

Out and about with...

Marie Rippingale REVN looks at safe and comfortable travel for horses

With horse ownership becoming more popular and shows becoming more accessible, horses are being transported more frequently and for longer distances. We don't all have to get our horses to Rio, but short journeys are no less important.



ROUTE PLAN

The route for road transport should be carefully considered. If possible, plan transport times to avoid extremes of heat or cold. Night travel can be advantageous because ambient temperatures will be lower during hot weather, traffic is likely to be lighter, refuelling might be faster, and horses could be more relaxed during the evening. Plan regular stops to check horses and, on long journeys, offer them water every four to six hours. Locate vets along the way in case of a medical emergency.

FIRST AID KIT

Take a first aid kit with items such as sterile bandage material, cotton wool, adhesive wrap and tape, leg wraps, scissors, rectal thermometer, antiseptic solution and disposable gloves.

BLANKETS AND BANDAGES

Travel boots can be useful if horses are accustomed to wearing them. Train the horse to wear protective bandages if you plan to use them. If the horse is rugged (not advised unless it is cold), select a rug that will not overheat the horse. The horse will be using his muscles to balance and there could be limited ventilation once the vehicle is fully loaded.

RECOVERY PERIOD

Despite efforts to prevent transport-related disease, some horses will become ill during or within the first three days of long-distance transport. It is advisable to plan for a convalescent period of at least three days. Contact a vet if the horse exhibits nasal discharge, refuses to eat, or has a rectal temperature over 38.5°C.

FEED AND WATER

Clean water should be offered approximately every three to six hours during prolonged ground or air transport. It is advisable to bring water from home as some horses are reluctant to drink water that is not from the home sources. In warmer conditions, high humidity, or when horses are sweating, water should be offered more frequently. It is important that horses eat during long journeys. However, it is also imperative that the environment of the transport vehicle has as little contamination of the air with respirable particles as possible. Because hay nets must be placed very close to (or within) the breathing zone of the horse, it is essential that hay be as dust-free as possible. It is recommended that hay be soaked in water for at least 30 minutes. Alternatively feed haylage, as it contains minimal fungal spores and dust particles and does not need soaking.

AFTER ARRIVAL

Horses that travel well will be bright and alert with a normal rectal temperature (37.5-38.5°C) upon arrival. Unload horses as soon as possible. They should drink voluntarily and be keenly interested in eating within one to two hours. Hand walking or turnout in a small paddock for an hour or so is recommended.