



Tips for Safer, Happier Trailer Travel

Once your horse is trained to load into and out of a trailer, there are several additional things you can do to make the horse's ride a more Fear Free experience.

Load facing the barn or pasture

Horses load up more easily when the trailer opening is positioned facing towards the area the horse wants to go.

Consider a trailer buddy

An already trained horse that's relaxed in the trailer offers added comfort when they're loaded up first. However, avoid placing horses with a tumultuous relationship next to one another.

Face in the direction you want the horse to go

Position your own body and feet to face in the direction you want the horse to go, such as towards the inside of the trailer when loading, rather than turning to face the horse, which inadvertently signals the horse to stop.

Offer stable footing in the trailer

Avoid slippery substrates such as loose shavings. Instead, stick to the rubber matting already present.

Or, if bedding is added, use a heavier, weighted or pellet type bedding that increases traction and is less apt to fly up in the air and enter the horse's respiratory system.

Keep the trailer level

A level trailer enhances balance and ease of travel. In contrast, an unbalanced trailer increases muscle soreness from the horse developing a compensatory stance and increases risk of a fall.



Back it up

Because more of a horse's weight is on his forelimbs, it's generally safest to back him out of the trailer. However, in a new location with a variety of unfamiliar odors and sounds the horse will likely unload easier facing front.

Plan additional travel time

Drive smoothly and safely so that the horse's ride is as comfortable as possible. A rough ride will create a negative experience, and may even result in injury. Also, give the horse plenty of time to load and unload as they adjust to lighting contrasts.

Consider a breakaway feature for tying

Tie the horse to a breakaway, rather than fixed point. Or, consider a breakaway feature for a halter. Doing so prevents the horse from being left hanging from their halter should an accident occur.

As an extra precaution in slant-load design trailers, the lead rope can be tied with a quick-release knot with added breakaway function in the stall behind the horse that's closer to the exit, so that he can be untied before opening his partition.

Enclosed trailer considerations

Open vents for airflow. Windows may be opened, depending on the weather and travel speed, but should have protective bars to keep the horse's head safely inside to reduce risk of head injury.

Consider wearable travel gear

Horses traveling in an open livestock-trailer design may need a blanket for traveling in colder weather, and a fly mask to protect their eyes and face from wind.

Horses may be outfitted with protective gear including head bumpers, fly masks, blankets or sheets, and leg wraps. Leg wraps can protect from cuts and abrasions, but increase a horse's tendency to overheat, and in one study were shown to increase risk of travel injury, as leg wraps may unravel or increase angst in a horse unaccustomed to their use. Ensure the horse is familiarized with all gear prior to travel. Don't use stressful travel time to add new items to his "outfit."

Offer forage

Forage is a pacifier for horses, so having it available during travel alleviates boredom and increases happy relaxation. Use either the inbuilt feed bunk of the trailer or stuffed hay nets or bags that are tied up high and kept away from tangling in the horse's legs. Hay nets or bags can also be dunked in water to reduce flying debris during travel.

Reduce excess noise

- Take care to close doors and latches quietly.
- Lubricate all joints, doors, gates, and latches of the trailer. Swinging chains, latches, "butt bars", and trailer ties, etc., should be secured.
- Consider using ear poufs (ear plugs for horses), especially for highly sensitive horses.



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