



GREG BROWN'S pets-aloft experience is limited to flying his granddog Kito to a military veterinarian for international travel papers.
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PIPER, THE FLYING CAT

Dogs commonly travel by airplane, but how often do you meet a flying cat?

Transporting the skittish animals can be tough enough by car, much less by airplane. Yet my Montana friends Alyson and Travis Booher routinely aviate with Piper, their adventure cat.

"Before Piper, two geriatric cats at home limited our travel," explained Alyson. "So when I got a new kitty, I vowed not to be homebound anymore." Alyson used to write a "Dear Tabby" advice column for Missoula's AniMeals food bank and adoption center. One client had trained her kitten to ride everywhere in a harness on her shoulder.



Piper relaxes aloft over the Cascade Mountains.

Intrigued, Alyson wondered whether kittens could be trained to travel. Investigating online, she learned that "pet adventure travel" is trending among young people. Few fly with felines, but given countless other "adventure cat" activities

Alyson thought, "Let's try it!" Travis was concerned about being tagged as "the crazy cat people," so the couple agreed Piper would travel exclusively for function, not attention.

"As with people, flying is not for every pet," says Alyson. "My cat just happens to be really chill. Probably the key is to train kittens when they are young." A show-cat owner advised Alyson that if a kitten isn't bothered by vacuum-cleaner noise, it will be comfortable out and about. Piper passed that test, so Alyson began toting him on errands in a cat backpack. Finally one day, the couple bundled Piper into their Cessna Skylane to visit Alyson's brother in Bozeman. When Piper stretched out relaxed, Alyson freed him from his backpack to cruise the cockpit.

Piper has been an easy cockpit traveler ever since, but as with other pets and little kids, preparation is key. Piper is ID-tagged with a microchip. Cats need a safe haven if scared, so he starts and ends each flight in his carrier and emerges only when at ease. Although Piper won't walk on a leash, a travel harness prevents him from bolting and cues him to coming activities. Along with food and water, the couple carries a lidded container of biodegradable pellet litter—neater than granular pet litter. Piper emphatically rejected cotton balls and foam earplugs, so pending suitable hearing protection he rarely leaves his noise-dampening backpack for more than an hour.

I asked Alyson why she named her cat Piper, when she and Travis fly a Cessna. "To me, 'Piper' sounds less industrial than 'Cessna,'" she said. "However if we get a second cat, you can guess what its name will be."

Along with flying, Piper enjoys hiking and golf excursions, and recently earned celebrity status rafting Idaho's Salmon River. Whether on land, air, or water, he just finds a cozy spot and gets comfy. Surprisingly, though, he draws little attention at the airport.

"Most pilots you meet are doing exciting things," said Alyson, "so comparatively, flying with a cat probably seems like no big deal. But we sure have fun. And whenever we return from a flying trip, all our friends want to know is, "Did Piper go along?" **FT**