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# Trailerling Your Horse

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Some of your horse activities may involve hauling the horse. If so, safety is your first priority—as it is with most horse-related activities.

Following the safety procedures listed here will help make trailerling a safe and pleasant experience for you and your horse.

## The trailer

Be sure the trailer hitch is strong and your trailer is fastened securely to it. Use a strong chain to secure the trailer to the towing vehicle. Be certain the brake and turn lights work before loading the horse.

Check your trailer regularly for rotting or weakened floor boards, rusted and weakened door hinges, and cracked hitch welds. Horses have been known to step through rotted floor boards while being hauled, causing extensive damage to both trailer and horse.

If floor boards need replacing, use pressure-treated wood. When having the trailer serviced, ask the mechanic to check the spring



Always wrap your horse's legs before trailerling.

shackles and wheel bearings.

The trailer should be high enough to give the horse plenty of neck and head room. Remove or cover any protruding objects inside the trailer.

## Loading

Before you begin, find at least one other person to help you. It is difficult and dangerous to try trailerling a horse alone.

Remove bridle, saddle, and other equipment before loading. Use your halter and a sturdy lead shank (at least 5 feet) made of cotton



Carefully check the trailer hitch.

rope. Don't use nylon shanks; they can be dangerous if your horse pulls back. Always wrap your horse's legs. Be sure the bandages extend over the coronary bands onto the hoof and the heel area.

Be sure the trailer is level and steady so it doesn't move as the horse tries to enter. Place chocks behind wheels to

keep the trailer steady. If the trailer floor is wet and slick, the horse may be fearful of being loaded.

Use rubber mats if necessary to help secure footing. Some people use 3 inches of bedding (shavings, straw, or sand) to help cushion bumps and reduce concussion on their horse's legs.

When loading a young horse, you can make it more confident if you enter first on the opposite side of the partition. Never go into the same stall you want the horse in unless there is an escape door.

It's much better to train your horse to go into a trailer alone. Hang the rope up on its neck and let it walk in on its own. Giving your horse a small amount of grain upon loading might make the job easier. This takes the risk out of loading and prevents a nuisance when the horse is difficult to load.

Properly fasten the butt chain or bar as soon as the horse is in the

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*You may increase a young horse's confidence by entering first.*

trailer—and always before tying the horse. Be careful when reaching for the chain. Be sure the gate is secure, both at the top and the bottom.

Check latches to be sure they are tight and won't bounce up and come loose. There are many types of door latches on trailers; be sure the type you are using can't come unfastened.

If you're hauling one horse in a two-horse trailer, load it on the left side. This is because the



*Fasten the butt chain as soon as the horse is in the trailer.*

road is higher in the middle, and placing the weight near the higher side gives the driver better control of the load. When hauling two horses, load the heavier horse on the left side.

## Driving

Before driving, doublecheck all the connections (lights, brakes, hitch, and safety chains). Make sure all doors are secure.

When on the road, stay far enough behind vehicles in front of you to allow plenty of room to stop. Hard stops tend to throw horses down. Even if not injured, they may become fearful and trailer-sour, causing difficulty in hauling.

Never throw lighted cigarettes or matches from a car or truck window. They could start a fire in the area or the wind could suck them into the trailer.

Like people, some horses get motion-sick. Adjust your horse's feeding schedule to avoid traveling immediately after feeding. Feed smaller amounts more often if necessary.

## Unloading

When you arrive at your destination, be careful where you unload. Leave enough room behind for unloading. Be sure the area behind and around the truck or trailer is level and free of debris to provide for safe footing. Never undo the butt

chain or bar before you untie your horse at its head; the horse may try backing out as soon as the tailgate is down.

With the rope over the horse's neck, you are in position to catch the horse before you release the tail chain. Horses that get part way unloaded and find their heads caught tend to panic and injure themselves.

If there are two horses in the trailer, have someone stand by the head of the second horse while the first one is backed off the trailer. This is to prevent the second horse from thinking it also is free to back off.

Once the horse is unloaded, walk it to restore circulation before putting it in a stall—especially after a long haul.

## For further reading

In the *Get Under the Safety Umbrella* series: *Equestrian Helmets: What Do I Need to Know?* 4-H 13001. No charge.

*Riding on the Road*, 4-H 13002. No charge.



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