



Cold Weather Equine Transportation

The Educated Horseman: Management Series



Although most performance horses are accustomed to being transported, research indicates stress experienced by horses during transport can lead to decreased reproductive performance, increased disease and temporary reduction in performance ability.

Even more, hauling during cold temperatures escalates the potential hazards for drivers and animals. Extra precautions should be taken during cold weather to diminish the challenges associated with hauling horses during cold weather. Take measures to maintain your horse's health and to ensure peak performance ability.

There are many ways you can reduce the stress your horse experiences during transport. One of the most critical areas to manage is the environment within the trailer. Instinct during cold weather is to close trailer vents and windows. But ventilation is key to maintaining your horse's health. Even in extremely cold weather heat inside a trailer can accumulate quickly, increasing the humidity and potentially causing your horse to sweat. Fresh air facilitates the circulation of mold spores, urine/manure fumes and dust out of the trailer and helps reduce heat buildup. Opening the roof vents in reverse (opening to the rear) will draw heated air out of the trailer. Opening the trailer windows slightly also is recommended if additional fresh air is required.

Blanketing may or may not be required and should be assessed based upon hair coat, condition of your horse, number of horses in the trailer and type of trailer you are using. If your horse is body clipped and being hauled alone in an open-sided stock trailer, your horse likely will need to wear a weighted blanket. But a horse with a full winter coat in an open-sided stock trailer should not need a blanket. As the number of horses in a trailer increases, so does the body heat, reducing the need for blanketing. Use common sense when deciding to blanket a horse. Keeping the horse comfortable during transportation ultimately will reduce the amount of stress experienced.

Managing your horse's hydration level also is a key to your horse arriving healthy. Horses are more likely to become dehydrated in cold weather. Additional dry forage (hay) given to horses to help maintain body

temperature coupled with the issue that some horses will not drink while hauling can increase the chance of a horse becoming dehydrated. You should plan to stop every three to four hours to water your horse. Providing room temperature water (rather than cold water) will increase the chances that your horse actually will drink and stay hydrated.

Research also has shown that different travel distances have various effects on your horse and its performance ability. Horses that were hauled three hours experienced muscle changes due to fatigue and dehydration. These changes resulted in decreased



performance ability. Horses that were hauled for only one hour prior to competition did not experience any reportable muscle damage, however, but that did experience higher stress levels than those hauled for three hours, which resulted in behavioral changes. Arriving four hours prior to an event will allow enough time for

muscle recovery and a reduction in stressed behavior. This rest period prior to physical performance is necessary to achieve peak performance levels.

While hauling during cold weather can be challenging, proper planning will keep you and your horse performance ready.

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References

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