



Safe Travels

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With the start of spring, we have warmer weather and longer days for more riding and barn time or fun trail rides. Training and show season is also in full swing. While this can be a fun and exciting time, traveling with horses can also be quite stressful. We have put together the following list of things to keep in mind when you travel with your equine companion this season (and year round!).

Health check:

Traveling can be quite stressful on horses, which increases their cortisol levels. When this happens, their immune system can be compromised and their ability to fight infection or viruses can be diminished. Stressed horses in groups like at shows or training barns can be the perfect place for common viruses to circulate between horses. Making sure your horses are up to date with vaccinations is an easy way to protect them against some of these diseases like equine influenza and rhinopneumonitis. Also, depending on your destination, heavily populated areas with mosquitoes, can harbor diseases like West Nile and Eastern Encephalitis. You also want to make sure your horse is vaccinated well in advance of travel to allow protective immunity levels to accumulate. After a vaccine is given, it can take 10 days or even longer to have protective titers, so you don't want to have vaccines administered right before you leave somewhere. Keep in mind your horse's vaccine schedules when traveling and schedule them accordingly.

Most places you travel to will require proof of a negative EIA or Coggins test. Depending on your destination, some will require proof of a negative test within 12 months, but some places require within 6 months. Know when your horse's Coggins is due and what your destination requires. Most labs will have Coggins results within a few days to a week depending on when the lab performs the test. If a test is needed ASAP, a rush Coggins test is usually more expensive, so plan ahead.

Anytime traveling with animals, a certificate of good health from an accredited veterinarian is recommended and in some states is required, like entrance into Florida for example. Not all veterinarians can write health certificates for horses-only veterinarians listed as an accredited category 2 vet can inspect horses for travel. These health inspections are official documentation that your horse was inspected and is free of disease and certified health for travel. These documents are only good for 30 days, so the exam must be done within the 30 days of you traveling to your destination and coming back home. For horses that travel frequently, certain states allow a passport or Go Pass, which is a certificate that lasts for 6 months. Only certain states will allow this certificate, so do your research into your destination or consult with your veterinarian prior to travel to make sure you have the correct documentation.

Trailer safety:

Before any haul, a quick trailer inspection is always a good idea to make sure everything is working properly. Do the tires have adequate air? Is there a spare tire with adequate air? Is the flooring in decent condition? Do all the lights work? Are the trailer breaks functioning? All of these things should be looked over prior to every haul. If your trailer hasn't been used much the last several months, it's always a good idea to have it inspected by a professional to make sure it's safe and also to check for any wasp or bee nests that may have accumulated in it (be sure to check both sides of the dividing panels!). You certainly don't want your horse being stung and have a bad experience in the trailer.

Once yearly trailer inspections are recommended no matter how often you travel to inspect flooring, electrical, brakes, tires, etc. Also your towing vehicle should be in good condition and have been serviced

recently. Keep in mind the hauling capacity of your towing vehicle. Too little engines can be dangerous on the highway or interstate traveling at high speeds with a large tow package and also may not have the braking capacity needed for heavier loads. It's also important to remember to bring blocks to put behind your trailer's wheels in the event you have to leave it somewhere for an emergency or something unexpected.

When hauling your horse or multiple horses, keep in mind about weight distribution. You certainly want the trailer balanced prior to hauling at high speeds (be mindful of what the extra stuff is in your trailer like tack, feed, etc. and how much it weighs. Some trailers will have heavier stuff than the horse that's in it!) If hauling a single horse in a straight load trailer, put them on the left side as some roads have a slightly slope to them and the added weight can cause the trailer to pull to one side of the road. Also make sure your horse is comfortable loading and unloading. Spend time training on loading on different types of trailers-an emergency is not the time to have a lesson on how to load.

Ventilation is important in trailers, however, while traveling please DO NOT leave the trailer windows down. In the unfortunate event you had to slam on breaks while traveling down the road, your horse is at risk of a neck fracture or subluxation if his head is out the window. Some horses may try to escape and stick a foot through their window. When stopped, it's ok to put the windows down and let your horse have a look around, but for traveling, make sure the window is up where the horse can't stick his or her head out. The bars will allow enough ventilation through the trailer. If you're concerned about ventilation vs warmth on cooler days or times of the year traveling, it's better to have good ventilation and if needed, blanket your horse.

Trailer ties are commonly used to tie horses' heads in trailers. The most common mistake we see people make is attaching the wrong clip to the horse. If you use trailer ties, you want to make sure the heavy duty clip is on the horse and the quick release clip is attached to the trailer. In the unfortunate event your trailer flipped, it is easier to undo the quick release on the trailer than get up near the horse's face. Also in doing so, this allows you a short lead attached to your horse in the event of an emergency.

Know your route. Are there any underpasses that have a certain height limit or bridges that have weight limits? Road construction is common on interstate highways, so check your route and decide if there is an alternate route that may be needed due to certain conditions or expected delays. With it warming up, also be mindful of WHEN you travel. Avoid traveling in the hottest part of the day during the summer. Certain delays are unexpected, but in a still, metal trailer on hot asphalt, your horse can easily overheat.

Supplies:

Whether you are traveling locally or out of town, there are several supplies you should always have with you.

- A spare tire and tools/equipment to change one is a must. Make sure you have the appropriate lug wrenches for your trailer and even keep this equipment in your trailer at all times.
- Hay nets or bags with fresh hay for your horse should always be brought. It's better to pack too much food for your horse than to find out you didn't pack enough. Sudden changes in food, including hay, can cause colic. If you leave hay nets or bags in your trailer, make sure you dump them out and put fresh hay in each trip-you'd be amazed at how quickly they can mold.
- Water buckets and a source of water should always stay in your trailer. Some horses are picky about their water source and may be hesitant to drink at new places. Taking large jugs of water from home that you know your horse will drink is always an option. Some other products that can be added to water to encourage horses to drink are gatorade or Horse Quencher products. These add flavoring to water that help mask smells and most horses love the taste. Also giving

hydration hay from Purina is a great way to get more forage and water into your horse prior to or during travel.

- Emergency contact for yourself and veterinarians in the area of where you will be with your horse is essential. Most shows will have an onsite veterinarian, but it's always a good idea to ask your vet if they know anyone in the area you are traveling to in the event you had an emergency. Always make sure you have a charged cell phone or a way to charge one and let someone know where you are headed and how to get in touch with you.

Traveling with our horses can be a lot of fun! Things can always happen, but don't let a good trip go bad by not being prepared.