



Photo: Andrew Ryback Photography
Top photo: Courtesy of The Dutta Corp

Sky

AIR TRAVEL WITH HORSES

by Lindsay Berreth/Jump Media

In March, World Equestrian Center – Ocala (WEC) welcomed riders from 10 nations for one of four qualifying legs of the 2025 Longines League of Nations™ series, a team show jumping competition leading to the Longines League of Nations™ Final in Barcelona, Spain, in October.

While many top U.S. and foreign riders are based in Ocala and Wellington, Florida, for the winter, most of the horses and riders competing at the \$770,000 Longines League of Nations™ Ocala CSIO5*-LLN traveled on a flight from Europe.

Equine air travel has vastly improved in the last few decades,

making it easier than ever for these top athletes to travel thousands of miles safely and efficiently. Flying horses can be much less stressful than trailering them; the stop-start nature of being on the road makes horses brace themselves in the trailer and can tire them out after hours.

Left & right photos: Courtesy of The Dutta Corp
Middle photo: Andrew Ryback Photography



Tim Dutta, founder of The Dutta Corporation, has been flying horses internationally and throughout North America since he started the company in 1988.

"We are in 16 countries," he described. "We do all the major championships from Pan American Games, Olympic Games, World Championships, Nations Cups, Global Champions Tour and Longines League of Nations™. We're shipping the

"The stalls have changed from wooden jet stalls or FRP [fiberglass reinforced plastic] jet stalls," he said. "They are now all aluminum and the hardware is stainless steel. We have soft gels on the floor, which give the horses more comfort. The horses don't slip and slide due to turbulence, landing or takeoff. There is also much more airflow thanks to the modern aircraft we now use — instead of the older,

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To me, every horse is the same," he expressed. "The pressure is, of course, the timeline. If they don't show up on time, the show will not go on. It's pretty much standard for us and we work for the best of the best in the world in all the disciplines. So, we're used to stress. We're used to delivering horses on a time-definite schedule. We got lucky — everything went very smoothly, and we had top sport in Ocala. They had success and they were very happy going home too.

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Dutta says the biggest change he has seen in his three decades of business is the volume of horses shipped. International equestrian sport and horse breeding are big business and the number of flights from Europe to the U.S. has increased.

Dutta has also contributed to the way horses are shipped by air, including helping make changes to the type of stalls used inside of the airplanes.

recirculated air, they're getting fresher air. We have seen over the years less shipping fever, less bacteria [infections]; so that has improved, just like anything else over time."

For the Longines League of Nations™ in Ocala, Dutta and his crew shipped 44 horses on a charter plane from Liege, Belgium, to Miami.

"Our team meets the flight and the horses get offloaded and transported to the import quarantine center, where, depending on which part of the world they come from, they stay



Photos: Courtesy of The Dutta Corp.



for a certain length of time,” said Dutta. “If they come to the U.S. from Europe, three days of quarantine is standard. If they arrive from South America or Mexico, a seven-day quarantine is required. Once the blood work is done and we have paid the customs and tariffs and duties and processed through the USDA [United States Department of Agriculture], then they’re released based on their blood work.”

Margo Thomas is the head groom for U.S. Olympic team gold medalist Laura Kraut and she has had plenty of experience flying with her charges throughout her career. Kraut, who is based in the Netherlands for most of the year, helped her teammates win the 2025 Longines League of Nations™ Ocala CSIO5*-LLN on St. Bride's Farm's Dorado 212.

Just like humans, horses are only allowed a certain amount of carry-on luggage and Thomas has packing down pat. Most of the horses' equipment for competition, such as bridles, saddles and boots, will be shipped separately, but they are allowed a flight bag. Depending on the climate at the destination, Thomas will include a light blanket or cooler, treats and a small amount

of grain she mixes with water to encourage the horse to drink.

She will usually put bandages on the horse's front legs to protect them and often skips the blanket. “Generally, the rule of thumb is you don't put anything on their back legs because you can't get in with the horses while you're on the flight

When it's time to load the plane, the horses are walked into a stall on a pallet that holds one to three horses. The pallet is lifted onto a truck, then driven to the plane and the horses are loaded into the cargo area.

Horses can fly coach, business class or first class, just like humans. Coach is three horses to a pallet,

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because it's not safe,” she said. “We generally ship our horses without blankets on. It's cool on the flight, but because it's like shipping in a truck, they're constantly balancing, so we don't want them to get too warm.”

Horses are grazers, so always having something in their stomachs is important to their digestion and the act of eating or grazing is calming to them. They are given a hay net to keep them busy during the flight and they always have access to water.

business class is two to a pallet and first class is a private stall. Typically, horses flying to a major championship are in business class.

“It's our standard operating way to ship horses,” said Dutta. “It's safer; it's better. The stalls are luxurious, and hopefully, they travel with more comfort and less stress on their back.”

Since there are no regular passengers on a plane shipping horses, once grooms are finished getting the horses settled, they must



Photos: Courtesy of The Dutta Corp



go up to the cabin to be seated near the pilot for takeoff and landing. Once the plane reaches 10,000 feet, they can return to check on them.

Most horses don't feel much difference between flying and trailering on the road. "They are very similar to us," remarked Dutta. "Some people, like me, fall asleep before they leave the gate, and some horses need rosary beads and a gin and tonic! It just depends on who they are. Most of the time, horses do very well and we don't have issues with them. And sometimes they are very nervous and they need to be taken care of."

Thomas says she will check on the horses every one to three hours, offering water and making sure

they're happy. Unless it's a major championship, vets don't usually fly with the horses and grooms don't need to take vital signs unless there is a concern.

After being unloaded from the plane at their destination, the horses will stay in quarantine for the mandatory period, then they will be trailered to their final destination.

With his decades of experience flying horses, Dutta trusts his crew to transport horses safely from point A to point B. They have all learned to work through the occasional stresses of shipping multimillion-dollar horses that mean so much to their owners, riders and caretakers. He is thrilled to have helped the Longines League of Nations™ Ocala run smoothly.

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