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The Long Haul: Tips To Ensure Your Horse Ships Safely

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With the winter show circuits in full swing, we're likely starting to consider what is in store for our horses come spring and summer. While some will stay home, others may take a short trailer ride to a local show or travel far for a multi-week circuit.

As horse people, we have likely heard our share of shipping horror stories: a trailer that flipped on the highway, the horse that arrives at its destination with severe shipping fever, or a horse sustaining a substantial injury simply by slipping as it walks off the trailer. Luckily, safe transports outweigh accidents, but there is still an inherent risk in anything we do with these precious yet unpredictable animals. Injuries can happen and often there isn't an identifiable error.

While so much is out of our control, there are a number of steps and precautions you can take before your horse steps onto the trailer to help ensure a smooth and safe trip.



*Doing research upfront can help ensure your horse has a safe trip.
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Ship a healthy horse, maintain a healthy horse

While this may seem obvious, shipping a healthy horse is critical to preserving its health and well-being. In addition to ensuring that your horse is up to date on immunizations, you may also want to consider having a vet conduct an exam to catch things that may not be glaringly obvious. If you are shipping across state lines, this is not only a helpful precaution, it's likely a necessity. States have varying requirements when it comes to presenting a horse's bill of health, so do your homework ahead of time to make sure you have the right documentation such as certificate of veterinary inspection (CVI) and negative Coggins.

For a long trip, find out the feeding and watering schedules, how the horses will be monitored while in motion, and if there will be any layovers. Standing on a trailer for long periods of time can be stressful for a horse and problems can crop up quickly, so it's important to know how the carrier plans to keep your horse comfortable and safe.

Ask beforehand about the positioning and number of horses being transported. We once saw a case where an owner requested compensation after his stallion was attacked by another stallion that had broken loose from the ties on the trailer. Knowing where your horse will be and more about the horses around it could save you a lot of trouble.

You should also understand whether the carrier has any authority to enlist a veterinarian's care for your horse if an injury requires immediate treatment. Discussing this issue in advance could avoid confusion at the time of an accident when timely care may be critical.

Know you can trust the carrier

While cost is a common concern, a lower price tag may mean higher risk. Your horse's well-being is in the hands of the transporter, so be sure you are working with an experienced and qualified company that is a licensed carrier in good standing and has the appropriate commercial driver's license.

It's also a good idea to go online and explore the reputation and licensure of the transporter or company before you confirm the trip. You may want to verify that the driver's insurance coverage does not have exclusions that would result in a lack of any coverage for the damages claimed.

For example, a 1988 Court of Appeals decision in Louisiana ruled in favor of the transporter's insurer and against the owner of horses injured during transport, notably because the clear language of the auto policy excluded property damage to property owned or transported by the insured or in the insured's care, custody, or control. While it may defy logic that a horse carrier would buy coverage that excluded horses being transported, courts will generally look at the language of the policy to determine the outcome even if it is unfavorable to one of the parties.

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This article originally ran on [Horse Network](#) on October 6, 2020.

Briefly: A Look Back at Leone Equestrian Law Press



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"Equine Law With Armand Leone"

In addition to an equine lawyer, Armand Leone, Jr., is an accomplished show jumper and holds a total of three postgraduate degrees from Columbia University Law School, New York Medical College, and Columbia Business School. Tap the button below to hear about his unique experiences and his takes on the sport and equestrian law in a 2021 interview with The Equestrian Podcast's Bethany Lee.

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Led by Armand Leone, Jr., MD, JD, MBA, Leone Equestrian Law LLC provides legal services and consultation for equestrian professionals ranging from riders and trainers to owners and show managers in the FEI disciplines on a wide variety of issues.

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