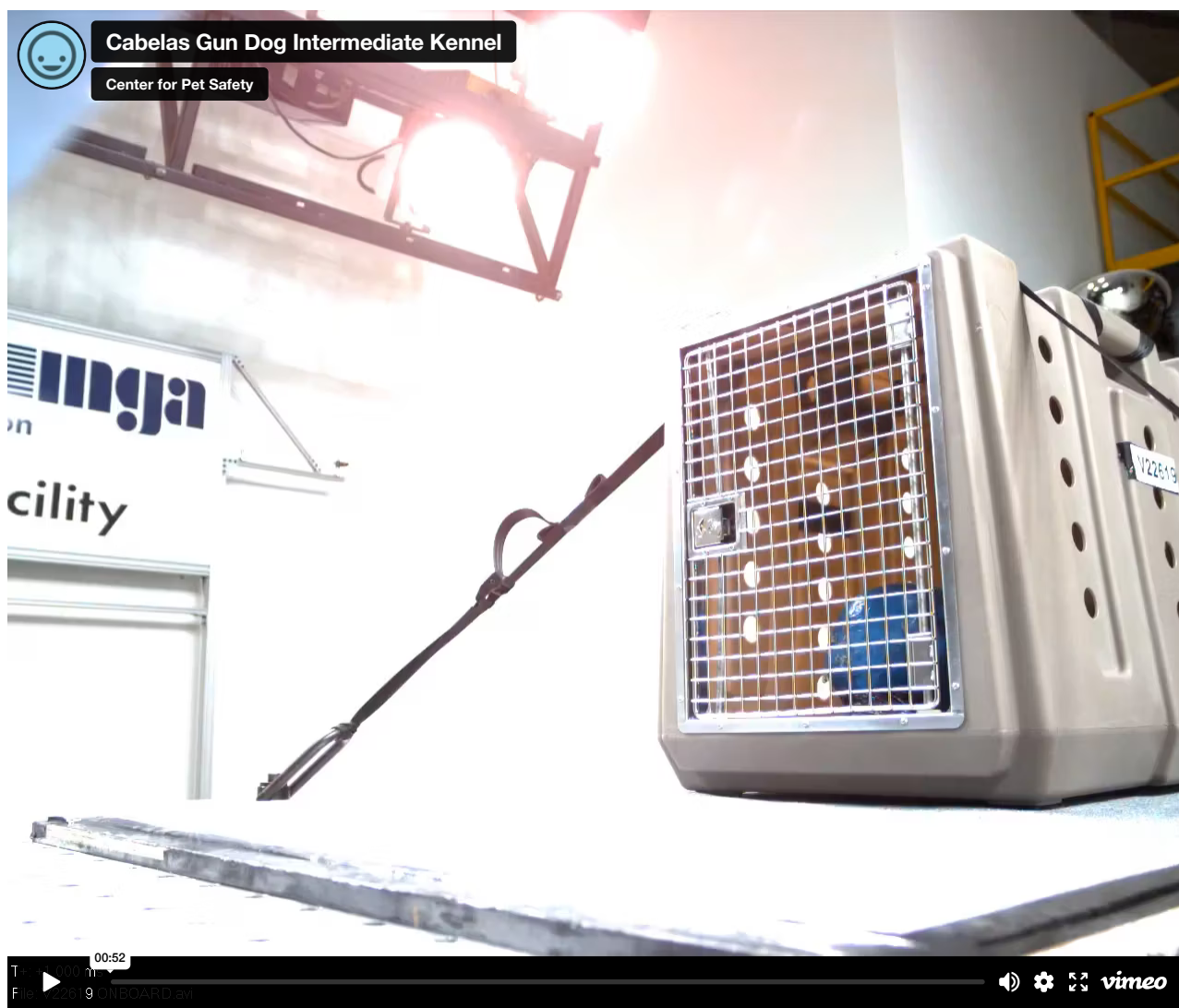
simple yet effective, making it a great budget option for a safety-tested crate.

The main complaint we have about the Gun Dog is the strap-down pattern. The crate must be strapped correctly to maintain the safety certification. But boy, did we find it challenging to get right. We recommend double- and triple-checking your work, especially if spatial awareness is not your strong suit. Incorrect strapping could unknowingly put your pet at risk during transport.

### Safety Testing

The Center for Pet Safety awarded the Cabela's GunDog crate five stars, meaning it has passed the main parameters: The doors remained locked, sliding is minimal, straps did not break, and the crate isn't fractured or broken.

However, while the crate meets safety standards, it may deform during impact, as seen in the footage. "It did have a fair amount of crush," Wolko says. "But it popped right back into place when we removed those straps."



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## FAQ

MICHAEL SIMARI | CAR AND DRIVER

### What is a dog car seat?

A pet car seat or restraint is specially designed for safely transporting pets in your vehicle. Like any unrestrained car occupant, if your pet is not restrained correctly, it can become a projectile within the cabin during an accident, causing injury or worse. A crate, carrier, or restraint should contain your pet during and after an accident.

The Gear Team recommends purchasing only carriers and car seats tested and approved by the Center for Pet Safety.

### Can my cat use any of these carriers?

Yes, any carrier within the carrier category is suitable for cats, as long as they fit comfortably and are within the weight restriction.

### How can I be sure my pet seat has been adequately tested?

This article features only a handful of dog car seats, and several more are on the market that meet strict safety criteria. If you want to explore more products that CPS has tested, visit their website at

[www.centerforpetsafety.org](http://www.centerforpetsafety.org). You can learn more about other tested and certified products under the "CPS Certified" tab.

## Are dog and pet car seats easy to install?

While these seats have passed rigorous testing, their effectiveness relies on proper attachment to the anchoring points. This ensures that in an accident, the carrier will perform as expected. Always read and practice installation instructions for optimal results.

## Can pet car seats be used in all types of vehicles?

Yes and no. Harnesses are generally compatible with all seatbelt restraint systems. Carriers are compatible with seatbelt restraint systems but should be used in the second row. Crates are compatible with the rear hatch of a larger SUV and truck bed. Always confirm with the seat manufacturer before purchase that your car is compatible.

## Can dog car seats accommodate more than one dog?

Would you put two kids in a [child car seat](#)? Probably not. One carrier/restraint per pet, please.

## Why can't I attach my dog's harness and leash to the anchor points of my car?

If you decide to go the harness route, you should be clear about the difference between distraction and crash-safety devices. A harness attached to any extension tether may effectively prevent driver distraction, but it is categorically unsafe for the pet during an accident. According to CPS, any harness with an extension rope as part of their product is automatically disqualified for crash-safety certification. This video does an excellent job of explaining the risks of a harness-plus-extension combination during an automotive collision.



## Why Trust Us



Hearst Autos combines the talent, resources, and expertise of three of the largest, most influential automotive publications in the world. The Gear Team has tested a wide variety of automotive products, parts, accessories, and gear, such as [dash cams](#), [portable jump starters](#), and [snow brooms and ice scrapers](#). We get our hands on each and every product we test. Most are purchased; some are supplied by manufacturers.

Hearst Autos doesn't need to game algorithms for traffic or promote lousy products. We're more concerned with our legacy, our reputation, and the trust that our readers have in *Car and Driver*, *Autoweek*, and *Road & Track* to deliver honest opinions and expert evaluations.

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ASSOCIATE TESTING EDITOR

Katherine Keeler is Associate Testing Editor at Hearst Autos. By day she evaluates tools for your enjoyment; by night, she Frankensteins her ever-changing fleet of rustbucket oddities back to repair. Her dream is to open a roadside attraction where the public can view, drive, and learn repairs at her emporium of curious cars.

**TESTED BY COLLIN MORGAN**

COMMERCE EDITOR

Collin Morgan is a Commerce Editor at Hearst Autos, where the former Rust Belt mechanic and gadget enthusiast presents the best gear for your automotive endeavors.

**TESTED BY GANNON BURGETT**

ASSOCIATE TESTING EDITOR, HEARST AUTOS

Gannon Burgett loves cameras, cars, and coffee: a perfect combination for his Hearst Autos work. His byline has appeared in *USA Today*, *Gizmodo*, *TechCrunch*, *Digital Trends*, the *Detroit Free Press*, and more.