



Protective wraps are just one of the important elements in safe shipping.

Shipping Young Horses

How to give your youngsters a good, safe ride

By Leslie Deckard

Preparing and shipping young horses is a lot like getting a small child ready for a car trip.

Even if the child or young horse is only going a short distance, a lot of preparation is required before the youngster is buckled into his or her car seat or the horse is loaded into the truck or trailer.

Before the young horse heads out on his first adventure, it is important his vaccination status be up to date. Vaccinations should be given no closer than 10 days to two weeks before transport.

Dr. Steve Soule cautions against forcing any type of IV or oral fluids prior to shipping. He says the dangers of forcing fluids include hyperhydration, which shuts down the horse's thirst mechanism and leads to dehydration.

"If you do this (force IV or oral fluids), they may not want to drink for up to 36 hours because their thirst mechanism has been shut down. They urinate out the fluids and end up dehydrated," he says.

Steve advises against giving immune stimulants prior to shipping. "The im-

mune stimulants are non-specific and can cause autoimmune disease where the horse reacts to its own tissues," he explains.

The Florida-based veterinarian adds it is appropriate to give the young horse a dose of mineral oil in his feed before transport. "I prefer to give them two or three ounces of mineral oil in four or five consecutive meals prior to shipping so it has passed through and lubricated their whole system as opposed to tubing them with a half gallon, which is a bit of a trauma," he says.

The biggest concern horse owners should have about shipping young horses is their naïve immune system. "They haven't been exposed to different environments and different infectious agents and bacteria," Steve explains. "As a result, and through no fault of our own, young horses get sick more often than older horses. I am not sure what we can do to prevent that, other than good health care, good feeding and management practices, and a good vaccination program."

Just as it is important to make sure the young horse has had all of the proper vaccinations before shipping, it is just as important the horse has had proper schooling on how to walk on a lead and how to enter and exit a trailer.

“You would hope they (young horses) have had significant handling before the day you want to ship them. If not, a problem has already been created,” says Richard Taylor of Ventura Farms in Virginia. “If that young horse has had significant handling, they have already developed that understanding of ‘I can do this by myself.’”

“Horses are gregarious or herd-bound by nature and that is the one problem that has to be overcome,” adds Richard. “It’s the ‘Oh my God, I don’t want to go to the prom by myself’ type of fear that must be overcome.”

An option to shipping the young horse alone is to ship him or her with a buddy, but it is best to use an older and more experienced horse as opposed to the young horse’s paddock or barn buddy.

Make sure the young horse feels comfortable and secure while being led onto the truck or trailer. Richard suggests loading the horse in an area he is familiar with because the sight of the truck or trailer is going to change the surroundings and the horse is going to know that. A backup plan of getting the horse loaded on the truck or trailer should be in place in case something goes wrong.

Schooling the horse by placing him or her inside a trailer or truck and driving around the block a few weeks before he is scheduled to ship is another way to make the shipping process less stressful.

If the young colt or filly has mastered the loading process then the next decision is how best to get from point A to point B.

Curt Lange, spokesperson for Brook Ledge Horse Transportation, says his number-one recommendation for shipping young horses is to place them in a

box stall instead of cross-tying in a single stall or stall and half. Brook Ledge requires all weanlings be shipped in box stalls.

Steve and Richard agree shipping in a box stall is the best way to go with a young horse. Both say young horses are too unpredictable to be tied while shipped.

“At the end of the day, it is like having little kids,” Curt says. “If it is possible for them (horses) to get into trouble they are going to do it.”

Shipping in a box stall is a more expensive option when shipping commercially because the owner must buy the extra space in the truck, but horses that are shipped in boxes get to where they are going feeling better than horses that are shipped in double standing stalls or straight stalls.

One concern in shipping horses, young or old, is maintaining the animals’ respiratory health. Doing this involves dust control and good ventilation, just like at home in the barn. Dust is often worse in the back of the trailer than it is in the front. You want to ship horses with respiratory conditions in a box because they can put their heads down and eat and drink from the floor, which encourages drainage of accumulating fluids in their respiratory tract in the best possible fashion.

In a box stall, truck drivers can hang water buckets so they have water to drink at all times, and they can eat hay on the floor, a more natural grazing position.

Temperature change enroute is another concern. Make sure horses are well ventilated and cool during hot weather and warm during cool weather.

Curt says Brook Ledge drivers open the trailer windows, even in cooler weather, if they are carrying a full load of horses due to the amount of body heat produced inside the truck. If it is a small load, then the windows will remain closed during the cooler months to allow

the horses to remain warm.

If the horses are wearing blankets while being transported from the North to the South during the winter months, Curt says it is the truck driver’s decision on when and where to remove the blankets on the horses he is carrying. The same rule applies for horses returning to the North from the South during the winter months.

If a young horse is going to ship in wraps it is best if he is accustomed to wearing them.

Steve recommends wraps that go up to the knee and over the hock, incorporate a bell boot with the wrap, and have a velcro closure. “These types of wraps are not tight, but they do not slip and they offer the most protection,” he says.

Once the horse arrives at its final destination it is important for someone to meet the truck or trailer to inspect

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the horse’s condition, monitor his or her behavior, observe eating habits, and make sure he urinates or defecates on a regular basis.

The horse’s temperature should be taken soon after arriving. If the horse appears well adjusted after arriving, other exams may not be required.

The successful shipment of young horses often comes down to thinking like a horse and good practical horsemanship. In the words of Richard Taylor, “You will always have good luck outsmarting them, and you will always have bad luck trying to out-muscle them.”