

## **Pets and Boats**

In the past we cruised for months at a time with two cats aboard our thirty-five foot boat and we spent many weekends aboard my parents boats with dogs and cats, so I know something about pets and boats. In my opinion pets and boats are not a good mix but many others will disagree with me.

Allow me to answer the first question we are always asked; yes, pets get seasick. They do not warn you before throwing up. They instinctively know the most inconvenient places on a boat and seek them out to make your life as miserable as they can. It is never a hard surface. It is always on the carpet or in a bunk. Cats are especially devious because they can make themselves throw up just to let you know they would rather be somewhere else.

Some people say they train their dogs to relieve themselves aboard a boat, but I am quite sure that a dog trained not to go in the house is not really into going on a boat. Our dogs refused to relieve themselves on the boat which likely kept them in hours of agony. We know this to be true because the happiest moment of any voyage for the dog is the smell of the breakwater.

Most often dog owners stop every night to take the dog ashore. This is a problem for the dog who must uncomfortably hold it until taken ashore, and it is a problem for the dog owner who must either stay at a marina dock or take the dog ashore in a dinghy from an anchorage. We chuckle every time we see someone row a dog ashore in the rain knowing the dog is having a great time and the rower is cold and wet and will have to clean wet muddy paws and decks back aboard the boat. Even when it is not raining dogs love to frolic in the water so muddy or sandy paws is standard.

Cats will use a litter box that gets around the problem of the shore run but it causes another set of problems. Cat litter is heavy and hauling it from the store to the boat and from the boat to the trash is not fun. We solved the problem of odors by placing the litter box outside on the back deck, until it rains at which time we put the litter box in the head, prop the door open, and we and the cats remain closed up inside a damp boat with the smell of the litter box.

Cats love to play around dewy wet decks at night then jump into the litter box, do their business, then run around the decks some more with litter stuck to their paws. Some will come off on the deck but most of it clings to their paws until they get inside where the rough carpets knock it off.

With our cats aboard we always tried to anchor because when we tied to a dock all the doors and hatches had to be closed to keep the cats from bolting. This is inconvenient on a boat without air conditioning. The worst place to tie up is near seafood restaurants

and fishing docks. Cats can smell those places from a mile away. Our cats did occasionally bolt and that caused a mad scramble to get them back aboard. At one marina we had to delay our departure for twenty-four hours because of a missing cat. It turned out the cat crawled into a settee locker and hid behind a fuel tank contentedly sleeping all day while we searched for it ashore.

Dogs are usually careful about not falling overboard but cats are another story. Cats like to jump up on ledges and precariously walk along narrow places. They are daredevils. This occasionally leads to disaster as our cat found out very early one morning anchored off the Coast Guard Station near the entrance to Cape May. We heard the cat screaming like the devil and jumped out of bed to frantically search around the boat, unsuccessfully for a time, until we peered over the side to see the cat in the water clinging to the PVC spray rail with its front claws. Good thing for the cat that it screamed, had claws, and we found it, because had it let go that cat would have been out to sea quickly in the ebb tide.

Cats are not fond of water, but most dogs are okay with it. One morning at Catalina Island we woke up at anchor and my brother's dog was missing. After frantically searching the waters around the boat with the binoculars we finally saw the dog bounding happily around the hills surrounding the cove. At sunrise it had apparently noticed land and favored it over the confines of the boat. I rowed ashore to get the happy guy. He showed no remorse whatsoever about putting us through the ordeal and happily jumped into the dinghy before I noticed the smell of Catalina Island buffalo dung he had apparently been rolling around in. He was a little surprised when halfway back to the boat I pretended to show him some pretty fish in the water to get him near the side and gave him a push overboard for his second swim of the day.

We cruised for three seasons with two cats on a small boat. They liked the attention we gave them but would have rather been home catching mice and birds. Halfway through the third season our daughter visited us up in Ontario, Canada. They were really her cats and somehow we finessed her into taking the two cats home with her on the airplane, through security and customs. Arriving home she reported that it was the worst flight of her life but we were happy to have our boat back and the ability to tie up at a dock with the doors and hatches open.

We love pets and put up with the shedding and frequent vacuuming required but animals really do not like being on boats as much as humans do. They only tolerate it and have limited number of ways to tell you how uncomfortable they are. That is why we are happily to live aboard without pets.