



**Association of Pet Boarding and Grooming (Qld) Inc**

3994 Mt Lindesay Hwy, Park Ridge South, QLD, 4125

info@apbg.com.au

www.apbg.com.au

ABN 66 895 661 861

# Boarding Your Cat

*For a variety of reasons, more and more people are discovering the delight of living with cats (as you are aware, no one owns a cat). In urban areas, flat dwellers find that cats offer companionship, without the need for frequent exercise periods outdoors. In rural areas, cats still fulfill their function as rodent catchers for many households. If you are a cat owner, you are undoubtedly very attached to your furry roommate. However, there will be times when you will have to make arrangements for his care when you are travelling on business, vacations, or when guests may stay with you who are allergic to cats. Therefore, it would be well to examine some of the facts about cat care which will help you understand the advantages of boarding your cat.*

## What Options Are Available?

It is important to remember that cats do not usually travel well. They do not usually enjoy it, nor do they adapt well to travel. Many people who try to take their cat along with them on their vacation end up spending most of it searching for their escaped pet. Therefore, when transporting your cat, it should be in a cat carrier for its own comfort and safety.

Leaving your cat with friends is just as unsatisfactory. Cats must go through an adjustment period in a new environment and this means they will not look upon your friends' house as 'home' for quite a while. Therefore, your cat will try to escape from the house at every opportunity. Most cat owners recognise that it is not fair to impose this kind of responsibility on their friends, nor is it a safe arrangement for their pets.

Having a cattery care for your pets in your absence is the best alternative. Obviously, the most satisfactory way of arranging for such care is to entrust your cat to a cattery where the security arrangements are adequate to ensure that your cat will not escape, and where the personnel are trained in observing and handling the problems which might arise in your absence.

## How Do You Arrange To Place Your Cat In A Boarding Cattery?

Get acquainted with the people who will be caring for your cat. Ask questions, take nothing for granted. Find out if toys and bedding are welcome. Find out about the diet the cattery provides. If there is a special diet that you would like your cat to adhere to, most catteries will allow you to provide such food and will see to it that your cat is fed only what you request. Discuss safety features. Boarding cats requires good security to prevent escapes. Discuss frankly any qualms you may have about boarding your cat. The cattery will appreciate your frankness and your interest.

Many times it is easier for cattery personnel to detect problems than it is for the owner of the cat. For example, urinary problems, a warning sign that deserves attention, can more easily be detected in a cattery than at home, because the cat is closely supervised. However, it is not part of the cattery's job to diagnose or to prescribe. If your cat requires veterinary aid while he is in the cattery, you should be aware that you are financially responsible for such aid. Discuss before boarding any medication your cat might need, or any special care. Most catteries offer a certain amount of individual care (playing with, talking to and petting) but you must be reasonable (asking the cattery owner to allow your cat privileges that might result in an escape is not fair to either the cattery or your cat).

Make certain that you understand the rate structure for all services and hours of operation. The fee for boarding includes not only the care of your cat but also the peace of mind that comes from knowing he is safe and with someone you can trust.

## Facts To Consider

Keep in mind that cats react very differently in a strange environment than dogs do. Cats are instinctively solitary animals, they do not run in packs as dogs do. Therefore, when confronted with strange surroundings, a cat's normal response is to withdraw physically and mentally into a protected, solitary state. For this reason, cats prefer the 'protected' feeling they get from being caged while in the cattery. Where it is true that most dogs want to run around and get acquainted, your cat will probably want to sit in a corner of his cage and stare, until he feels comfortable in his new environment. Human contact does not normally accelerate this period of acclimatising. It has to take place at the cat's own speed. A common reaction of cat owners to the idea of caging is 'but my cat loves to run around'. Perhaps he does at home, but while he is in unfamiliar surroundings, his cage gives him a feeling of safety. But what about exercise? Here, again, the difference between a cat and a dog must be understood. Dogs need space in which to get their necessary exercise, whereas some cats exercise isometrically. This means that if a cat has enough room to stretch, he can exercise every muscle in his body. When your cat is in strange surroundings, around strange cats, he will undoubtedly much prefer 'safety' to 'space'.

## Immunisation

Fortunately, within the last several years there have been significant advances in immunisation programs for cats. In past years, there were a number of contagious airborne viruses, which caused serious respiratory problems in cats. These viruses could not be controlled by any means except complete isolation of all cats from each other. Now, however, thanks to advances made by the veterinary pharmaceutical companies, there are effective vaccines available to prevent such diseases. Most catteries have strict policies regarding the immunisation programs for these diseases. You should be aware of the cattery policy and discuss it with your veterinarian prior to boarding your cat. In fairness to the cattery you should also make sure that your cat is not exposed to any contagious cat diseases prior to boarding.

## Stress Is A Factor

Any animal in strange surroundings suffers from stress. This means that his normal immune process is affected, as well as his eating and digestive habits. Your cattery will do everything possible to minimise the effects of stress on your cat (for this reason it is a good procedure for them to allow your cat to adjust to the cattery environment at his own rate). However, you can help to minimise the effects of stress by trying to make the boarding experience as pleasant as possible for your cat. Remember that the more often your cat boards, the more adjusted he will be to the cattery environment, and the easier the boarding process will become for him. Therefore, several short periods of boarding prior to a lengthy vacation will probably do more to help your cat adjust to boarding than will anything else.

## Welcoming Your Cat Home

After you pick your cat up from the cattery, be sure to keep him locked in at home for a few days before allowing him to roam. Just as he had to adjust to the cattery, so will he have to adjust to being home again. Allow him to find that 'at home' feeling before letting him out of the house.



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