

Safe Trailering and Transportation of Horses

In today's world, being able to transport your horse is a necessity. Regardless if it is for a trail ride, showing, pleasure, business or health reasons, having your horse familiar with trailering will make for a successful trip.

TRAILER SAFETY

There are many types of trailers to choose from when hauling horses: stock, ramp, hauler, slant, or straight load. Stability of the trailer will vary depending on the combination of the tow vehicle and type of trailer used. There are two main types of horse trailers: 1.) a bumper pull which is popular for shorter hauls and smaller tow vehicles and 2.) a gooseneck trailer which offers more stability during adverse weather conditions and has a higher weight-carrying ability. Regardless of the type of trailer, make sure the trailer has solid flooring and secure footing for horses. Rubber mats aid in providing secure footing.

Many trailers come with dividing partitions (also

known as "dividers"). Slant load trailers have become popular for transporting horses due to easy access (side doors, fold down windows) and being able to easily separate each horse by the use of partitions. There are two types of partitions used in trailers: a partial or full. Partial partitions give more room for the horse to spread its feet and balance itself while traveling. Full partitions are useful when transporting a stallion with other horses or a mare and foal. The full partition helps avoid the foal getting under the feet of other horses. Many trailers have padding on partitions and walls of the trailer to reduce scuffs and scrapes to the horse during transportation.

There are many additional features available for trailers such as side doors, dressing rooms, sleeping quarters, and tack compartments. Talk to a trailer representative or dealer for additional trailer features. The most important decision in selecting a trailer is the comfort and safety of the animal. The more comfortable a horse feels, the less likely it is



to develop bad trailering habits.

Choosing a Towing Vehicle

When deciding on truck and trailer options, the most important choice is selecting the type of set-up that works best for your equine activities. Having a towing vehicle with a long wheel base will provide the best stability. The general rule is the larger and heavier the trailer, the more horsepower that is required from the towing vehicle. Choose a vehicle with an adequate tow rating for your trailer.

PRE-TRIP SAFETY CHECKLIST

Tow Vehicle: Fully inspect and check tow vehicle. Replenish engine fluids and inspect tires as towing puts extra stress on vehicle. Regularly service and maintain vehicle per specifications of manufacturer.

Tires and Wheels: Check the condition of tires. Look for any bulges, worn tread, or slices. Tires should be regularly balanced and rotated. Check for proper inflation pressure. Spare tire should also have proper inflation pressure. Wheel bearings should be regularly serviced (cleaned, inspected, greased, new seals). Check the tightness of lug nuts.

Lights and Wiring: Check all lights for proper operation in addition to making sure all the wiring is intact and secured.

Brakes: Inspect brake drums and wheels. Check fluid levels and lines to hydraulic brakes. Do a loaded and unloaded drive test to check the operation of brakes. Inspect emergency trailer brake battery being sure that it is fully charged.

Hitch: Hitches should be professionally installed and have an adequate weight rating for the trailer being towed. Is the trailer ball the correct size for the hitch? Be sure to grease the ball and coupler before hooking up. Is the hitch properly secured?

Clean and oil the jack stand. Be sure the jack stand operates properly and is not bent or damaged. Inspect safety chains and electrical connections. Check the breakaway system to be sure it is operating correctly.

Suspension: Check levelness of hitched trailer. The trailer should not be on inclining or declining angle. Check bushings as well as axle bolts for tightness

Floor and Body: Check floor and ramp for soft spots, rotting, splintering, cracks or corrosion. This may involve removing floor mats for inspection. Also inspect floor mat and replace as necessary. Check the trailer body for any damage. Inspect any seals. Check and lubricate doors, locks, dividers, and windows.

Safety Equipment: Be sure your first aid kit is complete and in your vehicle. Is your truck and trailer safety kit complete (road side flares, fire extinguisher, flash light, etc.)? It is very important to have tire changing equipment that has the ability to handle the weight of the vehicle.

TRAILER DRIVING HABITS

Practice driving and maneuvering your trailer before loading any animals. This includes driving both forward and backwards. Properly adjust and learn to use your mirrors. To maneuver a trailer in reverse, put your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel and turn it in the direction you want the trailer to go. To turn the trailer sharply, turn the wheel before you move the vehicle. For a gradual turn, turn the wheel as the vehicle is moving. If you are having trouble backing up, try slowing down.

Safety Check during Travel

Any time the load weight is adjusted during the trip (unloading or loading horses), drive a short distance and check operation of brakes before traveling onto

high traffic roadways. Make adjustments to the brake controller as needed. When adjusted correctly, the trailer should not push against the towing vehicle while braking. Any time while traveling that the driver exits the vehicle, walk around the trailer checking tires, lights and that the hitch is secure.

PREPARATIONS BEFORE TRAVELING

Before heading out on the road, make sure you have properly prepared for the trip. Preparations before traveling include having a first aid kit for your horse(s). A basic equine first aid kit should include:

- Phenylbutazone (Bute)*
- Non-stick bandages and gauze*
- Bandage Scissors*
- Alcohol*
- Electrolytes*
- Twitch*
- Eye wash*
- Thermometer*
- Antiseptic ointment*
- Self-sticking bandage*

These items will provide enough emergency care until a veterinarian can be contacted. Remember, the best way to control bleeding is a snug bandage. In case of emergency contact information for your horse(s) should be placed in both your tow vehicle and trailer. Information included should state your cell phone number, horse's name, horse registration information, veterinarian information, home/stable address, and vaccination records.

Vaccinations

It is very important that all horses being transported are up to date on their vaccinations, especially when crossing state lines. If you are traveling to a show, additional vaccinations may be required.

Vaccination recommendations vary throughout the United States, so be sure to check with a local veterinarian in the area you will be traveling to ask for which vaccinations are recommended. All in and out of state health requirements must be met. Throughout the United States, transporters are required to have a negative coggins (equine infectious anemia) test and health certification for each horse being transported. Do your homework before you travel – you do not want to be stranded at a checkpoint or port of entry for hours due to insufficient paperwork.

Overnight Accommodations

When traveling long distance, be sure to make overnight stabling arrangements before traveling. Have the contact information on hand for your overnight arrangements in case traffic delays your arrival or other unexpected events occur.

Bedding

Under normal circumstances, bedding in the trailer is not necessary but may offer extra cushioning and comfort, especially if transporting an injured animal. Bedding can be a great help in soaking up urine and manure during the trip.

TRAVELING WITH HORSES

Horses are designed to have the ability to stand for long periods of time. Nevertheless, while traveling they will need periods of rest approximately every 3-4 hours. The time it takes to fuel your vehicle offers an adequate rest period. If you will be traveling longer than 18 hours, prior arrangements should be made so that both you and your horse may have a prolonged rest period that includes unloading from the trailer and stalling the horse for the night.

Loading Your Animal

Before loading a horse, be sure the horse is wearing a correct fitting halter that will not slip off or break while loading. Lead the horse up to the trailer and encourage the horse to walk in. NEVER wrap your hand around the leadline. If the horse were to spook the handler could be injured. Once the horse has stepped up into the trailer and is standing, secure it with a quick release trailer tie or a slip knot with the leadline. Being able to release a horse quickly is crucial during an emergency situation. Be sure to carry a pocketknife in the emergency that the tie rope would need to be cut. It is important to always be aware of the animal while inside the trailer due to being in tight confinement with them. If the horse were to become scared or panicky, be sure there is a quick exit from the trailer to avoid injury.

Avoiding Injury while on the Road

Shipping boots and leg wraps offer additional protection to a horse's legs during transportation. Most shipping boots extend up from the coronary band to the knees and hocks. Make sure the horse is used to wearing shipping boots or leg wraps before hauling. Many horses will stomp or kick the first time boots or wraps are placed on them. If using shipping boots or leg wraps, be sure they are securely fastened, wrapped snug so they do not slip off during transportation. A loose shipping boot can cause the horse to slip and fall in the trailer.

When hauling several horses, it is recommended that the horses be familiar with each other. Horses have a social hierarchy within their herd which will continue inside the trailer. Be mindful which order horses are loaded. Avoid placing the most dominant horse next to the most timid. The use of dividing partitions can be especially helpful when separating horses.

Feeding and Watering



Feeding and watering on the road is just as important as when the animal is at home. When possible, take all needed feed and hay for the entire trip, making sure that you have enough for all the horses you are transporting. When offering free-choice hay during transportation, secure the hay net high and tight to avoid your horse becoming entangled during trailering.

Take buckets from home so the horse can eat and drink out of familiar containers. This also reduces disease transfer from other horses. Water should be offered every 3-4 hours. Some horses will not drink while traveling but should still be offered water. A few gulps of water can help avoid colic or impaction troubles during the trip.

Ventilation

Having good ventilation is a must! Not only does good ventilation help keep horses cool in the trailer, but it also provides fresh air during the trip. Opening ceiling vents and/or windows can ensure good ventilation. When opening side windows, be sure to keep screens and window bars closed while traveling on roadways. It is exceptionally dangerous

for a horse to have its head outside of a moving trailer traveling at high speeds in traffic.

Unloading Your Animal

Before unloading your horse, park the trailer in a location where the horse(s) can be unloaded onto secure footing, such as grass or gravel. Be sure to unload in a safe area away from roadways and traffic. Even experienced, seasoned horses can spook away from their handler when arriving at a new location. It is not recommended to unload horses on pavement as horses are prone to slipping on asphalt.

Just as with loading, practice makes perfect when unloading your horse. Be sure your horse will calmly back out of the trailer. Make sure you have a

hold on the lead line to guide your horse out of the trailer. NEVER wrap your hand around the lead rope. You may be injured if the horse were to pull back quickly or tries to turn around in the trailer.

SAFE TRAVELING

The weekend trail rider may have a different hauling set-up than a show jumper who travels up and down the East Coast months at a time. Proper preparation and practice for trailering your animal will avoid many problems while traveling. Once you have unpacked from the trip don't forget to clean and disinfect your trailer. Not only does this reduce any disease concerns but your trailer will be clean for your next trip.

Jessica Renshaw and J. Richard Nottingham

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