

# HOME & GARDEN

## 'Paws' for Safety

by Elizabeth Coughlin

**W**hen Topsfield's Gordie Spater and his brother Kitter of Portsmouth, NH started their company, KURGO, six years ago they had no idea it would lead them into the pet industry. They had a simple business goal—to come up with an innovative product. Combining Kitter's industrial design knowledge with Gordie's sales and marketing experience, they created the 'the seasonal tire tote' (a tire cover that is easy to manage). The tote ended up a successful product and led to other automotive items.

Kitter's dog Zelda would soon change the company's direction. Zelda, a Plott Hound, had a bad habit of trying to get into the front seat of Kitter's car. So Kitter put his talent to work and created the 'Backseat Barrier', a wall that kept her out of the front seat. They decided if it worked for Zelda it would work for others with a similar problem. Once they saw the positive response they realized there was a growing safety need to restrain a dog in a car. It turned out there was a lot more information emerging about the dangers of non-restrained pets in cars.



**Here is a Yorkshire Terrier in the 'Kurgo Skybox Booster Seat', one of the many products KURGO makes that helps keep dogs safe in a car.**

On Jun. 20, a man driving a motor home was allegedly distracted when his dog jumped on to his lap while driving. He crossed over the median and killed a Scout leader and Scout on their way to a rock climbing expedition in Verona, Wisconsin.

Besides distracting the driver, a dog can also become a dangerous flying object. On Aug. 18, Edmunds.com states, "In a 35 mile per hour collision, an unrestrained 60-pound pet becomes a 2,700 pound projectile and can do much harm to other passengers."

Gordie added, "According to the American Automobile Association

(AAA) unrestrained pets cause more than 30,000 accidents annually." He also noted, "Stateline.org reports that N.H., Virginia, Illinois, Arizona, and Kentucky state legislatures are reviewing anti-distraction bills that would require dogs be restrained while traveling in a vehicle."

Not only is the government starting to realize the need for safer laws for pets but also the automotive industry. Toyota has many of the KURGO products available with their new Venza car.

Gordie and his brother realized the need to offer a range of products to fit all size dogs and cars and they have done that. For smaller dogs they have the 'Kurgo Skybox Booster Seat'. This box-style seat straps around the seat of the car. It is propped up high enough so the dog can look out the window while clipped into the seat. Another product for multi sized dogs is the 'Auto Zip Line with Harness'. This works with the seatbelts in the car and creates a tether run for the dog.

These products along with others made by KURGO are sold throughout the United States, Canada and Europe. They are available on websites like amazon.com and fetchdog.com, catalogs and locally. The Essex County Co-Op in Topsfield and Ciao! Bow Wow in Rowley (across from the Institution



**Brothers Kitter and Gordie Spater with Kitter's dog Rocket, who is sporting a KURGO harness.**

*courtesy photo*

for Savings) both carry their products.

Melanie LaRocca, owner of the Ciao! Bow Wow has been selling their products since they opened in May, 2008. "The KURGO line fits in perfectly with our philosophy here. First they have an extremely high quality product line at a fair price, they stand by their products and on top of all that they are local," Melanie explains.

KURGO sales are up 200 percent from last year and their staff

has grown from two to 10, signs that people are recognizing the need for dog safety in cars. "Safety does not go backwards," explains Gordie, "we hope to see more and more people restraining their dogs in their cars to avoid distractions. We want people to know about the solutions."

Knowing the dangers of an unrestrained dog in a car should give us "paws" to consider the safety of not only the passengers but also their pets. For more information visit [www.kurgo.com](http://www.kurgo.com)