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Triple R Equine Welfare

Horse Float Safety

Information Sheet No. 4

Horse Float Safety - The Basics

Safely towing a float containing your best equine friend requires preparation, skill and vigilance. Just a few of the factors you should consider prior to hitting the road are outlined below. In addition, you must of course consider your horse's health, history and ability to travel safely.

Before You Leave

Firstly, it is important to be well prepared for your journey and the challenges you may face. Ensure you set aside ample time to prepare yourself, your equipment and horse. The time you spend in preparation will pay dividends in warding off aggravation and injury.

Towing Confidence: If you are unfamiliar with the towing vehicle and float, or have not towed for some time, it makes sense to become familiar with both. Practice the basics, including reversing, braking, steering and using your mirrors. If you have not towed before or lack confidence, consider taking a towing training class.

Vehicle & Float: Check that your towing vehicle is equipped to tow the float you will be using. As an example, it will require an appropriate tow ball, couplings, and brake connections. Its braking capacity and the number of brakes fitted must also be appropriate for the load. Similarly ensure that your float has the appropriate number of safety chains fitted.

Road Rules: Check the road rules for your state, and any state you may be travelling to, including as they apply to towing regulations, speed and weight limits and display of number plates. Note that learner drivers and some classes of provisional drivers are not allowed to tow.

Insurance & Registration: Ensure that your insurance and registration are up-to-date for the towing vehicle and float. It makes sense to understand the provisions of your insurance coverage - including what it does *not* cover.

Service History: Review the service history for your towing vehicle and float and ensure that they have been serviced to the required specifications. If you have niggling concerns, your journey is long, or a service is overdue, book to have one done prior to your trip.

Safety Checks: A safety check of the tow vehicle and float should be conducted. At a minimum cover the basics including all tyres (don't forget the spare), oil, brakes, coolant, lights, indicators, mirrors, wipers, safety chains, hitch attachments, ramp fastenings, springs and draw bar. Also review the overall condition of the float including the floor, roof, partition and windows. Pay particular attention to sharp edges, loose items and anything else that may cause injury to your horse.

Equipment: Inventory the equipment you need for the journey and make sure it is stowed. This should include wheel braces and jacks in the event of punctures, emergency triangles or witches hats, torch and batteries, jumper leads, oil, coolant, water, spare belts, hoses, fuses and basic car tools. Make sure that you have horse and human first aid kits, medication, food, water and your mobile phone.

Plan Your Journey: Aim for the easiest and shortest route to make the journey as stress-free as possible for you and your horse. For long journeys, identify appropriate resting places in advance and know where you can safely stop for fuel and food. Be realistic about how far and fast you can travel - consider the type of road, weather conditions and your horse's health. Avoid peak traffic periods and check the website of your state's road traffic authority to identify any likely delays due to road works or accidents.

Prepare Your Horse: Spend time to thoroughly ready your horse for the journey. This may include leg bandaging, appropriate boots, a head bumper and tail guard. You may wish to rug your horse lightly, depending on weather conditions. It is preferable to use a leather halter and ensure you have a spare halter and lead rope on board. It also pays to be aware of the risk of horse travel sickness and to know how to identify its symptoms.

Before You Leave: If floating two horses, locate the heaviest horse behind the driver. If floating a single horse, it should similarly be located behind the driver. This will provide increased stability. Before leaving do a final check and ensure the float is hitched correctly with the safety chain attached, the ramp is in place, the brakes and lights are functional, the mirrors are in position and your horse is secured.

During Your Journey

Drive Smoothly: Understand how your driving style will impact on the welfare of your horse - they will bear the brunt of your driving be it good, bad or otherwise. Drive smoothly at all times and avoid rapid acceleration and braking. You will be thanked by your horse for taking corners at a much slower pace than that recommended by posted signage. Plan for traffic lights, indicate well in advance and check regularly in your rear view mirrors.

Space & Pace: Allow ample space and then some between yourself and other vehicles. Remember that braking and acceleration distances will be longer, and the addition of a float reduces the control and maneuverability of your towing vehicle. Pay particular attention to your speed when driving downhill and be aware of the impacts that cross winds will have. Importantly, never accelerate unless your towing vehicle and float are straight. Also be aware of how the road slopes - the steeper the slope from the middle to the edge of the road, the slower you will need to go.

Be Calm & Play Nice: Remember that safety is your priority - your safety, that of your horse and other drivers. Remain, calm and unhurried, anticipate other drivers and pull over to let other vehicles pass when you are able to do so safely. When you need to stop, choose your location carefully and be well away from traffic.

Rest & Revive: Be aware of driver fatigue and take steps to ensure you take breaks along the way. If possible, share the driving - it is inadvisable to tow solo. It also makes sense to tell people of your travel plans, including the expected arrival time at your destination.

Finally, don't forget your driver's license. And your sense of humour!