

ECONOMIST & SUN • STOUFFVILLE TRIBUNE

TRAVEL

Keeping peace in the back seat

*Plan your trip with the kids well and it may seem just like a vacation*BY NANCY DEVINE
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Ah, the sounds of summer. If you listen carefully, you can hear the plaintive cries of young Canadians suffering from long-car-tripitis:

"Are we there yet?"
"I have to go to the bathroom!"
"He's kicking me."
"She put her hand on my side of the car."

As parents struggle bravely to drive to vacation destinations, the young continue their heart-rending cries. Eventually, both adults reconsider the wisdom of the annual trip.

But if last year's trip resembled a documentary on wild animals, take heart. This year can be different. Here are some tips to make the trip easier for everybody.

GETTING PACKED

Clothes: make sure you pack at least one decent outfit for each family member. Put these in a separate bag. This outfit might come in handy for a nice meal out, going to a theatre production or any number of events that might require something slightly more posh than cutoffs and a Spice Girls T-shirt.

Have a large bag ready for dirty clothes. That way, they will be in one spot when you finally spy the coin laundry in the next town.

Don't leave wet bathing suits at the bottom of this bag. Mildew does nothing to improve the ambience of a trip in the confines of a car.

Footwear: pack a pair of water-proof shoes or boots for each family member. Include good shoes, if needed, to go with the aforementioned decent outfit.

First aid kit: it should be ready and accessible at all times. Restock any supplies. If everything looks kind of antique, replace the whole thing. Have a bottle of painkillers, out of the kids' reach but in the car. Headaches happen.

Cooler: stock it with juice and drinking water. If space is limited, just have water and pouches of



STAFF PHOTO/MIKE BARRETT

Michael (left), Daniel and Erica Segreti are ready for a pleasant cross-country car trip.

powdered drink mix ready. This can be mixed a couple of spoonfuls at a time into a sports bottle.

Take care with prepared meats and salads. If the cooler isn't cool enough, this food won't be safe to eat. Crackers, pretzels and fruit are good and safe snack choices. They can also be meal fillers for purchased food items such as fast food burgers or sandwiches.

Think about packing the car before it is actually packed.

Don't pack the cooler in the back of trunk. Do that and you're unpacking at the first rest stop.

If you are using a rooftop carrier, remember they are not always waterproof, especially in heavy rains. You may want to consider placing rooftop items in garbage bags before they go into the roof bag, just in case.

Remember to check that luggage packed in an open cargo area

(such as in a car or van) is secure. Suitcases can fly forward and cause injuries if there is a sudden stop.

KIDS IN THE CAR

Most kids would rather run alongside the car than be confined inside it for more than an hour.

If you are travelling a long distance by car, try to see things from their point of view. Being stuck in the back seat can be hot, long, boring and it offers the perfect chance to bedevil their siblings.

Go over the trip route with the kids before you leave. Show them the map and point out how long it will be. Make copies of the map. Mount it on sturdy cardboard and cover it with plastic wrap.

Give the children a grease pencil and ask them to mark out the route as you travel along it. If there is a guidebook available, ask older

children to read aloud to the group about various areas of interest.

Plan frequent breaks along the way. Try driving for two hours and then take a 45-minute break.

Warning signs the kids are getting sick of being trapped in car fights, tears, bouncing up and down on the seat and, in the case of young children, trying to get out of the car seat.

It isn't necessary to feed them at every break. If rest facilities are available, insist that everyone make use of them (no matter how much they insist they don't have to).

Once everyone is comfortable, play.

Have skipping ropes, balls and gloves or soccer balls ready. Participate in the game; parents need to run off some steam, too.

Try sitting in the back seat of the car. If it's going to be hot, dress the

children in cool, loose clothes and let them kick off their shoes while you're on the road.

Take along some travel-sized pillows and small blankets. Air conditioning can sometimes get too cool for young travellers.

If motion sickness will be a problem, check with your doctor to discover how to make the child as comfortable as possible.

Take along some kids' books on tape from the library. Invest in (or borrow) an inexpensive personal stereo for each child. The headphones will ensure the Barney tape won't interfere with the Spice Girls. Take along a supply of fresh batteries.

Provide colouring books, paper and pencil crayons. Don't risk having wax crayons in the car.

Left forgotten in a hot car, they can create an interesting collage of colour that can almost never be removed from upholstery or carpet.

LAP DESKS ARE HANDY

Buy lap desks. These can be stored in the seat pockets when they are not in use.

To make a lap desk, sew (or hot glue) two pieces of fabric, measuring roughly 12 inches by 18 inches, together, leaving one short end open for stuffing.

Fill loosely (about a quarter or half) with packing foam, peanuts, (rice or corn also works well). Sew or glue the end shut.

Glue a piece of tough cardboard on to one side of the pillow. You can use a small message board from a discount store, or a part of a game board that has long since lost its pieces.

A pillow case, attached to the seat in front of the child using heavy-duty Velcro, provides good place to store toys and books when they aren't being used.

At the start of each day, have the children clean their part of the car. It's easier to be there if it's relatively clean.

Finally, make sure everyone is wearing seat-belts properly at all times and have fun.



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