

Traveling with Your Horse: Packing and Getting Ready

Many horses spend at least some time on the road every year, whether going to a park for a trail ride or across the country for a big year-end competition. It's important to plan ahead for these trips so that both you and your horse will have a safe, enjoyable time.

- Your route- First ask yourself, how long will it take to get to your destination in a loaded trailer? Make sure to get good road maps for every city that you will be driving through. Up-to-date maps and destination planners are often available for free on the internet. A slightly longer route via a major highway will often be faster than a direct route on windy, bumpy back roads. Travelling at a constant speed on smooth, level highways is also less stressful to your horse, both physically and mentally.
- Pre-travel desk work- This requires a bit of lead time. Stabling forms are usually part of the competition entry forms, and both must be filled out and mailed to the secretary by a certain date. Even if your trip does not involve a show, stall reservations at your destination are required. If your trip will take several days, overnight stops along the way must also be arranged. Do you need to order hay and/or shavings for use at your final destination? Think about how much your horse will need for the time away and how much you can bring from home in your truck and trailer.
- Your accommodations- Don't forget about your own accommodations. Do you need a hotel room? That gives you a comfortable bed and a shower, but may be expensive or far from your horse's stable. Camping out in your truck or trailer (sleeping bag, cooler of food, big flashlights) saves time and money, and may be perfectly adequate if you are only gone a few days.
- Your vehicle- make sure your truck is in good repair with a full tank of gas. Some trucks tow better with higher octane fuel, so consider this if your route will be hilly. Check the lights, brakes and tires on your trailer before you start to pack. (Once a year, the whole rig should be serviced at a reputable mechanics shop.)

Getting your Horse Ready

Each horse will need a negative coggins test, usually done within the past 6 months, for crossing into the States. Some states or competition sites require veterinary health certificates and/or proof of rabies vaccination within the past year.

Take some time to get your horse comfortable with loading, unloading and taking short trips in the trailer before you head out on a longer journey. Shipping is tiring for horses, who must consistently shift their weight and stance to stay balanced during the drive. Most horses appreciate having hay in a securely tied hay net or feed bag to munch on during the trip. It is important to give your horse clean hay, and allow him to drop his head periodically at rest stops.

Dress your horse for the journey according to the time of the year and how thick his hair coat is. Open the trailer windows for ventilation during the drive, but remember that it's still going to be warmer inside the trailer than outside. Protect your horse's legs with leg wraps that cover from the knee/hock down to the ground. The coronary band area (top of the horse's hoof) is the place most susceptible to injury as the horse moves about to keep his balance. You can use quilts, leg wraps, and bell boots or sturdy nylon or Velcro shipping boots. The most common injuries occur during loading or unloading so don't wait to place leg/foot protection on the horse. With proper preparations and precautions you and your horse can have a safe and wonderful trip!

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