

A Moving Experience

This article, although written for a “non technical” journal, embodies all the good qualities of technical writing: no wasted words, well-organized, and tailored to a specific audience. Describing how to haul your own horse long-distance, it is written from personal experience as a horse owner and veteran mover.

The Chronicle of the Horse awarded this article their 1998 Journalism Award for Feature Articles.

A MOVING EXPERIENCE

Hauling your horse cross-country requires careful organization and preparation, but it can be a safe and rewarding journey.

Jodie Gilmore

Moving a horse commercially is expensive, and many people feel uncomfortable relying on strangers for their horses' well-being. The alternative is to transport your own horse.

The key to a trouble-free trip is in the weeks before the actual departure. Some important areas include: horse health certificates and records; truck and trailer preparation; horse equipment preparation; and trip route and reservations.

Health Considerations: To avoid legal trouble on the road, have the following paperwork with you for each horse: a recent (six months or less) negative Coggins test; recent (30 days or less) health certificate signed by a veterinarian; brand inspection certificate (not required by all states); bill of sale.

It may also be useful to have copies of the horse's vet records.

Two weeks before the trip, gradually switch the horse to the feed he'll eat on the trip: low-protein grain and grass hay. Also begin flavoring his water several days before the trip, so he's less likely to refuse unusual-tasting water on the road. Some people use flavored gelatin, vinegar or apple juice.

Dr. Bob Meyer, chairman of the equine disease commission of the North Carolina Horse Council, also suggests giving the horse an immune stimulant, such as EqStim, so he can more easily resist bacteria and viruses on the trip.

If the horse is shod, consider removing his shoes for transport. Barefoot horses are less likely to severely injure themselves while scrambling in the trailer.

Towing Equipment: The truck and trailer are crucial to your trip's success—without them, you go nowhere. Brady Cambern, the shop foreman at

Gig Harbor Ford in Gig Harbor, Wash., suggests a pre-trip oil/lube/filter job and a safety inspection. In a safety inspection, the mechanic looks for any worn parts that might cause problems on the road.

"Other things you might have done," added Cambern, "include packing the front wheel bearings, and looking at the owner's manual to see if your vehicle is due for any mileage-dependent maintenance, such as a cooling system flush."

Similarly, have a mechanic re-pack the trailer bearings and check the brakes, lights and hitch. Replace any loose or rotting floor boards. Line the trailer floor with rubber mats (this cushions the horses' legs) and add shavings if desired.

Now, create a first-aid kit for the truck and trailer. According to Cambern, it should contain the following:

- spare tires for truck and trailer
- lug wrenches, jack, and tire changer for the trailer
- oil, transmission fluid, and windshield wiper fluid
- road flares and jumper cables
- tools, such as a hammer, screwdrivers, wrenches and pliers
- a roll of electrical tape
- a spare lynch pin for the hitch
- paperwork for the truck and trailer, such as insurance information and registration certificates

If traveling in winter, also include the following:

- cat litter and rock salt
- chains for truck and trailer
- snow shovel

A good way to jump-start a truck and trailer first-aid kit, said Cambern, is to buy a "Road Ready" kit. These usually

Is There A Veterinarian In The House?

On the road, a sick horse can be a nightmare unless you are well-prepared. Pack a first-aid kit, and keep it handy. Dr. Bob Meyer suggests the following kit:

- a variety of bandages, tape, and vet-wrap
- quilts or cotton
- Bute and Banamine
- a stethoscope and thermometer

You may also include the following, if you have room:

- anti-bacterial ointment, iodine, and alcohol
- liniment
- hoofpick
- clippers (battery-operated) for clipping wounds
- clean rags

How do you find a veterinarian on the road? Call the Equine Connection at 1-800-438-2386. The operator will give you the names of nearby veterinarians who are members of the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Operators are available Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m. CST, and on Saturday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. At other times leave a message and an operator will return the call.

contain most of the items recommended and are available from auto parts stores and discount department stores. A cellular phone is always handy.

One additional consideration is whether you need a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) or a U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) number. If you are a private citizen moving pleasure horses, you probably need neither. To be sure, call your state's Office of Motor Carriers (listed in the Federal section of the telephone book, under Department of Transportation, Federal Highway Administration).

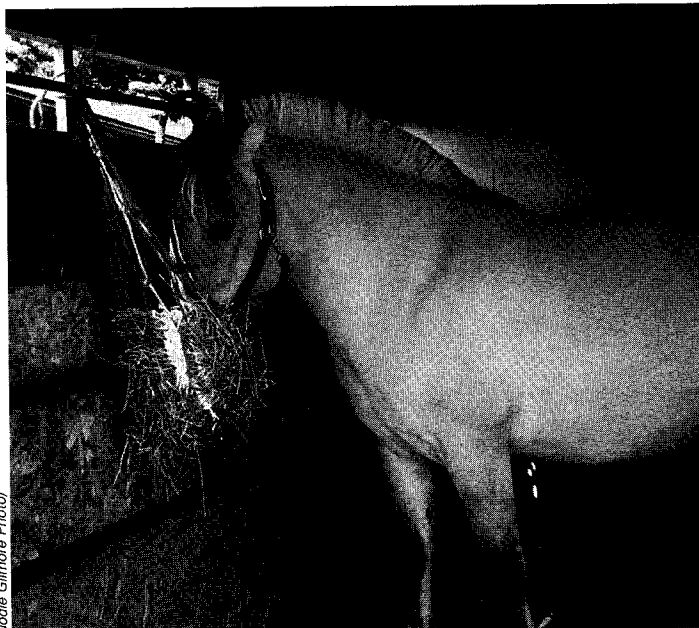
Horse Equipment: A horse's needs on the road are similar to his needs at home, but be prepared for emergencies. Bring the following:

- first-aid kit (see sidebar)
- extra halter and lead rope
- rubber buckets for grain and water and a haynet
- leg protection (boots or wraps)
- grain, hay, salt and water if there's room

If traveling in winter, also bring a blanket for the horse. And if he's changing climates in the move, consider what "clothes" he'll need at his new home and purchase them in advance.

Planning The Route and Making Reservations: Purchase complete maps of the states you're traveling through, and a directory of overnight stabling facilities (see sidebar). Choose the route in advance (stay on major roads where possible), and highlight it on the maps. Depending on how many drivers can assist, you may make 350 to 500 miles a day. It's easier to locate

Encourage the horse to stand sideways to the direction of travel, if possible, and tie the haynet securely and high.



Jodie Gilmore Photo



Lodje Gilmore Photo

Handy items for extended trips include: five-gallon water jugs, plastic bins for bandages, and a tire changer for the trailer.

stabling facilities during daylight, so plan accordingly.

Once the route is broken down into day-sized pieces, look for places to stay at each stop. Call and make reservations and ask for price, accommodations and directions. Now, prepare a reference list of all this information.

Finally, make sure your new home is ready—a stall or paddock, electricity and phone hooked up, water available, etc. If this isn't possible, make reservations at an overnight stabling facility for the first few nights in the target location, so you can prepare the new place.

Other Preparations: Give your itinerary to a friend and set up "check-in" plans. Obtain a list of certified farriers in the new state from the American Farriers Association, choose one and call him or her to get acquainted. Get a phone book for your new area and choose a veterinarian to use if an emergency arises soon after arrival.

On The Road

During the trip, you have three responsibilities: caring for the horse, caring for the towing equipment, and caring for yourself.

Caring for Your Horse: Riding in a trailer is hard work. To make the horse's ride as easy as possible, maintain a steady speed. Make gentle starts and gradual stops, if possible. Plan to rest every so often and give the horse a 15- to 30-minute break.

"Most horses won't stretch to urinate while traveling," said Meyer. "So it's important to stop every three to five hours."

The horse should have free-choice hay and water on the road. At stops, check his supply of both and replenish if necessary. If he's wearing shipping boots or leg wraps, inspect them for looseness.

"When you feed hay in the trailer," said Meyer, "be sure to use a haynet, not a haybag or manger. This allows the dust and debris to fall to the floor, and your horse is less likely to breathe these irritants."

At night, unload the horse (Meyer suggests unloading every eight hours) and exercise him. This keeps him from

getting stiff after a long day in the trailer. After 10 to 15 minutes of mild exercise, introduce him to his overnight surroundings. Stay for about 30 minutes so he knows he's not abandoned in a strange place.

While traveling, cut the horse's grain by at least half to reduce the risk of colic. If he isn't drinking properly, cut his grain completely and feed only grass hay. Use every possible opportunity to offer him water and encourage him to drink.

Caring for Your Vehicle and Trailer: "Check your oil and other fluid levels every time you gas up," said Cambern. He also suggested checking for fluid leaks and feeling the tires and wheels every time you stop. "Test the tires for any excessive heat, which can point to a worn bearing or other problems."

Although the repair kit will enable you to handle many emergencies, it's also a good idea to have access to a towing/repair service such as the American Automobile Association (AAA).

Caring for Yourself: Moving is stressful—pack some favorite foods (like chocolate and granola bars or potato chips). Bring along some relaxing tapes or books on tape. A calm owner is more likely to have a calm horse!

Other Considerations: Verify your reservations the night before you are to arrive. For example, on Tuesday, call and confirm the Wednesday reservations. If traveling in winter, call the State Patrol for road conditions each morning before departing.

At Your New Place

When you arrive at your destination, make sure it's safe for the horse and begin getting acquainted with the new area.

The First Night: Before you unload the horse, check his stall or paddock. Does it have sharp nails, loose wire or

other hazards? Fix these problems the best you can. Make sure the stall is clean—no old bedding, feed, or piles of dust in the feed bin. Check the paddock for noxious-looking weeds or low areas he can jump over. Never turn your horse out into a large pasture the first night, as he may panic and run through the unfamiliar fence.

The next morning, walk the horse around his new pasture. If there are neighboring horses, make sure the separating fence is high enough to prevent injuries, and that your horse can't get a foot stuck in it.

Once the horse knows his boundaries, turn him loose, but don't leave him unattended. Watch him for the first 30 minutes or so, and check on him frequently through the day. This way, you'll catch problems if they develop (a reaction to a new grass, a previously-unseen weak spot in the fence), and he'll be more comfortable with your presence.

The First Few Weeks: Once you have the horse's immediate surroundings under control, look farther afield. Check the yellow pages for feed stores and find out if they carry the supplies you need.

Call your local county extension agent (listed in the government pages in the phone book, under Agriculture) and ask about local poisonous weeds, sources of local hay, weather patterns, and so on. He may also know about local horse organizations, such as trail riding groups, 4-H clubs, Pony Clubs, etc.

Visit the equine vet clinic you selected before the trip, and give them a copy of your horse's records. Call the farrier you contacted and make an appointment if you pulled the horse's shoes before the trip.

Most importantly, spend time with your horse, and watch his health and attitude carefully. □

Where To Stay?

When traveling with a horse, you can camp or keep him at a boarding facility.

Camping with a horse can be fun, and you have complete control over his feed and water. When making reservations at RV parks and KOA campgrounds, ask if they allow horses and what restrictions and facilities they have. Many state parks also have horse facilities.

Pack enough food and cooking utensils, or choose places that have nearby restaurants. Never leave a horse unattended in camp—people may cause mischief. Bring a shovel for cleaning up manure, and garbage bags to remove it.

The enclosure you select depends on your budget and the horse. Portable corrals are nice but expensive. If your horse respects electric wire, buy a battery-powered electric fence charger, five metal T-posts, a post-driver, 25 insulators, and some electric fencing wire. Make an enclosure behind the horse trailer (with the trailer and open door as one

end), string a tight five-wire fence, and hook up the charger.

A few stabling facilities have rooms available to overnight customers, but usually you have to stay in a hotel. Often you can choose a stall or paddock for the horse. When making reservations, tell the owner which you prefer. Remember to ask about weather conditions, stall size, etc.

Before unloading the horse, ask to see the stall or corral, and if necessary, make adjustments. Let them know what time you will pick up the horse, and give them the hotel phone number in case of emergency.

Handy numbers and resources include:

- Nationwide Overnight Stabling Directory 316-442-8131
- KOA Camping Guide 406-248-7444
- Woodall's Campground Directories (Eastern, Western and North American editions)
- Rand McNally Road Atlas
- The Reach's Helping Hands listing 219-347-8223.