

My First Horse

Let's Go For A Ride. Is your trailer safe for travel?

Story by Angie Bryant

Weee're baaack! My favorite Quarter Horse, Levi, and I are rarin' to hit the trails this summer, and we're here with some horse-sense safety tips for your ride.

Trail riding can be the most fun you will ever have on horseback, and planning a ride is just half of the fun. Seeing bald eagles, red-tailed hawks, rattlesnakes (at a healthy distance, of course), jackrabbits, thousands of rats with furry tails (otherwise known as squirrels), gopher tortoises, wild turkeys, deer, big black bears, raccoons, you get the picture! Seeing these creatures from the back of your horse really puts nature into a great perspective. And when you have wide open areas to ride, it makes the adventure even better. An emergency kit is a must for any horse trailer and horse owner.

Levi is so excited to tell you about all the things you'll see and do when you finally go out on that first trail ride. But first, we need to be responsible trail bosses and provide some checklists as a matter of safety before heading out on your trail riding adventure.

Pilot to Co-pilot

Before pulling out of the driveway...we need to do a little pre-ride checklist. Think of when you fly somewhere. Your pilot is required to do a pre-flight safety check before you leave the gate. Now, I don't know about you, but I really appreciate it when an airline pilot fulfills this particular requirement of his job. This comparison trickles over onto YOU, the pilot of your rig, carrying a horse or two or three as your passengers, transporting them to whatever location you have chosen as your destination.

"TRAIL HORSES"

T: Tire pressure check

R: Remember spare

A: All-around walk

I: Interior (safe, clean)

L: Lights working

H: Hitch, chains attached properly

O: Open (vents/windows)

R: Realize (weight, length, road conditions)

S: Secure doors, windows
E: Eye the road ahead...drive defensively
S: Slow & Steady...starts AND stops

Levi loves to hit the trail, but before I load him, I do think he appreciates the fact that I take the time to check all of the necessary functions of my trailer. I say this because he loads up in his trailer like a dog into the front seat of an old pickup truck. When I got Levi, I was told that he had to be coaxed into trailers with a broom! What a bad boy he was! He's way over that now! Seriously, I have a routine that I follow every time I hookup. When someone tries to help, as great as it is, it throws a wrench in my thought process, and I find myself checking and rechecking to make sure everything was connected properly, working, and secure.

Weight Matters

As you look at each part of the hitch system on a truck and trailer, the first question to ask is; does the ball size match the coupler size (2" or 2 5/6")? The hitch is only as strong as the weakest link, which is the ball. The rating on the ball, the slide in ball mount, and the hitch itself should meet or exceed the Gross Vehicle Weight Rating of your horse trailer. You'll find two ratings on the hitch: weight carrying and weight distribution. (Weight distribution rating is only pertinent when stabilizer bars are used). Always check the welds and bolts where the hitch is attached to the tow vehicle. There are many sources of towing information regarding weight distribution, hitch weight limits, gross weight and tongue weight...all these terms can be real confusing!

Another safety item I have seen mentioned is to make sure the tow vehicle can handle the trailer weight (loaded, of course). There is nothing more dangerous than traveling in the mountains or very hilly areas and finding that your truck or SUV just doesn't have the horsepower or towing capacity to handle the trailer under heavy loads. Most vehicles can be equipped with towing packages. Buy it! For the extra money, your vehicle will be equipped with a larger radiator, Heavy duty brakes and suspension, better shifting differential, lower torque in the motor, and a complete wiring harness with a receiver tube, among other things. Check your vehicle's owner's manual if you are not sure.

Next, I would suggest, when buying a used or homemade trailer, take it to the nearest weigh station or scale to get an accurate weight. Some trailers have been repainted and had rust work done, so the registration plate with gross weight is nearly illegible or even missing. New trailers have the registration plate under the gooseneck (if equipped) or on the tongue, if a bumper pull. Know what you weigh. You'll be glad you took the time to find out.

Emergency kit? Check!

Okay, we have inspected the tow vehicle and trailer, and next is as equally important...the equine emergency kit. This is your insurance policy on the trail. No, you may never have to use it, BUT, like life or health insurance, we have it for the "what ifs".

An emergency kit can be purchased already assembled from most tack stores, or online from numerous horse supply companies. You can even make one yourself. (Refer to page 16 of the Winter 2003-2004 issue of ec magazine for more information, or visit www.ecmagazine.net and search for "The Equine First Aid Kit".)

These kits come in all shapes, sizes and prices. There are kits for the barn, trailer, and the saddle horn or cantle bag and they can range in size from 25 or so products to well over 50.

How much is necessary? It is all up to you. The most important item in your kit will be a thermometer. (Know that the normal temperature of a horse ranges from 99.5 F to 101.5 F).

Happy Trails To You

There is a lot more to that easy jaunt out in the woods than meets the eye. The bottom line is that we want you to be safe, at all times. It may take a little more time at the start of your ride, but it will mean the world if something tragic and unexpected happens on the road or on the trail.

You'll be prepared!

Levi and I look forward to seeing y'all out on trail, enjoying nature at its best.

Angie Bryant has been an Equine Nutrition Consultant for Seminole Feed in Ocala, Florida, for three years. Angie's husband, Al, is convinced Angie loves Levi more than him. If Levi could cook, who knows...

Here is a list of some of the common products found in an equine emergency kit:

Thermometer
Non-sterile gauze pads
4"x4" sterile gauze pads
Non-adherent gauze pads
Vetrap ® or other adhesive bandage
Alcohol wipes
Hand sanitizing towelettes
Wound (povidone) scrub
Eye wash
Latex gloves
Flashlight
Hoof pick

Latex tourniquet Pocket scalpel
Compass Insect repellent
Antibiotic ointment Hydrocortisone ointment
Sting relief wipes Sunscreen
Instant cold pack Bloodstop powder
Stethoscope Cotton sheet leg wraps
Diapers/sanitary napkins, towels Duct tape
Scissors (blunt end) Forceps
Tweezers Pliers and wire cutters
Ichthammol Liniment
Isopropyl alcohol Syringes: 3 cc, 12 cc, 60 cc
20- and 18-gauge needles Long handled swabs