

Dogs and paddles can mix nicely

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When you want to go canoeing, but don't want to leave your faithful canine companion at home, there's good news ahead. With the right preparation and practice, you can bring your best friend along for the paddle. Here's how.

There are as many ways to deal with dogs in boats as there are dogs. Temperaments vary, canoes differ, and paddling skills of the humans are at different levels.

But the following statement rings true for all pets. Physically and psychologically passive pooches make perfect paddling pets. In other words, get them comfortable and calm and they'll be wonderful in your canoe.

Training

I don't recommend heading out on your overnight or weekend trip without first testing the waters.

First, get your canoe on the lawn and line your pockets with plenty of tasty dog treats. Practise getting your pet in and out of the canoe, and reward them each time with their favourite snacks. Try again after outfitting them with their dog life-jacket, and lift them in and out of the canoe.

Once they are used to it, they'll soon associate the canoe with tasty snacks and be more comfortable, when you head out on your first journey. Make your first outing a short, one-hour paddle before heading back to your vehicle. This will ensure it'll be remembered as something fun.

Gear

There are life jackets built especially for dogs, and for your canoe outings. This is a must. Check with the local outdoor and pet stores to inquire about the best type of life-jacket for your dog. At a cost of around \$40-\$50, you'll have to choose the proper weight size to fit your pet correctly. They also come with a handle on top to make it easier to pull your pet back in the boat.

First time

It is strongly encouraged you run your dog before your paddle. A tired dog will be less anxious to run about in the canoe. If they've expended some energy and have a gourmet treat they can chew in the canoe, they'll stay put, feasting on the snack and scenery.

The floor of a canoe is slippery, especially when wet. Dogs and slippery canoe bottoms do not play well together. Your first item to purchase is some type of rubber matting.

This could vary from bathtub mats complete with suction cups, to outdoor carpeting. Either way, these will give your pet some footing, and make them more comfortable during their trip.

Most pets don't like lying in the water at the bottom of the canoe.

Sure they like to jump in and out of the canoe into the cool lake water, but lying or sitting in river muck, not so much. Consider installing a larger platform that will allow smaller dogs to see over the gunwale. Even a smaller platform will make your larger dog more comfortable.

Location, location, location. Many pets prefer to be in-between the legs of the paddler in the stern but, depending on the size of your dog, this may not be possible. Others want room to lie down in the middle of the canoe. Still others beeline for the bow, standing erect as if they're captaining this craft, taking in the smells of loons, herons and all the scents Mother Nature provides.

As you embark on training your pet for these convertible canoe rides, be sure to keep your sense of humour. If you do, you'll be rewarded with a travelling companion who'll add an entirely new dimension to your paddling adventures.

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