



MOVING HOUSE WITH CATS

Moving home can be a very traumatic time for people and cats. Owners have many worries about how their cat will cope and how they can ensure that it does not wander off and get lost in its new environment or, if the old home is within an easy walking distance, that the cat will return there instead of accepting the new house as “home”. Indeed this does happen and, since cats value their territory as much as their owners, they may return to old haunts and try to take up residence with the new people who live there. There are some things that the owner can do to help the cat settle into its new home.

- Cats should be transported in a safe container (e.g. a cat basket or box) and properly secured with an extra strap or rope for safety.
- Cats should travel with their owners, not in the removal van !
- A cat should remain in its basket on arrival until one room is straightened out and its familiar objects installed. It should then be let out and allowed to settle with the door locked. Give a good meal to assist it to feel comfortable and, if possible, a well covered hot water bottle.
- After the removal men / women have gone and the house is quiet, the cat should be allowed to explore, but all outer doors and windows must be kept closed to prevent escape.
- The cat should be shown the garden, the doors etc. on a lead and when thoroughly at home may be allowed out alone. The exact time this will take place depends on :
 - The time the owner has to spend making it feel at home.
 - The disposition of the particular cat. Some cats take up to 3 weeks to settle down, others only a few days.
- It is, of course, taken for granted that during this period of settling in a suitable litter tray will be provided.

It may be wise to board particularly nervous individuals in a friendly cattery before the packing of belongings and stripping of curtains etc. starts at the old house, and not to bring them into the new house until everything is unpacked and positioned. Outdoor cats with a wider experience of change generally cope better, but should nevertheless be kept in the new home for a week or so in order to learn the geography and smells of their new home base. When finally let out to explore their new outdoor patch and carve out a piece for themselves from that of local resident cats, it's best if they're hungry. Starved of food for 12 hours or so, they will not wander too far from the new home and will readily respond to the call or plate-bashing that signifies “dinner is served” ! Accompanying the cat on its first few excursions into the brave new world will also help, but the cat's adaptability and survival instincts usually serve it well and it soon adopts a similar lifestyle and habits to the ones it enjoyed at the old house.

MOVING A SHORT DISTANCE :

If the new home is only a few streets away from the old one, it is highly likely that in its explorations the cat will encounter old known routes. It will simply return “home” along these routes as before and then look confused on arrival to find that all has changed. The bond with the new home is simply not yet well enough established to lure such cats. Some too are inadvertently encouraged by the new occupiers of the old base who provide food, or who are flattered by this strange cat's confident entrance through the cat-flap and willingness to set up home with them. But even when these new occupiers have been warned that the cat might return and they take deterrent action by turfing the cat out, throwing water at it and being generally unwelcome, the bond with the old centre of territory can persist. The cat keeps returning and will only go to the new home if physically taken there by old owners collecting or the new ones delivering. Both parties can get tired of travelling, especially in the remarkable cases where cats have returned to old haunts many miles away.

The first step is to ensure that the new occupiers of the old house do everything to detach the cat from his old home by chasing him away and throwing water at him, and never stopping to say hello or feel sorry for him. Other neighbours, even those previously friendly with the cat, must be asked to behave similarly. The cat should be kept indoors at the new house for about a month, but if it still returns to the old abode after that it should never be taken back to the new home by a direct route. Instead make as wide a detour as possible, heading off initially in the totally opposite direction and driving, if you have that option, a good few miles before circling round and back. As a last resort, consider boarding the cat for a few weeks in a cattery as far away as possible from either home in order to scramble both its memory of the old home and its "homing mechanism". But once at last at the new house, the tricks of short frequent feeds and plenty of love and attention should help build new bonds. Again, the cat should be starved for about 12 hours before being let out and then for the first two weeks allowed out only for one period per day, being called in within half an hour and promptly fed.

The aim is that the new home comes to be perceived as the centre of the new territory and a source of food and shelter (in contrast to the old home, where these things are denied him). It may take weeks, and in some cases months, before the cat can be allowed outside unattended. If all else fails encourage the new owners of your old house, or their neighbours to adopt your cat permanently.

INDOOR CATS :

Moving home can be just as traumatic for the permanently indoor cat as obviously it involves a complete change of personal territory and can leave it feeling totally vulnerable in the new house. Slow, careful introductions, one room at a time, and lots of attention will help most cats over the stress of such upheaval within a few days.

Taking pains pays dividends but most owners would agree that there are limits.

"Edward Lear" was so devoted to his cat "Foss" that when he decided to move house he had his new villa built as an exact replica of the old one, so that the cat was not upset by the move !!

EXTRA CARE TIPS :

- More care should be given to all the above points if builders happen to be working within the house. Cats hate this.
- All cats should wear a cat identity collar (elasticised) with the owner's name and address, until fully settled in their new home. Even then it is a good idea to keep a tag on them anyway.
- Give more petting and more food during this period of settling in and re-adjustment.
- Remember thousands of cats are made strays each year through insufficient thought and care. ***DON'T LET YOUR PET BE ONE OF THESE !***
- ***NEW PRODUCT***
There is a new product on the Veterinary market called "Feliway". It is a spray containing synthetic facial pheromones of cats. Facial pheromones are what cats leave behind when they rub their face on an object or on you – these have a calming function – this is why when cats are taken to new places they are often very nervous as there are no calming smells for them to identify with. "Feliway" can help in a situation where you are moving to a new house, boarding your cat or travelling with cats.

Please ask for an information pamphlet if it has not already been given to you.