

SAFE TRAVEL WITH YOUR HORSES

by Dr. Laura Harris

Whether you travel with your horses to competitions, trail rides, camping, or to avoid summer heat and winter cold; safety while on the road should be your first priority.

Be sure that the trailer itself is safe before the horses are ever loaded. Is the trailer big enough for your horses? Do your horses ride comfortably? Have you had the trailer safety inspected within the last year?

A horse should be able to stand with clearance on either side when loaded in the trailer. There should be at least two feet of "head room" when the horse stands normally. And, finally, a horse should have enough room from chest to tail so that it is not forced to stand in contact with the chest or tail bars.

Usually the longer and heavier the trailer, the less bumpy the ride will be for the horses. However, any trailer can be made more comfortable by having the floors completely covered with rubber mats that lie smoothly and by adding wood grindings or shavings to act as a cushion and to absorb urine that might make the mats slippery.

A yearly safety inspection schedule for every trailer is optimal. Be sure that, at a minimum, lights, brakes, flooring, axles, wheel bearings, tires, door latches and hinges are checked for integrity and function.

As you pack for your trip, consider the things that can go wrong when traveling with horses. Bring along extra halters, lead ropes, and buckets. Pack extra blankets or sheets and fly masks. Ideally, in case of breakdown, you should carry enough food and water for 24 hours for each horse. (Don't forget food and water for yourself.) If you do not have storage capacity for that much feed and water you should carry, at a minimum, 2 to 3 gallons of water per horse and enough feed for one meal per horse.

In addition to adequate water, electrolyte paste is important when traveling during any season. It is important during hot weather to replace minerals lost when sweating and during cold weather to encourage water consumption. One tube of paste per day per horse while traveling is probably sufficient for most adult full size horses. Horses being given electrolyte paste must have access to adequate water and time to consume the water.

Remember to put together a portable first aid kit to use when traveling. Recommendations for kit content can be found on the Client Education page of

this website. Bandage materials and shipping boots are important to help prevent and in case of leg injuries. These items should be stored in plastic bags or in dust/water proof containers to keep them clean over time.

If a trip includes multiple consecutive days of travel or long distances in single or multiple day increments, it is advisable the names and phone numbers of layover facilities (horse hotels) and veterinarians along the route. The following two websites will help you obtain this information:

- 1) <http://www.horsemotel.com/>
- 2) <http://www.bayerdvm.com/getadvn/>
- 3) <http://myhorsematters.com/>

The key to successful travel with horses is to plan ahead, imagine the things that can happen while on the road and then prepare for them.