

Safe Travelling, what to watch out for – Julia van Niekerk

When travelling with horses there are a few things to keep in mind. Ensuring that your horse arrives safely on the other side in a fit enough condition so that he/she may perform with the best of their ability is your responsibility. Whether it's the feeding scheme prior to and after travel, what to dress your horse in and checking on them during and after their trip.

Firstly I'd like to mention the importance of a safe and sturdy horse box or truck. Whether you choose to pay someone to transport your horse or whether you choose to do it yourself it is essential that the trailer is well serviced, the wheels are pumped and that your vehicle is able to tow the trailer with a 500kg+ horse inside. The same goes for travelling with a truck. I also recommend that you practice walking your horse into and out of the trailer beforehand so that when the time comes they are not stressed out before you even leave the gate.

Things you need to have in your tack room for travelling are trucking boots, a well fitting head collar, a fly mask, a tail bandage and a light cotton day sheet. The trucking boots should fit well and should not be able to slip down when the horse walks. Again I would put these on in the stable before you plan to travel so that the horse can get used to them and does not associate them with a stressful situation. It is very important that these are used every time you load the horse (even when practicing) as most accidents happen while loading and off loading. A well fitting head collar for comfort and safety, travelling with a bridle is not advisable as there are more pieces to hook on the trailer and this can scar and injure your horse. I feel that a fly mask is another essential as it protects from grass seeds which can get into the eyes from the hay net. The tail bandage/protector should never be put on too tight but keeps the tail looking healthy and full especially during a busy competition season. And finally the day sheet is just there to break the wind chill factor for horses travelling in a box with and open back. A poll protector is recommended for horses who tend to not want to load or who throw their heads up while travelling.

Before travelling very long distances it is a good idea to get a Vet to do a routine check up on your horse about a week before. If your trip is short it is still a good idea that he/she is healthy before setting out on your journey as the stress from travelling can make any underlying pre-existing conditions worse. Horses are very trusting animals and you should never underestimate the trust they put in their owners when they walk into a horse box without knowing where they are going, this is why it is important to make the entire experience as comfortable as possible.

If you know your horse stresses during travel and this causes him to lose weight and become 'tucked up' it is a good idea to up their Fibre-Beet rations for up to 4 weeks before the planned trip. This will give them the extra weight which will inevitably be lost during the trip. I find that feeding them a hay net (filled with yummy teff and lucern) during the trip helps to reduce the stress and therefore reduces the 'tucked up' appearance of those horses who are slightly more highly strung.

During the trip if possible offer the horse some water. Remember that your horse has to do a lot of work to balance him/her self while travelling so they will appreciate the occasional break in motion, however it is not advisable to stop in unsafe places (on the side of the road) nor to stop too often as this only lengthen the trip. I never feed my horses concentrates while we are moving purely because

they cannot relax while they eat their food and this could cause colic if they do eat it (many will not eat during a trip.) I give mine a lunch break if we are travelling in excess of 6-7hrs where they can eat and drink and rest for half an hour. I never off load horses on the road, the danger of them getting loose is just too high. They are more than happy to stay in the box and have a snack.

On arrival it is important to check that your horse has a clean stable to go into. Offer him/her water straight away! Zandor has a routine when he gets off the box, he rolls, he urinates drinks and then gets stuck into his hay! It is important that you observe your horse's habits and note anything out of the ordinary. Some horses take a while to eat after travelling but it is important to check that they both eat and drink before settling down for the night. I always give my horses 30g of electrolytes in the meal directly after travelling helping them replace any salts that they may have lost.

Please remember that for your horse to be on top form during the competition season he/she has to travel well and arrive at the show relaxed and happy. I hope the tips help and enjoy the ride.

Regards, Julia.

