



TOYOTA
**Family
Journeys**

TIPS FOR ENJOYING THE JOURNEY

Why, after nearly 50 years, can I still remember what the upholstery of my father's 1953 Chevy smelt like? In fact, I can even recall what the seats tasted like. (A very bitter American vinyl flavour). I suppose those memories linger because we Kiwis spent a large part of our childhood in cars. I bet I'm not the only one who can remember the gritty squeak of winding down a window, or what it felt like to peel your legs off the vinyl after a long hot trip. Do you remember dozing on a car journey at night and then resenting the thump-bump as you turned into your own driveway? Did you then pretend to be asleep so that you would be carried into the house?

Despite what my kids reckon, my childhood was not set in pre-history but it was definitely pre-seatbelts. The only child restraint was, "Sit down back there!" If Mum had to brake her Austin A30 suddenly, she would shoot her arm out sideways to 'save' us. Of course, in a real accident it wouldn't have helped at all (when they were made compulsory, seatbelts halved the number of kids killed and injured) but it is nice to think I would have felt a farewell brush of her hand as I launched through the windscreen and into space.

Sadly my parents can't have had a very good internet connection back in the 60s for Googling 'how to keep kids

entertained in the car', and we were not furnished with portable video players or iPads on long trips. We were not given backpacks of snacks and games. My entertainment consisted of playing 'slaps' with my older brother (until the inevitable, "Keep quiet back there!") and watching my father steer with his knees as he rolled cigarettes while leaning sideways to listen to the rugby on the radio. I would be wedged between an older brother and the dog.

Why the dog got a window seat and I didn't is still a matter I discuss regularly with my counsellor. It may not have been the best position for ventilation, comfort or scenery, but it was an ideal place to become car sick.

My dad was a keen fisherman but was totally uninterested in fish that didn't require a six-hour drive over gravel roads to catch. All of our holidays were somewhere in the Far North ("I'll head North 'til the butter melts, then turn left"), and the roads to get there were almost totally unpaved. If you were following another vehicle kicking up a rooster plume of dust, you had two choices – wind the windows down and choke on dust, or wind the windows up and swelter.

Thank you for indulging an old man rambling on about, "When I was a boy..." As a small reward, I shall now give you half a dozen tips on travelling with kids.

1. Make the trip part of the holiday. My Y chromosome resents delays and diversions when I drive – most men just want to get there – but on family holidays my Y chromosome has to take a back seat. Your kids will enjoy the trip so much more if you stop frequently for picnics, playgrounds, and rambles. Plan the stops, and then you won't begrudge them.
2. Audio books are fantastic! You can download some over the net, audible.com, or get them on CD from libraries and bookstores. The Narnia and Harry Potter series are popular. If you pick one the whole family likes, the miles will just fly by.
3. Get talking. Car trips are the ideal time to connect with your kids, and provide the perfect space to have some deep and meaningful conversations. Often all it takes to get a good conversation going is to have some quality questions up your sleeve. To give you a headstart, The Parenting Place has created *Chatter Box* – a series of fantastic conversation starters. There are questions for the whole family, for teens and for couples.
4. When our children were older, quizzes were the staple in-car entertainment. Sometimes we'd play, *Who Wants To Be A 10-Dollanaire* doubling the prize money from tiny amounts up to a massive 10 dollars. Incidentally, I very rarely ever had to pay out – they always kept going until they lost. *I Spy*, *Guess the Tune*, and *20 Questions* kept us all occupied happily, too. *Car Bingo* is great too – download your own copy from familyjourneys.co.nz
5. Some toys are great for car trips, and others are not. If they make noise or have a capacity to be used as weapon, think again. Things to doodle with like an Etch-A-Sketch or small dry-erase board are good. Pipe cleaners are great, play dough is not. Pack a ball or frisbee for games during breaks.
6. I see portable DVD players for less than \$50 on TradeMe. I never used them with our kids, but they sound like a great idea. Or a laptop, except the batteries are notorious for never lasting as long as you hoped. Tablets are better. You can get double-adaptor plugs so that multiple headphones can be plugged into the same unit.
7. Pack some non-crumby, non-sticky food, preferably in individually-wrapped serves or in plastic containers. Or else give them really messy food and then shout yourself one of those car-valet cleans when you get home – budget it as part of your holiday costs. Individual drink bottles are good for keeping the number of toilet stops high.
8. Baby wipes, regardless of the age of your children, are invaluable. So are rubbish bags and plastic ice cream containers (because sometimes you just can't stop in time). Motion sickness is awful – eyes-on-the-road and fresh air help, but sometimes an over-the-counter remedy is just the thing for a happy trip.

I wish you many happy, safe kilometres of holiday driving with your kids. These really are the good old days.

John Cowan