



On the Road – Horse Transportation

Alexander Grayton

[Back to Articles...](#)

HORSE TRANSPORTATION – ON THE ROAD

Shipping horses is no simple task. Our horses are precious cargo, to say the least, and they can make the process difficult and complicated. It must be so, as we are indeed putting them in an aluminum box on wheels and driving them about without their comprehension of direction, speed or reason. It must be strange for them. Certainly the horses get used to getting on the trailer at one location and getting off somewhere different, but we must always do our best to look out for their safety. There are a few considerations when on the road hauling your horses.

It is important to have a big and powerful enough truck to haul your trailer. If you drive West or South out of Alberta to any of the popular horse shows, you will drive through a mountain range. This means long uphill climbs, seemingly endless downhill sections, and lots of windy roads. The truck needs to have enough horsepower and torque to effortlessly climb the hills without losing too much speed, and especially if you are hauling a gooseneck-style trailer with four or more horses, a dual-rear wheel truck (dually) is nearly a must for improved handling and balance.

The biggest safety concern, however, will be stopping power. If you are driving down a long hill into a turn, you need to be able to control the speed of your vehicle in spite of the downhill grade, meaning that your brakes must be substantial. In general, the larger the truck is, the larger the braking system. Most dual-rear wheel trucks these days come with an engine brake, which alleviates the strain on the wheel brake system and in turn makes for a smoother ride for the horses. The engine brake consists of a valve that limits the exhaust coming from the engine, which forces the engine to slow down. When in action, the engine brake feels a lot like gearing down, but with considerably more power behind it. It is a very highly recommended feature for hauling a heavy trailer.

Most standard pickup trucks that are used for hauling will have close to the same fuel economy. This means that when hauling, drivers will have to stop to fuel up every 450-500 kilometres. Certainly some trucks can do better, and others maybe a bit worse, but this timeframe is convenient for drivers who may need to stop for a short refreshment break. This is also a good schedule to check the horses – give them more hay, fill water buckets, and ensure they are all behaving normally. If any of the horses appear to be in distress, a quick phone call to either a local vet or your normal vet at home is a good protocol to determine your next steps. Thankfully with the wide availability of internet connection and cellular phone coverage, there are fewer places in North America where it is impossible to connect with help.

A good investment for safety as well as peace of mind is a surveillance camera system for the trailer. Typically equipped with three or four cameras that can be positioned as the user may wish throughout the trailer, a monitor mounted in the truck displays the live feed in order to keep an eye on the horses while on the road. This is obviously handy to identify any serious or sudden issues that arise while on the road, but can also be interesting information about how your horses tolerate hauling. Some horses stand perfectly still,



On the Road – Horse Transportation

Alexander Grayton

[Back to Articles...](#)

following the motion of the trailer, while others may keep their heads on the ground eating all the hay they can reach. If your trailer is set up for box stalls, the camera system can shed some light on how the horses prefer to stand while the trailer is moving – straight forward, standing on an angle, lying down, or constantly moving. This aspect of the camera is mostly for interest's sake, but it may help explain how your horse comes off the trailer. If your horse is uncomfortable and tense while shipping, you may need an extra day or two off the trailer before they feel ready to compete.

One of the most inconvenient aspects of horse shipping is the inevitable flat tire. If you haul a trailer for long enough, you will have a flat tire, no matter how diligent you are about checking tire pressures and re-packing bearings. This means you should have roadside safety equipment in the truck or trailer, the tools to change a tire, and of course the skills to do so. Having an AMA membership for RV's or trailers is also a good idea, as sometimes the flat tire can happen in difficult places that may not be safe for tire changing without some assistance.

Ultimately, shipping horses is an exercise in safety and responsibility. Our horses count on us to look after them and keep them safe while we bring them from one place to another. They are vulnerable in the trailer, and we must be prepared, educated, and aware of all aspects of hauling. Experience and hours on the road help, and the AMA and other organizations offer trailer driving courses that can further develop the skills needed to properly look after our horses.