

Tips for Trailering

Having a horse trailer at your disposal brings the freedom to take your horse places—clinics, shows, trails or the beach. It also gives you the peace of knowing you can truck your horse out at a moment's notice for urgent medical care should the need arise. But owning and operating a trailer means added responsibilities and concerns if you want to do it well.

If you're new to trailer ownership or are looking for some extra help with hauling, here are some suggestions on trucking procedures, horse health and driving tips, and lists of both necessary and luxury items for your trailer.

Before You Head Out

Consider obtaining a roadside assistance plan from US Rider, which specializes in covering horse vans, tow vehicles and trailers carrying horses. Their technicians are equipped to help you if you break down on the side of the road while hauling your horse. They also have access to emergency stabling locations in the event that your trailer is unfit to complete your trip.

With the exception of an urgent medical situation during which you've been asked by a veterinarian to truck your horse to a hospital, you should always make sure your horse has been eating and drinking normally and producing a normal amount of manure before you haul him. Trucking is stressful for horses, and stress can exacerbate illness in a compromised horse. Your trip should be postponed if your horse isn't feeling well. If you are unsure as to whether your horse is feeling in top condition to travel, check your horse's respiration, pulse and temperature along with his hydration level and other vital signs before taking him on a long trip.

Try to take someone with you whenever you're hauling a horse. Many trailer-related injuries result from the loading and unloading process, and having an assistant to help you at these times can be invaluable. You'll also appreciate the help in the event of an unforeseen circumstance, such as a breakdown or a detour on unfamiliar roads. Even if your trip is supposed to be relatively short, be prepared for traffic tie-ups or situations that can mean a longer time for your horse to be in the trailer. Bring enough water (2 to 3 gallons per horse) so that you can offer him a drink and check on his well-being. For long trips, plan stopping points in advance.

If you're crossing state lines, take your horse's Coggins (proof of negative EIA) along with a health certificate and record of inoculations.

Prior to loading your horse, inspect your trailer for hornet's nests. They can be built overnight, and you don't want to lock your horse into a trailer with an active nest. Each time you prepare to haul your horse, double check your hookup, emergency braking system and safety chains, and that the directional, road and parking lights on your trailer are functioning. Check that the side mirrors on your tow vehicle are positioned correctly so that you can see your blind spots. Also confirm that trailer doors and latches are secure, and that you have adequate tire pressure on both your towing vehicle and your trailer.

At least once monthly and before every long trip, check your tire pressure when the tires are cold. Remember to check the spare trailer tire too. Refer to your owner's manual or the sticker located on your vehicle's door jamb for the proper tire pressure. The pressure listed on a tire indicates how much pressure it can hold, not the recommended operating pressure. Properly inflated tires allow your vehicles to run smoothly, reduce gas consumption and are less likely to have blowouts. According to US Rider, improper tire pressure is the leading cause for roadside service assistance.



On the Road

Always turn your headlights on to increase visibility on the road, and turn your cell phone off. Because your horse is counting on you to concentrate on the road, distractions should be minimized.

So that your horse can most easily maintain his balance, always accelerate and decrease your speeds slowly and with care, and make slow turns. Drive at a consistent speed and brake slowly – abrupt stops have been known to cause horses to fall in trailers. When you encounter a bumpy road, reduce your speed by 5 to 10 miles per hour.

Merge carefully on and off highways as doing so is more difficult when pulling a trailer. Your tow vehicle works harder on the incline to the highway, and it is important to use your directional light to gain the attention of other drivers during this time. Keep your directional on until you reach the same speed as other travelers and can move into the travel (middle) lane of the highway.

Because stopping a rig takes longer than stopping an independent vehicle, double the distance between your vehicle and the vehicle in front of you to allow yourself plenty of room should you have to stop. Lastly, always look at the road and traffic patterns well ahead of you and plan your maneuvers to avoid sudden stops and abrupt turns.

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Here are some points to consider for keeping your horse healthy while trucking.

Make sure your horse wears either a leather halter or breakaway halter for trucking. These halters should break if your horse becomes entangled or falls in the trailer. Some haulers use breakaway trailer ties or twine in conjunction with their trailer ties so that the horse will break free if he falls. Other haulers choose not to tie a horse at all in a trailer so he can move his head freely in efforts to maintain balance. The choice that is right for you depends on your horse's personality and whether he is sharing his ride with another horse with whom he might fight.

Shipping halters encased with sheepskin, or halter fleece kits that can be attached to your regular halter, provide soft protection from rubbing for horses with sensitive facial skin. Head bumpers or horse helmets designed to protect the vulnerable poll are also available for horses that are likely to raise their heads high.

Avoid giving grain to a horse during trucking. Be sure the horse's last grain meal has had time to fully digest prior to hauling, and wait a bit for the horse to relax and drink water after a trip before providing a grain meal.

Hay is a comfort food for a horse during hauling, and is important to keep the horse's digestive system functioning during the stress of a trip. Rely on plenty of hay to keep the horse calm and occupied. However, hay generates airborne particles and dust that can fly into your horse's eyes and respiratory system during a trip. For this reason, some people wet hay to reduce dust in a trailer, and other people place fly masks on their horses for trucking.

Be sure that your hay net or hay bag is hung securely so that it cannot slip and allow a horse's leg to become entangled. It should also be adjusted to a height that is both appropriate for your horse to eat and that is out of leg reach if the horse paws.

Keep the interior of your trailer clean. Promptly remove manure and hose out urine to reduce the buildup of harmful fumes. Sanitize the walls and floor to reduce bacteria and viruses that can flourish in the remnants of respiratory excretions and manure.

Good ventilation is important during trucking because horses are highly susceptible to respiratory problems. Be more concerned with providing the horse with plenty of fresh air rather than with having him be cold. While drafts and direct blasts of air should be avoided in cold weather, remember that stale air filled with exhaust fumes from the pulling vehicle, body heat from the horse(s) and gases from manure and urine accumulate rapidly in the closed trailer.

It is better to clothe a horse and allow ventilation than to keep a horse closed tightly in a trailer. A clipped horse that is accustomed to wearing a blanket should most likely wear a blanket on a winter trip, but avoid overdressing him for hauling. Most horses tend to heat up during trucking, and even a sheet in some instances can be too much in warmer temperatures – especially if more than one horse is being trucked as body heat accumulates rapidly. In cold temperatures, a wool dress sheet may prove to be the ideal solution for clothing your horse for trucking. Wool is a natural insulator, yet it allows for moisture to move away from the horse's body if the horse begins to perspire.

If you truck your horse in summer, try to do so in the cooler parts of the day and make sure there is plenty of airflow in the trailer. Park in the shade when you reach your summer destination. If you can't, open the trailer doors or unload your horse as soon as possible so that he doesn't overheat in the enclosed environment.

Many people choose to protect their horse's legs with shipping bandages or shipping boots. Because poor wrapping techniques can damage a horse's legs, if you're not skilled at wrapping, use shipping boots that cover a horse's legs from hoof to knees and hocks. It is imperative that any protective gear you put on your horse's legs will remain in place so as not to interfere with his ability to maintain his footing. Concerns of overheating and adverse reactions of horses to wearing wraps cause some haulers to avoid protective legwear altogether. The choice that is right for you will depend on your horse's own particular needs and behavior.

Trailer-Related Concerns

Have a trained mechanic inspect your trailer at least once per year, or in spring and fall. Be sure the floorboards, axels, ramp, brakes, hitch and emergency braking system are checked and tested. Watch for signs of rust on the trailer, and consult your mechanic as to how it can be treated and whether it poses a hazard.

Trailer mechanics can obtain window repair and replacement kits to fix broken trailer windows, so your inspection is the time to report any difficulties in their operation as well. If your trailer has drop-down windows, screens should be in place so that a horse cannot stick his head out during trucking.

Many trailer-related injuries to horses occur during loading or unloading, so you should work with your horse at home to train him to load and unload calmly. Conduct training sessions with a helper when neither of you will feel rushed nor are likely to become frustrated if your horse is uncooperative. Consult a reputable trainer for help if your horse's loading behavior is uncontrollable or dangerous. If you truck your horse only infrequently, load and unload him periodically to keep his loading skills sharp.

Use floor mats in your trailer for non-slip footing. Shavings can generate dust and contribute to poor respiratory conditions inside trailers. If you use shavings, be sure they are dust free. If conditions are rainy or snowy when you arrive at your destination, close up the back of your trailer to keep your ramp or step and floor mats dry – and less slippery – for reloading your horse. Cocomats designed for trailers can be applied to ramps to provide a slip-free footing as well.



Tips for Trailering

You'll find all sorts of tools and accessories to make trucking easier on you and your horse.

Here is a list of suggestions.

Trailering Supplies

- To be courteous to the places you visit, you'll need a manure fork, muck bucket and possibly a broom to clean up after your horse. A Mini Future Fork is a handy size for trucking as it is a petite, space-saving version of the original.
- When you travel, take along an equine medical kit.
- If you plan to tie your horse to the side of your trailer when you arrive at your destination, use a breakaway trailer tie such as the Tie Safe Trailer Tie or bring along a piece of twine. Attach the twine to the tie hook on your trailer, then tie the horse to the twine. This way, the twine will break if the horse panics.
- You'll need a bucket for drinking water for your horse, and a bucket and sponge for cooling down your sweaty horse after exercise in warm weather. You'll also want to pack an ample supply of water so that you have it in the instance of a breakdown, and you won't have to worry about finding a water source when you arrive at your destination.
- You'll need a hay bag or hay net. A wide selection of bags exist, including fabric bags designed to cut dust, corner feeder bags, cotton rope hay nets and nylon mesh hay nets. No matter what kind you use, be sure that it is fastened securely at a height at which a horse cannot get a leg entangled in it.
- If you have to pack an entire bale of hay, consider using a bale bag to keep the hay contained, out of the sun and free of road spray.
- Pack a fire extinguisher designed for dousing electrical fires, a Trailer Aid or suitable jack for changing flat trailer tires, and a tire chock.
- Take an extra halter, which should be breakaway or leather, and an extra lead line in case your primary ones break.
- Pack a flashlight with fully charged batteries.
- In winter, pack a supply of sand and a snow shovel in case you get stuck. Include an extra blanket for your horse, and one for you to keep warm in the instance of a breakdown.
- Accessories you might want to include for your trailer include a spare tire cover to protect the tire from harsh weather, a hitch cover to prevent water from seeping into the electrical system, and trailer covers to keep a stored trailer free of dirt and debris.
- If you have a dressing room, you may want to outfit it with a shatterproof mirror and one of a variety of travel style grooming bags designed for mounting in a trailer.
- If you don't have a dressing room with built-in saddle racks, you might want to take along a collapsible saddle stand to hold your tack when you arrive at your destination.
- The Trailer Eyes Wireless Monitoring System can help you align your trailer ball and hitch, and can enable you to monitor the horses inside your trailer.



TRAILER EQUIPMENT

- Trailer Chock
- Wheel Chock
- Trailer Aid Super Trailer Chock
- Trailer Aid
- Tire Cover
- Mini Future Fork
- Fortiflex 70 Quart Muck Bucket
- Fortiflex 40 Quart Muck Bucket
- Blitz Self-Venting Water Can
- Cotton Rope Hay Net
- Nylon Cord Hay Net
- Small Mesh Hay Net
- Dover's Hay Bag
- Mesh Hay Bag
- Cashel Hay Bag
- Shatterproof Mirror



TRAILER ACCESSORIES

- Grooming Case with Storage
- Standard Horse Trailer Cover-Up
- Gooseneck Horse Trailer Cover-Up
- Hitch Cover
- Trailer Eyes Wireless Monitoring System
- Portable Saddle Stand
- Caution Horses Reflective Tape
- Retractable Cones

FOR THE HORSE

- Dover Pro Shipping Halter
- Centaur Shipping Halter
- Dover's Genuine Sheepskin Halter Pieces
- Synthetic Halter Fleeces
- Dover's Shipping Boots
- Dover Pro Shipping Boots
- Dover Plaid Shipping Boots
- Horsecare Newmarket Travel Boots
- Shipping Head Bumper
- Cashel Horse Helmet

