

On the Road Again

The Ins and Outs of RVs and Trailers

BY CHARLENE STRICKLAND

You, your horse, your gear—you move it all from barn to the show venue. To enter the arena on schedule, ready to compete, depends on your transport.

Whether you arrive in your own trailer or hire a van, your transportation choice contributes to your success at the show. Pulling your own trailer gives you control over schedule and your horse's safe arrival. You'll probably drive a truck or full-size SUV. If you're not a do-it-yourself show hauler, your horse can ride in your trainer's or a hired van.

And after arrival, your vehicle can become your show headquarters for a day, weekend, or longer. See the sidebar for more about travel trailer or motor home options.

Across the range of horse show vehicles, different features improve travel and showing. When you go show, focus on components that make the competition safe and pleasurable.

Stowing and Loading

You can't haul the complete contents of your barn and closet, so you'll pick what you need at the show. Overloading your rig can endanger you and your horses, with excess pounds riding tires and axles—both rated for maximum weight.

"Tires are your weakest link," said Mark Podeyn of Action RV, Albuquerque. He advised to check air pressure throughout a trip.

John Estep of Sundowner Trailers explained, "You're pulling a heavy truck and trailer, and it's important to maintain air pressure to avoid blowouts. If you have only 60 pounds in a 90 pound tire,

it overloads the other tire. That one blows, and you are sitting on the one that's 60."

You can also damage your truck with too heavy a load. Exceeding towing capacity can blow an engine. Maximize storage space through careful stowing of show gear. Secure loose items in con-

So that all arrive show-ready, position each so they'll travel calmly.

"It's matching the horse with the trailer," said Gigi Stetler of Broward RV Sales, Fort Lauderdale. "I recommend to have the horse first, to get to know their shipping habits before you buy the trailer. Some won't back up, or some don't like a ramp."

Look at the stall width and length. For a larger horse, trailer width affects the length of slant-load stalls. In a trailer seven feet wide, the divider should be angled for sufficient length. A trailer that's eight feet wide will have wheel wells inside the stalls.

A horse could feel even more cramped in a slant-load stall in a trailer that is six feet, six inches wide. Carl Turnbow, who's built Turnbow Trailers for 43 years, explained how size affects the horse. "If you cramp a horse up, he will become a bad hauler. He will fight the trailer.

"We always oversize the stalls. You have to make the trailer longer."

A wider stall in a slant load allows the larger horse to position himself to maintain his balance. With fewer horses, remove dividers to give them more space.

You can also make a slant-load trailer's first stall into a utility stall. "The lower divider panel is removable," said Podeyn about an Exiss trailer. "Leave it in, and you can keep equipment or hay separate."

On the Road

A trailer's ride affects your horse's attitude. He'll arrive at the show grounds happier when he's less concerned about being cramped, hot, sweaty



Brandt Gamma

ainers. Bring a wall organizer from the barn tackroom to the trailer, attaching it to the inside of tack room or dressing room door.

A trailer's ramp is handy for loading large items, such as a tack trunk or scooter. Arrange items you'll need on the trip for quick access.

Loading horses is usually one of your final tasks before you hit the road.

or thirsty.

Comfort starts with a smooth ride. Modern trailers use a rubber torsion suspension to handle uneven roadways.

You can control ventilation inside the trailer. Adjust windows and vents according to the weather. Screens on windows block snow and rain from entering the stall.

Check the roof vents, above each stall. With a two-way vent, in colder weather change the airflow so air blows from the back-not directly down onto the horse.

A closed-circuit TV camera lets you observe your horses in transit, but still stop at intervals to inspect horses. "A blanketed horse should not start to sweat," advised Jim McKague of Jamco. "A horse that sweats is damp, and a draft is more critical. It can tighten the muscles, and can lead to a horse tying up."

Insulated walls reduce noise and heat buildup. From Dream Coach, Ron Hubbard said, "With the insulation factor, horses arrive in a cooler, quieter, more horse-friendly environment. When the trailer is lined and insulated in the roof, it's also cooler for you to use as a changing room."

Dave Dalzell, President of Jamco, added, "A trailer with an insulated ceiling is a benefit in hot or cold weather. In winter, horses will sweat and drip under blankets. Insulated walls and ceiling are a real must in cold climates."

Drop-down feed doors can be on both sides. Dalzell noted the popularity of "tailside" drop-down doors, especially in warmer climates. "You can force air into a trailer, but you can't get rid of the air. With windows open at the front, air comes in. With a window also on the butt side, air goes on through."

To see inside, you can stand on the running board. "On a trailer six feet, nine inches, you typically have a running board," said Estep. About the eight-foot-wide trailer, he noted, "We have a fold-down step under each window, so you can get up and check on the horse."

Podeyn recommended a plastic 25-gallon water tank, shaped to fit in a corner of a dressing room or tack room. "With an onboard water tank, you have your own water. Connect a hose and it pressure fills-then use the hose to fill a bucket."

He also said, "Mangers are coming back in slant load." You can tie a water bucket in the manger so your horse can drink in transit-a drain handles overflow.



Art and Bronkova

Arrival and Settling In

Know where your rig can pull in for unloading horses at their assigned stalls. If you plan to show from a trailer, find a spot where you can tie horses safely.

Ensure safe unloading with a secure ramp or walk-through doors. Longer trailers or vans have room for side loading doors or ramps.

Tom Scheve, co-author of the book,

The Complete Guide to Buying, Maintaining, and Servicing a Horse Trailer, said, "The walk-through trailer is open in the front. The horse has lots of head room."

Turnbow advised, "Anytime you ask a horse to back out, he

becomes nervous. I've seen horses shoot out of a trailer. People get hurt when a horse runs out."

You can remove interior fittings for safer unloading. The trailer might have a collapsible rear tack compartment, where the partition folds against the wall. Dalzell noted on the Jamco that you can pull pins to remove dividers, and even take the center post off the trailer's rear.

Unloading lights over doors help during late arrival. You'll also appreciate doors that are easy to open and close, and door hinges that withstand abuse from humans or horses.

Hubbard explained about the Dream Coach: "Our door is a double-lipped jamb indoor facing, totally welded. There are no screws or pop rivets holding the hinges on, or the door together."

You can use your trailer for storage during the show. A roof-mounted hay rack holds hay your horse is used to eating. Remove all dividers so you have

access to the entire trailer.

A dressing room adds only two to six feet to a slant-load trailer's length. Some designs include a tack compartment. "It's a mid-tack room with swing-out saddle racks," said Podeyn. "But it doesn't take up the full width of the trailer. There's no wasted space."

Other tack storage can include a removable saddle tree, that you set up in your barn's tack stall. Or your trailer might have a "pitchfork" rack with bars to hold blankets and saddle pads, neatly folded and stacked for quick access.

With horses settled, you're ready to enjoy the human comforts of show headquarters. Level the trailer for using the dressing room or living quarters-adjust a gooseneck's landing gear, or the front wheel jack on a bumper pull.

In living quarters, you have a 1/2 bath or 3/4 bath, along with a galley and sleeping area. You can sleep near your horse, in the show's parking lot or camping area.

Estep said, "It's less expensive to stay in your trailer than to be in hotels every weekend. You can rest and have a quick snack. You feel a little bit more at home, traveling on the road all the time."

Even a dressing room can be a cozy home for a few days. "A dressing room is your retreat, where you can rest at the show," said Podeyn. Walls are lined and insulated, and the space is carpeted. In a gooseneck, you can set up a mattress in the nose, and can even add a "cowboy toilet" porta-potti in a stall.

Robin Walls of Sidekick Trailers noted the popularity of living quarters. "We sell to major trainers. If they have a client's million-dollar horse, they won't leave it. They stay with it. It's not only for the convenience, for also for the safety factor."

Opposite: A comfortable journey will enable your horse to compete at his best. Above: Get to know your horse's shipping habits so you can load and travel safely and comfortably.

Sleeping Onsite

If you plan to camp at the show grounds, your rig can range from spartan to luxurious. Probably the least expensive vehicle is a pickup truck you drive to pull your trailer, equipped with a camper shell.

You can stay in a conversion van, or a motor home of the Class A or Class C type. These RVs are limited in their towing capacity. Tom Scheve cautioned, "Pulling all that weight plus itself is really hard on the engine. A two horse trailer with a dressing room is 6000 pounds."

About the high end of motor coaches, Podeyn said, "Some of them have tremendous power and can pull 12,000 pounds." Expect a price tag of \$200,000 to 300,000 for such a luxurious motorhome.

More affordable is the gooseneck trailer with RV-like living quarters. Scheve said, "They are popular because it's safer and easier to hook your trailer to a truck, and have 12 to 14 feet of living quarters on the front." Living quarters meet standards of the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association.

Like a motorhome, you enter through a camper door, and have heating and cooling powered by propane and RV batteries. Separate water tanks supply fresh water and hold gray or black water.

Even the longest living quarters may be only 15 feet, somewhat crowded for more than two people. An alternative is to caravan to the show, with a horse trailer and a travel trailer.

At the show, you can operate self-contained, using your batteries and propane tanks, or connect to the hookups at a show's campground. Stetler explained, "I just built a campground in the show grounds at Wellington [Florida], where I have 60 RVs to rent. People love it. You roll out of bed, and you're there for a class. You can go back inside and change your clothes for the weather."



Arnd Bronkhorst

Onsite, you can set up chairs to relax beside your trailer. Sundowner builds 1000 trailers a year with living quarters. "Virtually all have an awning," said Estep. He noted an upgrade over the rollout awning: "An electric, automatic awning has a certain intelligence built in. It folds up automatically in high winds."

Show Ring Countdown

Organize your gear in the trailer for easy access while tacking up and untacking.

In a tackroom, carpeted walls behind saddle racks protects saddle leather from rubbing against aluminum or steel. Halter hooks hold your bridles, halters, and martingales.

Arrange tack in your rear or side tackroom so you can locate what you need in the usual sequence. Locking doors secure your rig when you're away.

The dressing room should have hooks to hang tote bags or garment bags. A clothes rod and hat shelf are your closet.

Arriving at the competition site, or back at home, with happy, safe horses should always be your trailering goal.

Store grooming supplies in a brush tray installed on the dressing room door, or keep the grooming kit just inside the tack room door. With tie rings, you can secure your horse to the trailer for grooming and tacking.

Another nicety for show preparations is a self-contained lighting system in a dressing room. A trailer can house its own RV battery. "You can unhook from your tow vehicle, and still have lights," said Podeyn.

So pull up a chair under your awning, and chat with your show buddies. From your seat, you can keep an eye on your horse while snacking. Whatever rig you pick, its features increase your enjoyment while you're waiting for your next trip through the in-gate. ■

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Hiring a Shipper

No trailer? Hitch a ride with your trainer or a friend, or ship your horse to the show with a commercial hauler. Jack Williams, Beacon Hill Transportation, Wingdale, NY, explained how his company ships both locally and long distance. "We get calls from trainers for a local show. For a one-day show, the driver waits at the show. The farm will use the van as a barn."

For long distance hauling, shippers may have regular schedules to and from major show venues. Even if you're not a regular customer, you can get your horse on the van using what's called "Carrier Convenience." Williams said, "People call and need to get a horse on any load where there's room."

Your horse would be on an air-ride van. You can pick your stall size, as one of three or two horses side by side, or a box stall.

Your horse would need documentation: a current Coggins test and health certificate. You can ship him with his blankets, but many carriers discourage leg wraps.

"Sometimes a farm sends a groom following us," said Williams. "He helps give hay and water, and takes blankets off. It's easier because he knows the horses. He's going down to Florida anyway, and the farm likes their own people to take care of the horse."