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TNH3000-Traveling with Your Horse

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EQUIFACTS

Traveling with Your Horse

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Almost everyone who owns a horse will eventually travel with that horse. The traveling time can be enjoyable and a good experience. Proper planning and preparation to transport horses is the key to a pleasant and successful trip.

People go almost everywhere with their horses. Many go to shows and other competitive horse events. Trail rides and camping are also appealing to many horse owners. Trips to shows and trail rides are primarily for pleasure and enjoyment. However, some trips are for business — to breeding farms, horse sales and training clinics.

Horse owners should address a number of considerations before traveling with a horse. Correct procedures vary, depending on the reason for travel, the distance, weather conditions and type of trailer. The horse owner may consider several alternatives before finding the best solution to ensure a safe and pleasant experience. This fact sheet will address management considerations such as driving habits, health requirements, use of blankets and sheets, unloading during the trip and overnight stabling while traveling with horses. Traveling with a horse can be fun if the trip is planned properly.

Physical Facilities and Conditions at the Destination

Whatever the destination, it is part of good planning to inquire about the available accommodations. Will there be stables? What is the availability of feed and bedding? Will there be adequate tack storage? If possible, talk to someone who has taken horses to that location so he or she can provide information about local accommodations. Do not take anything for granted and always call ahead to verify expectations.

Many horse owners take their dog on horse trips. There are some places where horses are welcome but dogs are not permitted. Most large horse show facilities have dog rules. Check ahead of time to avoid creating a problem with a pet.

Driving Habits

Proper and safe driving habits are essential when hauling horses. Many horses that do not trailer well are the results of poor drivers. Potential drivers should first practice with an empty horse trailer before actually transporting horses.

All stops, starts and even lane changes should be done gradually. Turning should be completed at a much slower speed with a trailer. Fast turns not only increase the risk of injury but also result in bad trailering habits, such as “wall climbing.” The driver must

practice defensive driving at all times. If the driver is not accomplished at backing a trailer, practice should be done with an empty trailer and no on-lookers.

Health Considerations

Health considerations are a major concern for the traveling horse owner. It is extremely important that all vaccinations are up-to-date. A typical vaccination program for horses that are shown or mixed with other horses during the year includes a vaccination for 1) Eastern and Western encephalomyelitis, 2) tetanus, 3) influenza, 4) rhinopneumonitis and 5) possibly Potomac Horse Fever, depending on your travel plans. The vaccinations should be done at least two weeks prior to travel. Rabies may be justified if trail riding in areas where there is an outbreak. Certain areas of the country may have particular problems that are regional in scope and might be of interest to those traveling to that location. Your veterinarian should be able to provide valuable information on the ideal vaccination program for a particular horse.

Medication for horses taking a trip is questionable unless the horse is being treated for a specific problem prior to the trip. Antibiotics are not necessary, and one shot would be worse than none at all. The use of tranquilizers often causes excitable horses to become more excitable and they may lose their balance. Tranquilizers will lower the blood pressure. Also, tranquilizers are not legal in many breed shows. Many veterinarians tube horses with one gallon of mineral oil to help keep horses on feed during a long trip and prevent colic. This practice will probably do no harm but has not been proven to be effective.

A first aid kit for the horse can be very important when traveling to an event. Although many things can be included in a first aid kit, some of the more essential ones are telfa-type non-stick bandage, sheets of cotton bandage, leg quilts and wraps, twitch, elastacon tape, eye stain and wash, elastic bandage, anti-septic soap, bandage scissors and a tube of phenylbutazone paste. These items provide the horse owner reasonable emergency care prior to arrival of the veterinarian. Remember, a good "snug" bandage is the best means to control bleeding.

If a long trip is required, a thorough physical exam by a veterinarian could be

beneficial. Early diagnosis of teeth problems, lameness or perhaps an irregular heart beat can save time and money. Most of these conditions may be treated and corrected prior to the stress of a trip.

Certain health requirements must be met for both instate and out-of-state trips. State requirements for Coggins' tests (EIA) and health certificates vary from state to state. However, proof of negative Coggins' test and a current health certificate are mandatory for the traveler today. Check with your local veterinarian or state veterinarian's office for health requirement information pertaining to all states. Some facilities (fairgrounds, campgrounds), shows or events have health requirements that are beyond those required by state agencies. Always check with show or event management before taking the trip. Do not get stranded at a check point along a hot interstate highway for lack of health documentation.

Feeding and Watering

Feeding the horse properly on the road is just as important as feeding at home. If possible, take enough feed and hay for the entire trip. Hay can be covered with plastic and hauled on top of trailers or in pickup beds. Take along feed buckets so the horse can eat and drink from familiar containers. This also reduces the risk of horses eating from contaminated containers previously used to feed sick horses.

If feed must be purchased on the road, advance preparation is necessary to keep the horse "on feed." One idea is to use only commonly available feeds in preparing rations. Keep it simple so rations can be easily duplicated. For example, grass hay, corn and oats are available almost everywhere. Using these as the primary feed ingredients will make a ration which is easily duplicated no matter where the horse owner may travel. Many horse owners prefer to use commercial feed mixtures. Those brands with a nationwide or regional distribution are generally uniform from location to location and may offer an advantage to the traveler.

Feeding free-choice hay to horses in transit can make trailering a better experience. If a hay net is used, make sure the net is tied high and tight enough to prevent feet or legs from getting caught in the webbing. A bran

mash prior to travel may be helpful to some horses that tend to have digestive disturbances while being hauled.

Water consumption on long trips should be an important consideration for horses. Water should be offered to horses every three to four hours during a long trip. Horses may or may not drink depending on need and weather conditions. Many horse owners put water additives in the horse's water before and during a trip to hide possible taste changes. Lemonade and sports drink powders, as well as soft drinks, are often used as additives. A few drinks along the road may prevent impaction and a colic situation.

Tying the Horse in the Trailer

It is recommended that the horse be tied in the trailer. However, take care to tie the horse with the appropriate length of lead rope so it can adequately move its head and neck for balance. Horses that are tied too short will have restricted movement and balance. However, horses that are tied too long may continually try to turn around in the trailer, aggravate a horse riding next to them or get a leg tangled in the excess lead rope.

Horses should be tied with a quick release knot or fastened with easy release or "panic" snaps on permanently-fixed tie lines in trailers. The horse owner must be able to get the horse untied in an emergency situation. Use lead ropes that are large enough in diameter so the knot will not get too tight. Do not spend time trying to untie a horse in an emergency; carry a pocket knife to cut the lead rope or halter. Horses have choked to death while owners were trying to untie a tight knot.

Ventilation in the Trailer

Providing proper ventilation for horses being trailered can be a tricky business, depending on the season. Generally, all windows and side and overhead vents should be open when hauling horses in the summer. Also, the removal of the upper rear doors, if possible, provides additional ventilation. If conditions are extremely hot, traveling in the cooler times of the day or at night will help reduce travel-related stress. In addition, do not park in direct sunlight. Load the horses immediately prior to leaving.

A well-enclosed trailer makes hauling easy in the winter. However, horses still need some

ventilation and air movement. Avoid drafts on the horse caused by open windows or major air vents. Correct ventilation in the winter is just as important as adequate ventilation in the summer.

Blankets and Sheets

The quantity of covering to be used would depend on factors such as time of year, weather conditions, type of trailer, number and size of trailer vents, sheet or heavy blanket, and even the outside color of the trailer. The use of winter blankets and sheets should be adjusted to the environmental conditions, amount of ventilation of the trailer and hair coat of the horse. A horse may need a heavy blanket on an early March morning in Tennessee but only a light sheet to return home in the afternoon. A horse with a heavy winter coat might be better off without a sheet or blanket, which might compromise the natural insulation of the hair coat.

Use common sense — do not use too much cover for the horses. Dark-colored trailers filled with horses wearing only a light sheet can cause profuse sweating of horses and even heat stroke in the summer. One of the major keys to comfortable trailering is air movement. Do not stop for a long lunch on a hot summer day. Keep the trailer on the road to help provide the much needed air movement.

Unloading During the Trip

Unloading during a trip is a potential risk. Horse owners would need to weigh the importance of some exercise versus the potential for injury from unloading and loading at a strange location. Many horses that are normally easy loaders become excited and refuse to load near highways or roadside parks. However, if the trip lasts for more than 18 hours, the horse should be unloaded, exercised and allowed some time to eat and drink.

Although the trailer should be kept moving to provide air movement, many horses will not urinate or defecate in a moving trailer. Occasional stops are beneficial not only for the horse but for the horse owner as well.

Protecting the Horse in the Trailer

Horses need to be protected from trailer injuries. Leg wraps that extend from the knee or hock downward to include the coronary band should be used routinely. Horses that

paw or kick the trailer or climb the sides may need knee and hock pads. This will help prevent swollen knees and capped hocks. A "head bumper" is good for horses that fight the trailer. This will prevent cuts to the poll and other areas of the head, particularly when unloading.

Tail wraps provide protection for horses that ride the butt bar. However, the tail wrap should not be put on too tight and should be taken off when the horse is unloaded. Do not use elastic tail wraps or vet wrap. These potentially can cut off the circulation to the tail and should be avoided.

Overnight Stabling

There are several ways to obtain overnight stabling accommodations around the country. County Extension offices near your destination or even state Extension horse specialists are excellent sources of stabling information. Many breed journals and other horse magazines provide classified or public service sections for the traveling horse owner. Several directories have been published to provide horse owners with general overnight accommodations, maps and local feed stores. One such guide is the "Nationwide Overnight Stabling Directory," P.O. Box 322, Arkansas City, KS 67005-0322 (316-442-8131).

Other Considerations

Carefully check and service the vehicle and trailer prior to the trip. It is extremely important to check the trailer brakes and lights before the trip. A small repair prior to the trip might save hours of delay from being broken down on the road en route to a horse event. A related fact sheet, TNH-3001 **Tips on Trailering Your Horse**, is available from the county Extension office.

Travel plans should be made to avoid heavy traffic conditions such as rush hour in larger cities. Areas of high traffic congestion and construction that cause stop-and-go driving should be avoided whenever possible.

It is always good to bring an extra halter, lead rope and large snap just in case one breaks. Also, if the horse has special shoeing requirements, packing a couple of extra horse shoes especially designed for the horse could be the difference in competing and not competing in an event.

Prior to each trip, make sure the horse trailer has a properly inflated spare tire. The vehicle and trailer wheels may have different size lug bolts; therefore, it is necessary to make sure that the proper tool is available to change a flat tire on both the truck and trailer. Sometimes the spare tire and wheel are attached to the horse trailer with a completely different size bolt and nut than those tires and wheels on the ground. A jack to adequately lift the truck or trailer should always be included in the vehicle. Proper attention to these considerations can eliminate a potential problem while traveling with the horse.

Summary

There are many enjoyable trips and destinations for horse owners and horses to consider, but there are also problems that can occur if trips are not carefully planned. Discuss the trip with people who have made it before. Try to anticipate all possible problems and carefully plan to avoid them.

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Agricultural Extension Service Charles L. Norman, Dean