

Shipping: A Senseless Tragedy

(as printed in AKC Gazette, Sept 98 Miniature Pinscher Breed Column, courtesy of: Faith Gordon)

There has recently been a lot of discussion in dog related Internet Forums about the negligence of some airlines in shipping dogs. The sad story that follows will hit close to home for those planning to ship a dog by air. Perhaps it will raise awareness and draw attention to this important topic.

Ivy, a 9-month-old Miniature Pinscher puppy belonging to a fancier named Ronna, was being shipped home after having been exhibited at some shows outside the area. She was on a short interstate flight and was shipped counter-to-counter as a package, not as cargo. Counter-to-counter service is much more expensive and should guarantee that the puppy will be handled as a priority package. Ivy arrived safely at the airport at approximately 9:08 p.m., firmly ensconced in her crate. Ronna arrived at the airport at approximately 9:20 p.m., having driven there directly from work. But she discovered that Ivy's crate was empty. At first, she was told that the puppy had escaped on its own. However, three witnesses soon related that they had seen the puppy being carried out of the building by an airline employee. The employee came back without the puppy. Then Ronna was told the puppy had been taken outside on the pretense of being allowed to relieve itself and stretch its legs. With no leash on Ivy, the puppy was placed on the grass near the highway and she panicked and ran.

That night, Ronna and her husband searched the area for their puppy well into the wee hours of the morning. Several television stations were notified of what had happened, and three stations and two talk shows reported on it. Ivy was found dead the next day beside the road, almost unrecognizable by what was left of her. There was barely enough left of Ivy to bury. I will report on the legal outcome of this story in a later column after it has been settled.

If you are shipping an animal, there are several things you should be aware of. The current cost of shipping a dog counter-to-counter is approximately \$162. The cost of shipping a dog as cargo depends on the size and weight of the crate and dog being shipped, and is approximately \$50 for a dog the size of a Min Pin. When a dog is shipped as cargo, you can purchase additional insurance coverage above a standard value; such additional coverage is not available when shipping counter-to-counter. It is also important to note that most airlines are self-insured. That is, the people who review all claims for denial or approval are employees of the airline. According to regulations, airline personnel are not supposed to remove an animal from its crate under any circumstances unless the dog's life is endangered. It is the airline's responsibility to take every precaution to ensure that each shipped animal arrives safely at its destination and is not harmed or stolen in transit.

Make sure you have notices posted on your crates that say: "Airline personnel are NOT to open crate or remove dog." It is better to have a wet crate pad than a dead dog. The dog's crate should also be equipped with a water dish. Only use a crate that is approved for air shipping, and make sure the crate latch and hardware are in good condition and securely fastened. For extra security I wrap packing or duct tape around the crate, going around it several times along the seam edge. If my crate comes open after having done this, it is because someone had to work hard to open it.

Another concern is exposure of a dog to extremes of temperature. Although regulations do not permit animals to be shipped when temperature's are above or below certain limits, dogs can still become dangerously overheated or chilled at temperatures considered allowable. Overheating is of particular concern. When the weather is warm, try to only schedule flights in the very early morning or at night. Lastly, speak up, and speak loudly, when you have to ship your dog. If you cannot be at the airport before the plane arrives, call ahead and tell them not to open the crate. Emphasize the need for employees to make sure the dog is kept in a cool, safe, secured area, not left out in the heat or on a luggage trolley where a thief could walk by and pick up the crate.