

The Art of Long Distance Hauling

By Tracy D. Dowson

Well, if you think my truck looks like I live out of it you should see my horse trailer. We have hauled horses from New Mexico to Canada and all over the western United States. Let me share with you why I love my truck and trailer so much!

I'm currently driving an Ford F350 dually, power stroke diesel. This truck is built to haul. I get almost the same gas mileage going to the grocery store as I do hauling any one of our three trailers. We have a two-horse, a three-horse with dressing room and a four horse with living quarters.

This truck received two modifications, not including the trailer brakes. Because we live at 8000 feet and enjoy trail riding in the mountains, the first modification was the addition of the engine brakes (also called air brakes). You don't really need this feature, until you really need this feature, some would say.

Also, I've recently had air shocks added to the truck for a smoother ride for the horses. It's hard to measure how much better the trailer will ride, since I have done this during the off season, but it was important to me to get the horses to their destination with the least amount of stress on them as possible.

We use the two-horse for short trips or as a second horse hauler. My husband has even pulled it with the Nissan Murano. I have made all of the major show hauls with the three horses. I usually use the 2001 Sooner gooseneck.

In the three-horse trailer the dressing room was unfinished, but I did add sheer curtains, a mattress with bedding and a matching rug. With a cooler and electric port-a-potty I'm not afraid of being stuck somewhere without facilities. We have an 11-year-old boy who spends some time playing with his friends in the dressing room. At least I know where he is. Since I carry the saddles in the dressing room area, my dad helped me put in a bicycle rack and some more hooks for blankets in the back triangle section of the trailer. At most major shows you can rent a golf cart, but my bike is a lot less expensive and I do use it every day.



More importantly, I've added a cart rack to the back of the trailer. You will see many carts on the top of a horse trailer, but I know that I couldn't put a cart on the top of a trailer by myself. So, with the help of the guys at Five R Truck & Trailer Sales and Service shop in Golden, Colorado, we invented a cart rack that I can work alone. We started with two bicycle racks mounted on the back doors to hold the cart in place. With an aluminum arm welded to the center rear of the trailer I can have a rope with a pulley attached to the cart to lift it into place by myself. Rollers were added to the top of the trailer for the shafts to slide up along and the cart has to be securely tied down. The wind going through Wyoming really tested my ability to secure the cart! After that trip the aluminum roof of the trailer was reinforced. Of course, you have to load the cart after the horses are loaded and I cut a hole in the center of the buggy cover to put a strap around the center of the cart to hook-up to the pulley system. Necessity is the mother of invention.

Another great find was the new anti-fatigue flooring system from Comfortstall (www.comfortstall.com). For a three-horse trailer stall area the actual flooring was under \$200. The rubber mats then had to be pulled-up and the trailer cleaned out before the Comfortstall could be laid. Comfortstall is like 1 ½ inches of high-tech sealed foam. It's better than extra thick matting under your carpet. I may try to use shredded office paper in with the shaving to try to keep the dust down.

Drivers get fatigued too! So take breaks when you need to. Stopping the truck after several hours can also help the horse's legs rest. Try to travel with someone that can help you drive and my trainer, Diane Underwood, listens to books on tape because they are more mentally engaging.

My travel check list includes some of the following items.

1. I always give my horses a bran mash with a little mineral oil before a long haul. I have a 20-gallon container and carry my own water from home, but my horses really don't drink well on the road.
2. When I'm fueling up, I check my tire pressure. Also, check your lights and carry extra fuses.
3. I always hook-up my own vehicle. Take your time and do your walk-around just like a pilot. Check your safety chains and hitch at this time.
4. It's a good idea to have a cell phone, first aid supplies for horses and people, a tool box with jumper cables, flashlight and an extra halter and lead rope.