

# FACILITY BASICS

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## Guidelines for Safe Shipping

By the USHJA Trainer's Certification Committee

Thousands of horses are shipped by ground and by air every day. Transporting horses is generally safe, but it does carry some inherent dangers. Proper planning and attention to details like driver competency, travel conditions, and equipment is an essential part of assuring the safest, most successful shipping experience possible.

### Advance Planning

Every trip of any significant distance must begin with planning.

When preparing for long hauls, advance attention must be given to the horse's food and water, comfort, and care. The longer the trip, the more important advance planning becomes to the horse's well-being. For long distances that require travel of more than 8 hours:

- Plan the route and make sure that you know of layover facilities at appropriate intervals. If a horse is traveling cross-country, it is very important that layovers at safe facilities are planned. Horses need time to unwind and keep their strength up throughout the trip.
- Monitor temperatures while on layovers. Temperatures should be taken shortly after arrival after lengthy trips, and again an hour later (some elevated temperatures do not show up immediately).
- Have a vet's phone number readily accessible in case of emergency.
- *Water is the most important component when shipping.* Water horses at least every 4 hours. Often, horses will not drink on trips under 4 hours.
- Do not grain, but provide ample amounts of hay.

When arranging a trip for your horses, plan to have them travel for no more than 12 hours at a time. The only exception to that rule would be when they travel in a box stall.

Some people, particularly in the West, live in parts of the country that require extensive travel times of over 12 hours. A lack of suitable layover facilities—especially in the winter months—further complicates their travel plans. An accepted option in such cases is to “double stall” horses, and stop for a four hour break at least every 12 hours, so horses may rest, drink, and relax a bit from the stress of traveling. Many horses will only urinate when they are not in a moving vehicle.

When traveling long distances, plan on arriving well ahead of your event, so the horses will have time to regain the strength they need to compete.

## Flight Plans

Air transportation can eliminate the stress of long hauls, generally cutting cross-country trips down to 6 or 8 hours. When booking air travel, make sure to inquire about routings and scheduling. Some flights make connections with layovers.

When flying horses, make your travel arrangements only with companies familiar with the practice. Know as much as possible about the process and the requirements beforehand. For instance:

- Fees for flying are billed by the pallet. Each pallet contains three single stalls, or two stalls-and-a-half. As a general rule, air transportation is double the cost of ground transportation. Air transport should only be considered for trips that are 12 hours or more by ground. Pre-payment is required.
- A groom is necessary to handle the horse and see to his needs. Grooms must meet the standard of the shipping company. If you plan to supply your own groom, inquire about the standards and procedures several weeks ahead of time. If you do not provide your own groom, the air shipping company will supply one for a fee.
- Space is at a premium. Very little room is allotted or available for extra equipment. When booking air travel, do not hesitate to ask a lot of questions, and insist upon answers that you understand until you are thoroughly familiar with the process.
- In general, booking equine air travel is easy, requiring little advance notice.
- Have the necessary paperwork ready and readily available. The air travel company will require all paperwork in advance.
- Get to the airport early. Be prepared to wait on the tarmac.
- Arrange for prompt, competent shipping at the destination. The horses will need to be picked up at the airport. Ask your air travel company for suggestions. Many air travel companies are very helpful with this aspect of the process.

## Cost and Competency Considerations

There are generally two choices for ground shipping: commercial shippers and owner-trainer operators.

When transporting horses, the driver's competency and experience are paramount. Whether the driver is a professional or an owner or trainer, he or she must possess both extensive familiarity with the vehicles involved, and an understanding of how shipping affects horses. The driver must be aware of the dangers of driving fast on turns, sudden stops and turns, driving in extreme weather conditions, and driving for prolonged periods of time.

## Trailer

When choosing a commercial shipper, take time to look at their trucks and trailers. There is nothing more dangerous than old, faulty equipment.

Before every trip, the equipment used for hauling horses should receive a complete inspection. The trailer should be in good repair, with a floor that is strong, clean, and free of rot, nails, loose screws, or clutter. The trailer should also be free of sharp edges that could potentially injure the horse. It should also have good ventilation.

All aspects of the trailer should be well-secured, including the partitions, equipment, hay, and hay net. The hay net must be positioned high enough to avoid having the horse get caught up in it during transport. It is absolutely *essential* that all cargo is secured and that nothing can fall on or under the horses, even in the case of an emergency stop.

## Experience

Feel free to ask a commercial hauler for referrals and to request information regarding the size of their company. A company with only one rig is risky with no back up, but a company too big will, at times, be forced to hire less experienced drivers to keep their vans rolling. Make sure that transport is available 24 hours a day, in case of medical emergency.

## Expense

Transporting your own horses can save money, but the long-term investment and maintenance of the truck and trailer can be significant. In order to recover the outlay of equipment, you will need to ship large numbers of horses. Transporting your own horses should only be tackled if you are 100% confident in your driving ability, your ability to deal with emergencies, and in the soundness of your equipment. You need to consider back up plans if you break down, and be prepared to deal with an unruly or sick horse. However, transporting your own horse may be the only option if you live in an area without readily available commercial shippers.

Larger stalls will be more expensive than smaller ones, but the benefits often outweigh the added costs. Likewise, commercial shipping tends to cost more than doing it yourself, but the extra costs are often offset by considerations that include the safety of the horse, the suitability of the equipment, and the experience of the driver.

When working with a commercial shipper, always ask for a price quote in advance. Arrange payment for shipping prior to loading the horses.

## Paperwork

Have all paperwork in order, available, and up-to-date before the horse leaves the barn.

Know what paperwork is required for the trip you will be making. The requisite paperwork will depend on the situation, and on whether or not the horse will be crossing state or international lines.

Commonly required paperwork includes verification of current Coggins tests, interstate health papers, brand inspections, international health papers, and others. If in doubt as to what paperwork your trip will require, consult your veterinarian well in advance of your shipping date.

## Weather and Traffic Issues

Regardless of the length of the trip, every time you transport horses you must take both weather and traffic conditions into consideration. Horses that are too hot, too cold, or too nervy are prone to sickness.

- In hot weather, ship at night (if possible), early in the morning, or during the coolest part of the day. Excessive heat can be very dangerous for your horse. Temperatures on a hot day can soar to over 120 degrees on the asphalt—and if the truck is not moving, no air is moving either. Many professional shippers recommend shipping at night during the hottest months to minimize temperature extremes and possible traffic delays.
- In cold weather, monitor the trailer temperature. Sheets (and blankets, in extreme conditions) are often necessary to keep the horse comfortable. Use care when blanketing a horse during shipping. Heavy blankets are rarely recommended for use on a horse in an enclosed trailer. Horses radiate large amounts of body heat, and a blanketed horse with no air can get extremely hot in a short period of time. In very cold weather, it may be advisable to put a sheet on under a blanket. The blanket can be removed if the weather or the temperature in the horse van gets warmer.
- As much as possible, consider traffic conditions.
  - Nervous horses can easily become upset in stop-and-go traffic.
  - A slow-moving or stopped trailer suffers ventilation problems.
  - Short trips become long in heavy traffic.

## Stall Safety

In general, the longer the trip, the larger the stall. Box stalls are recommended for long trips (over 12 hours). Even on shorter trips, nervous horses—regardless of their size—travel best in large stalls. Most “bad shippers” benefit from being transported in a box stall. Box stalls can also help in extending shipping time.

How the horses should be tied during transport depends on the style of trailer. Use either cross ties or a trailer tie as the situation dictates.

Regardless of the mode of restraint, pay close attention to the length of tie. Ties should neither be too short nor too long. Ties should be long enough to allow the horse to rest his weight on the rear partition. Ties should be short enough to prevent the horse from turning his head completely around to his side.

Full partitions that extend all the way to the floor inhibit horses' ability to spread their legs and decrease the horses' stability. Therefore, if using full partitions, the need for larger stalls increases. The positive aspects of full partitions often outweigh the negative ones. While half partitions allow the horses to spread their legs wider, increasing their stability during shipping, full partitions are the only way to keep the

horses' legs completely separated from each other.

## Placement Planning

The placement of horses within the trailer can be critical to the success of their shipping experience. In general:

- Stalls that are readily accessible and that are easy to put horses in and out of are best for poor loaders and horses that are inexperienced travelers.
- Reserve middle stalls for good shippers and non-aggressive horses.
- Tie aggressive horses slightly away from the others so they cannot harass or try to bite them.

It is also wise to consider placement when hauling stallions or fussy mares. These horses need to be handled with care, given plenty of room, and separated by sturdy, adequate dividers.

## Special Considerations for Difficult Shippers

Most hunters and jumpers are great shippers. However, there are exceptions.

When a horse is purchased, it is usually wise to ask if the horse has any shipping quirks. Horses can remember bad experiences and are hesitant to put themselves back in those situations.

When dealing with difficult horses, rely on experienced haulers' and agents' expertise and tackle potential issues upfront. Most problems can be dealt with, but prior knowledge is important. If you know your horse has problems or difficulties during transport, be sure to mention it to the shipper. Remember, good driving makes confident horses. If your horse is afraid of the trailer, it often indicates that he is afraid of your driving.

*Claustrophobia* is the most common problem horses have in both trailers and airplanes. Ensuring that they have enough space usually takes care of most phobias.

In summary, pre-planning and attention to the details of safety are the hallmarks of successful shippers. Consider all aspects of the horse's needs while in transit, and plan accordingly. If in doubt about your ability to provide safe transport for your horses, it may be best to rely on experienced haulers and agents for guidance. However, it is in your best interests as a trainer to gain the experience, skills, and expertise to make your own shipping decisions and arrangements.