

All About Pets

The national pet care information service

LOADING AND TRANSPORTING HORSES



THE BLUE CROSS

Britain's pet charity

Horses need to be transported for a variety of reasons, from occasional journeys such as moving home, changing owner or visiting the vet, to more frequent travelling to attend shows or events. Whatever the reason or frequency of the journey, it is important that the horse is safe and comfortable in order to minimise stress.



Loading and preparation for travelling

Even horses without competitive careers may need to travel, as a horse may need to be taken to a vet for emergency treatment, or an owner's circumstances may require a change of home. Horse owners need to be fully prepared for any eventuality, ensuring that their horse is happy to be loaded and to travel should the need arise.

Equally, for a horse expected to travel regularly, bad experiences when loading or on previous journeys can leave a lasting impression. A horse being difficult to load is a frequent complaint, but one that is both preventable and redeemable.

Training to load

Training a horse to load takes patience and preparation. Never leave it until the last minute and never suddenly decide to load a horse when you are in a hurry and short of time. It can be quite unnerving for a horse to walk on a ramp and into a small space. Take one step at a time and remain calm. There are many different approaches to loading a horse to choose from, so use a method that does not either frighten or punish your horse or present a safety risk to either you or your horse.

Do not fall into the habit of using bribes to get your horse up the ramp (one day when it is really important they will not work). If you wish to use food as a reward, give a small feed in the trailer once the horse has loaded. If your horse has a known loading or travelling problem due to a bad experience or journey, be prepared to look at every aspect of your horse's training and the type of transporter you are using. You may need to enlist the help of someone more experienced, but be happy with the methods they plan to use to help load your horse.



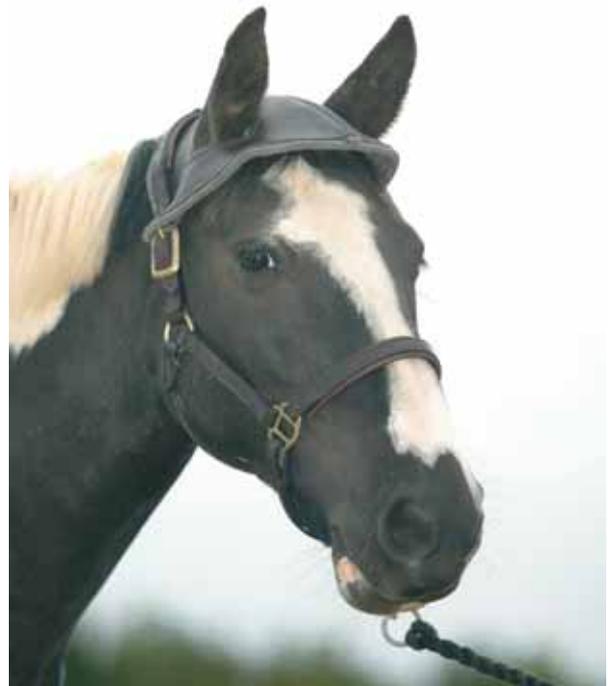
Once your horse is loading happily, move onto short trips and avoid making your first trip to a show, as both you and your horse are more likely to become stressed. By taking small steps and remaining calm and patient, the end result should be that both you and your horse are happy to travel, whatever the destination.

Travel clothing and protection from injury

Horses should wear protective travel clothing to protect them from injury and to ensure that they stay safe and comfortable during loading and the journey itself.

The equipment and clothing used should be well fitting and of a suitable type for the conditions and the individual horse's needs.

A horse should always wear a good leather head-collar that fits correctly. Poll guards protect the top of a horse's head from injury, while tail guards and bandages are important to prevent damage and rubbing to the tail.



Leg protection can be provided in the form of bandages or purpose-made leg protectors. Whichever you choose, check that they fit correctly and in the case of bandages, ensure that you are aware how to apply them safely and correctly.

There are many types of sweat and cooler rugs on the market to help your horse arrive at the destination looking smart, and these can also prevent a horse becoming chilled whilst in transport, which is important. However, beware of over-rugging your horse, as many are already warm (especially field-kept horses and ponies) and unnecessary sweating and overheating compromises the welfare of your horse.

With all of the above equipment, it is essential that the horse is used to it and happy to wear it, and is able to move comfortably before being asked to wear it while travelling. Many horses react to protective leg wear and can feel restricted by it, so spend time with your horse before planning a trip, practising getting “dressed up”. The time spent practising is invaluable.



Types of vehicle and driver considerations

Using a lorry or towed-trailer depends on personal choice, finances and requirements. However, if you are planning to do a lot of long distance travelling, a lorry may be the better option. Some bigger horses also prefer lorries but either choice will need regular maintenance and servicing to maintain safety. If towing, the towing vehicle must be capable of towing the trailer's maximum authorised mass (MAM). Check vehicle specifications to find its weight and towing capacity.

Internal designs can vary greatly and again can depend on personal choice, taking into consideration the type and size of horse. The options are to transport the horse facing forwards, backwards, or herring-bone (on a slant). Whichever you choose, ensure that there is sufficient (but not too much) space for your horse, allowing it to brace around corners and when braking. Too much room can allow the horse to fall over during



travelling and be far more tiring. The trailer or lorry should be light and airy, allowing your horse plenty of headroom, and allowing him to stand straight within the space.

To provide a comfortable journey, the lorry or trailer should be of solid and sound construction, with a good quality, non-slip rubber flooring, padded partitions, and a ramp with matting or a rubber surface. The ramp angle should be as shallow as possible, without too great a step onto the ramp. If choosing a horsebox, ensure that the engine has enough horsepower to avoid constant gear changes.

Legalities

Accepting payment in any form for transporting horses requires an operator's licence. This includes any kind of reward in exchange for transportation, and penalties for not using a licenced transporter could be a fine and your insurance being null and void. Anyone who has passed his or her car-driving test on or after 1 January 1997 is now required to pass an additional test in order to tow a trailer of a MAM over 750kg. The test requirements can be found through the DVLA.

Vehicles of 3.5 tonnes and up to 7.5 tonnes MAM can be driven by any driver with a category B Licence. If the driving test was taken after 1 January 1997, the driver must take a PCV (passenger carrying vehicle) test. To drive a lorry over 7.5 tonnes MAM, an LGV (HGV) licence will be required. Remember the MAM includes the total loaded weight of the box including horses, passengers, water, fuel etc. Horseboxes must be plated (MOT) every 12 months.

If you are considering transporting a horse into or out of the UK, it is advisable to get a professional to do it for you. There is a considerable amount of red tape to get through to ensure that the whole operation goes smoothly, which a shipping agent will be used to.

The abilities of the driver can make or break a good traveller. Do not assume that you can drive a lorry or tow a trailer without adapting your normal car-driving style. You have to think about the ride for the horse – how and when you brake is entirely different when carrying a live load, as are consideration of cornering, stopping and accelerating. Better to arrive late than not at all – better still to plan ahead and leave in plenty of time to arrive fresh and settled.



All About Pets

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All About Pets provides expert advice, information and support for pet owners. It aims to ensure the welfare of Britain's pets by promoting responsible animal care. For further information and advice on caring for your pet or horse visit www.allaboutpets.org.uk. Alternatively, you can write to us at the address below to request a list of available leaflets.

All About Pets is a service of The Blue Cross, Britain's pet charity, which provides practical support, information and advice for pet and horse owners. Through our network of animal adoption centres we rehome thousands of animals each year. Our hospitals provide veterinary care for the pets of people who cannot afford private vets' fees.

How you can help

The Blue Cross is a registered charity and receives no government funding. We rely entirely on the generosity of pet lovers to help support All About Pets and other vital animal welfare projects. Any contribution would be most welcome. For more information on how you can help call us on 01993 822651 or visit our website at www.bluecross.org.uk.



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