



Horse Trailers

Alex Grayton

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HORSE TRANSPORTATION — WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A HORSE TRAILER

One of the most important, yet sometimes onerous, tasks involved with owning a horse is finding a way to transport the horse safely to any number of places – horse shows, vet clinics, training facilities, and so on. It's possible to find a friend that owns a truck and trailer to borrow, or of course there are a number of great commercial horse transport companies. But if there are many trips on the calendar, sometimes buying a horse trailer of your own is the most sensible choice economically as well as for convenience.

SIZE MATTERS

It is clear that if your trailer will only ever need to transport one or maybe two horses at a time, the biggest trailers can be excluded from your search. If, on the other hand, you travel to many horse shows with a full stable, maybe a 7- or 8-horse angle haul is the best choice for you.

Most trailers will have a tack room or tack storage area. It is important to consider the trailer's primary use. If it will be used to make short runs locally, whether working off the trailer at a small horse show or making a quick trip to the clinic or something, a large tack room may not be necessary. If long trips to big shows will be on the calendar, a larger tack room should be considered. It is sometimes surprising how much equipment needs to be taken along for the longer trips, and running short on space is a difficult problem! The balance must be found between the desired tack room size and how heavy you are comfortable making the trailer!

TOW VEHICLE

Some may have seen the small trailers in Europe jetting about the countryside towed by an Audi station wagon. That is almost never seen in North America. We seem to like big vehicles here. And big trailers. Our North American two-horse trailers are considerably heavier than the European versions, meaning that even for the smaller trailers here, a fairly big vehicle is needed to pull the trailer safely. A large SUV or a half-ton pickup truck can be sufficient for the smaller bumper-pull trailers, but as the trailer size increases, a more powerful truck will be needed.

INTERIOR DESIGN

Once you have identified the purpose and regular use of the horse trailer, and have a suitable tow vehicle, the final important step is to decide the interior configuration. That is, how many horses need to fit comfortably in the trailer, and in what order – straight load or slant load (i.e. horses facing straight ahead or on an angle). There are, of course, pros and cons to each.

The straight load option often means the length of the trailer will be longer than a comparably-sized slant load, simply due to the length of the stalls inside. With that said, with standard options from a dealership, the straight load trailers make it easier to get to each of the horses individually to feed, water, change blankets, remove wraps, or any number of things you may wish to do while on the road. Also, loading and unloading in whatever order you prefer is easier. With the slant load, it is very difficult to get in to the horse



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way up at the front of the trailer when it is fully loaded, without crawling through/under the others, or unloading and reloading.

The slant load really does save on size. And size means weight. Every extra foot of trailer means real weight that your vehicle needs to pull. And every additional foot needs to be accounted for in turns and driveways.

In commercial transport trailers, and now also most often seen in private trailers, more people are choosing to configure the interior into 'California box stalls'. This is essentially a fully-contained rectangular space. A partition of full height separates each horse from the horse in front, behind, or beside it. They normally are a double stall, meaning a little extra width for the horse's comfort. The best part of this configuration is that the horses do not need to be tied up, as they are contained in their standing stall. The horses can eat hay off of the ground, and drink from a water bucket that can be hung in the stall. In terms of horse health, this is optimal. Eating from the ground is important for the horse, as they are physically designed to operate this way, from the way their teeth chew to allowing drainage from the nose and sinus cavity along the trip.

It seems like there really are an infinite number of options for a horse trailer. It is important to research the options readily available, and to be clear about the intended use (including what you may want to do one day in the future). One of the best resources available is the combined knowledge of the shippers and horse trailer owners who have lived through so many of these options – capitalize on their experience and decide what best fits your unique needs.