

HIT THE ROAD... SMOOTHLY



by Lisa Perkins

Transporting a horse is a huge responsibility and can negatively affect both your horse - and your wallet - unless managed effectively. Whether you are using your own equipment or hiring a professional transportation company, any trip takes careful

planning and preparation to ensure the health, happiness and safety of your equine partner. From cross-country, to cross-border to intercontinental journeys, we cover the aspects you need to address for a stressless start to any adventure

Enjoy Your Flight!



As restrictions on travel lifted throughout Europe and the US this year, spirits among horse-riders rose. Reiners rejoiced as events got underway and the competition calendar began filling up. Yet there is one part of any equine outing that can spoil the fun... travelling. To benefit from the knowledge of experts and gain a better understanding of the services that a reliable and well-established equine transport company can offer, we talked to the staff of a firm that has been in the business for thirty years, European Horse Services (EHS). Based in Belgium, this specialized logistics company has grown from modest beginnings to become a full-service enterprise that now exports and imports horses from countries worldwide. Handling

approximately 3500-4000 horses per year, EHS employs over 20 staff that manage operations and business administration as well those working in the stables and drivers. In addition, they have seven professional grooms that collaborate on a freelance basis.

Firstly, what health checks are required before a horse undertakes any international travel and what additional requirements are there for air travel?

When importing or exporting horses, specific blood tests, vaccinations and possibly quarantine are required and need to be arranged. Although not all countries require pre-export quarantine and/or quarantine upon arrival; where this would be required, we have our own

quarantine stables available with all modern specifications and turnout possibilities.

EHS can arrange all the necessary blood testing for the horses that are going to leave the European Union. We can organize this at our company's stables or from the client's stable. Alternatively, clients can arrange this from their stable under supervision of their own vet. For travel within the EU, it is essential to ensure all the correct preparations and planning have been done according to the EU law. This documentation will include any official layover stables because the necessary stops must be planned and booked in advance to guarantee the welfare of the horses during a long trip.

As far as air travel is concerned, the health checks will depend on the location

to which the horse is travelling. Each country has their own health requirements, and it is our job to make sure the horses that are being transported by us meet all the requirements for that country. This is also double checked by the state vet before they leave for their journey.

We always organize the health certificates for horses entrusted to our care in a quick and correct manner and the original documents travel with the horse in personalised document bags.

Where horses will be travelling by air, do you provide a door-to-door service or do customers handle road transport themselves?

We provide a door-to-door service, however, customers may choose to arrange road transport to our stables



as well as transport in the country of destination, i.e., from the airport of arrival to address of destination.

As regards the transportation by road, could you explain how you are equipped to manage this part of the journey?

Firstly, our drivers have years of experience in horse transportation and our priorities are the safety and welfare of the horses we transport. Our fleet of trucks are equipped with onboard computers for efficient communication and the horses are monitored through cameras in the cabin. All our modern trucks have temperature control so that temperature can be closely monitored during the transport and the newest trucks even have sprinkler systems to help cool down the horses. In summer, we recommend driving as much as possible during the evening/night and keep the horses in stables during the day. This way we can avoid traffic jams and avoid horses being loaded, transport-

ed and unloaded during hot weather.

The floors of our trucks are provided with anti-slip rubber flooring and mostly covered with shavings to ensure that when a horse urinates it does not splash on its leg as this may inhibit urination.

When travelling by road, how often should horses rest?

At least every eight hours, though more frequent stops may be required depending on the external temperatures. Our drivers must also follow the drive and rest time regulations.

During the layover stabling, we provide shavings for the horse's bedding unless the owner specifically requires an alternative.

What are the feed/water provisions during transport?

This will depend on the temperature at the time of the trip and can also be different per horse. Our drivers always have a fresh water and hay supply onboard. It is





very important to pay close attention to the provision of water during the stops being made as some horses prefer to drink from a bucket if they are unused to an automatic water system. Horses should have hay available before, during and after travel; it also keeps them busy during the journey.

If horses are required to fly, how long before transport should an owner ideally contact you and will the contact person remain the same throughout?

When a horse has been bought or sold or requires transport by air the owner needs to contact our office as soon as possible so we can start arranging the booking of the flight and give all the necessary information about what is

required (testing, quarantine, vaccinations, etc.). Our operations manager for the country of destination will remain the contact person throughout.

Could you explain the management of horses before/during/after flying?

We only cooperate with the best and most reliable airlines so that the horses we handle can travel from one continent to another in the safest manner possible. Horses must be delivered to the airport at least five hours before the flight departure to ensure there is enough time to load the horses in the stalls and allow them to settle and get to know the neighbours with whom they will be travelling in the air-stall. Horses can travel in a triple

air-stall or in a double air-stall. For first-time travellers or horses that are less at their ease, we suggest the latter option, i.e., two horses together (business class). If the horse is comfortable with flying, then you can easily choose the more economical solution in a triple air-stall.

Throughout the flight, professional and approved (by the airline) grooms accompany the horses and check regularly to ensure they are well and that they have plenty of water and hay available for the precious passengers. Should any problem arise, they have the experience and knowledge to intervene in the proper manner. Several countries of destination require post-import quarantine (USA, Canada, China, South Africa, UAE,

etc.) and the period of quarantine varies according to the country. The equestrian centre we have at European Horse Services has 106 boxes for horses in isolation or quarantine and is officially approved of by the Belgian Ministry of Agriculture for import and export quarantine.

We work together with agents in the countries of destination to make sure that all is booked/prepared for the import of the horses.

What are the most common concerns of customers?

That their horses travel safely and comfortably. We keep the owners informed on how their horses are behaving/have travelled. Our professional grooms fill in a journey plan where they note how the horse has been loaded, how they trav-



elled during the flight, if they have been drinking enough water, urinating, etc. In case of any problems, they inform our operation manager right away so the customer can be updated.

What problems may be encountered and how do you resolve these?

Horses can be nervous during transport, loading in the horse stalls and so on. However, we have professional, horse-minded drivers and grooms with years of experience who know what to do to ensure the horses relax, even when this requires much time and attention.

How would you summarise your advice when transporting horses?

Make sure the horses have the right certifications and permissions from the government for transportation; make sure they look fit before loading and they make enough stops during long trips and ensure they drink

well, eat enough hay and urinate/poop during transport.

What is the ‘added-value’ that European Horse Services (EHS) can offer?

First-class service from an experienced and dedicated team: shipping horses is not just our business, it’s our passion!

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OVER TO YOU

- Should you decided to en-trust your horse to an equine transport company there are a number of questions that will need to be considered. Unfortunately, there are many less serious animal transporters that will offer lower prices for the same journey, however, consider any choice carefully: it makes no sense to risk the health and sometimes even the life
- of our horse to save a few euros. Search for a company that is professionally run and has an established reputa-tion. Where possible, check references by searching for online reviews or contacting someone who has used the company previously.
 - Be prepared to ask about the quality of vehicles the company uses – requesting photographic documenta-tion where available - and the level of experience their driv-ers have, not only in handling the vehicle but also in safe horse-handling techniques.
 - Prices will vary consider-ably according to distances covered and level of service. Bear in mind that interna-tional transportation by air will include fees associated with blood testing and vet-erinary costs as well as quar-
- antining where required. Ask for an estimate to check exactly what is included and ask to see a copy of the con-tract or shipping agreement
 - Ask as many questions as necessary to make sure you fully understand the agree-ment before signing. A seri-ous company will be happy to put your mind at ease be-fore they take responsibility for your horse.



Flying in for the Olympics: the first equine athletes are unloaded in Tokyo



BRIG-MAN

DO-IT-YOURSELF
THE THREE PS: PREPARE, PLAN & PERSONALISE

PREPARATION

- Make sure your horse is healthy and that all vaccines are up to date. Arrange a visit from your vet if you have any concerns. While a healthy horse can handle the fatigue and stress of a long-distance trip, sick animals run a much greater risk of travel-related illnesses such as shipping fever
- If your horse is new to the trailer or truck or has not travelled for some time, it may be a good idea to familiarise him with the vehicle in advance by practising loading and unloading. For many horses, the initial loading may be more stressful than the journey itself
- The stress of travel may upset the balance of flora in the horse's gut. Feeding probiotics a few days in advance can promote a healthy intestinal balance for when the horse is subject to stress
- Have your vehicle checked professionally. Regular maintenance and servicing will protect against breakdowns or malfunctions that may impact on your animals' health or safety
- Ensure that non-slip rubber flooring is well maintained and cover it with sand or wood shavings before the trip. Extreme stress can result from slippery floors combined with poor driving practices that cause horses to 'scramble' to retain their balance
- Pack an equine first-aid kit that includes emergency medications such as oph-

- thalmic ointment for eye injuries and Bute, or similar, as well as bandages, tape, wound cream and examination gloves
- If possible, take a tank of water from home that will last the length of the trip, including breaks
 - Verify the requirements for importation and exportation of horses through a shipping agent and/or the relevant government veterinary authority and ensure all your travel documents are in order for the area in which you will be transporting your horse.

PLANNING

- Plan your journey in advance and carefully: it allows you to schedule rest stops and eliminate any extra costs being incurred due to last-minute solutions
- Ensure your horse has plenty of opportunities to eat, drink and rest. You should plan to stop your trip every four to six hours for at least half an hour at a time. Check your horse for any signs of stress or discomfort
- Plan your routes and travel times to avoid delays due to heavy traffic
- Bear in mind that extremes of both cold and heat are stress factors that will affect animal health. In cold weather, horses that have been clipped or whose coat is kept artificially short will require additional high-quality feed and blankets when transported.

In extremely warm temperatures (above 25°C), horses are unable to dissipate body heat quickly: feed intake will decrease, and water intake must be assured to avoid dehydration; where possible, travel in the cooler hours of the day/night to avoid loading and unloading in the heat.

PERSONALISATION

- Each horse must be adequately protected with its own equipment. Protection of the horse's lean, lower leg is required using either bandages or travel boots. If you choose boots, check that they fit snugly. Boots do not offer the same support as that provided by bandages. Good bandaging, on the other hand, requires practice. Loose bandages can cause problems if they become unwrapped and create a risk to the horse or his travelling companions. If tied too tight, they can cut off circulation. Bandages should be applied over a leg pad and further protection may be needed for the hooves
- It is also important to protect the horse's dock from damage or injury during transport using a tail guard or bandage
- Travel rugs provide extra protection against colder temperatures and when the horse rubs against the sides of the vehicle. However, it is preferable for horses to be too cold than too hot. The rug chosen should be suitable for the season and take into consideration whether

- the horse is clipped or not (see above)
- Tethering. More recent methods of transportation allow horse to travel untethered, naturally, where the vehicle is correctly equipped with robust and suitably modelled partitions. Tethering during transport can be dangerous and counterproductive and is generally considered necessary for the owner's peace of mind rather than for the well-being of the horses. It is, therefore, advisable to avoid long journeys in vehicles that require the animal to be tethered throughout. Where the need arises, the horse should wear a well-fitting headcollar attached to a quality lead rope that is tied using a quick-release knot of twine that can be easily untied in case of emergency. Never tie the horse with a chain shank. Ensure that your horse has enough room to drop his head and cough downwards
 - Isolation from stable-mates or combining horses with others that may be aggressive will contribute to transportation stress. It is recommended to segregate too lively stallions or horses with a particular character from other horses when they are shipped communally
 - Remember where possible to load horses with their head facing the back of the vehicle. Research suggests horse may travel more comfortably if facing the back of the vehicle as they are better able to balance and brace during braking.