

Trailer Safety

by

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As the unit is sponsoring a clinic on horse trailers and trailering safety this month, I'd like to talk a little about the subject. First off, every tow vehicle, hitch, and trailer has a maximum rated capacity- for safety's sake, please don't exceed it. If you don't know what the capacity of your rig is, look in the owner's manual of your vehicle and trailer. If you don't have the original paperwork for your vehicle, trailer or hitch the information is probably available online through the manufacturer.

Every horse trailer owner should at some point load their trailer full of horses and tack and drive to a vehicle scale to determine what their loaded rig weighs- local scales can usually be found online or contact your local truck stop. Once you know what your vehicle weighs you can determine if you're exceeding the capabilities of your tow vehicle or trailer. If you're within the safe limits of your rig but approaching the maximum capacity you might consider additional apparatus to help you and your stock stay safe, such as anti-sway bars, air shocks or load levelers. Your local RV facility can give you more information about these options.

A horse trailer, just like a car or truck, requires regular maintenance and inspection. Those individuals who trailer infrequently need to be even more vigilant. Tire tread and air pressure in the tires (including the spare) need to be checked regularly (your local tire store will probably do this for free). Trailer tires are different than vehicle tires- they usually have more "plys" (layers of material) and many have different operating air pressures. Lights, electric brakes, and emergency "breakaway" brakes need to be checked regularly for proper operation, the wheel lugs checked for proper torque, and the wheel bearings greased regularly (at least every year or two). Make sure you carry a lug wrench that is the appropriate size for your trailer- it may be a different size than the one for your tow vehicle. Make sure you have a jack that will work on your trailer- if your trailer is dual axle, you can get away with using a drive-on chock (available at RV dealers).

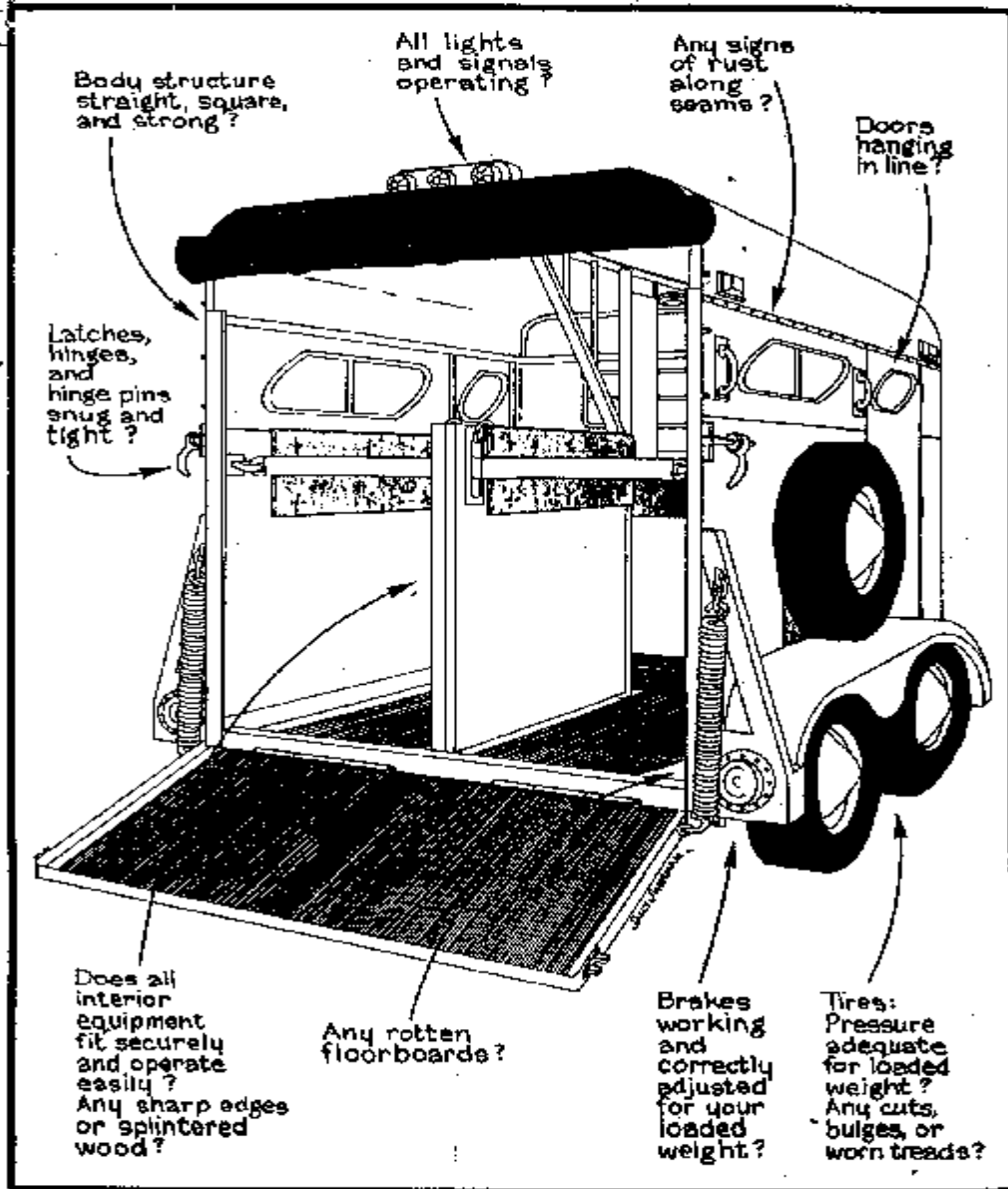
Pull up the rubber mats and check the condition of the floor of the trailer, and lubricate all hinges. Many people (and trailer manufacturers) are beginning to use spray-on coatings (such as Rhinoliner or Line-X) on the inside and outside of trailers. While this offers more protection than just paint, I personally don't think it's been used long enough to know how it will hold up when it's kicked, scraped etc. If it proves it can hold up, this might be a good option, especially for older trailers. Many people have tow insurance coverage for their car or truck, but do you have it for your trailer? Most tow plans cover the vehicle you are driving, but will not cover trailers or your horses if you break down.

There are a few companies (U.S. Rider is one many of us use) that for a minimal yearly fee will insure that, in the case of a breakdown, your vehicle, trailer, and horses will be transported to a safe location. Many of us use this and feel that it is a wise move. When driving your rig, please operate it in a manner that is safe for you, your animals, and other drivers.

If you are not traveling at the posted speed limit, please use turnouts whenever possible. This is not only courteous to other drivers, but prevents the situation where another driver, frustrated at being held up behind you, passes you in an unsafe manner and jeopardizes the safety of everybody involved. If you have more than five vehicles behind you, you are required by law to pull over and let them by. If you are traveling on a multi-lane road such as a freeway, stay in the right lane or lanes- I know people who have received tickets for violating this.

If you are hauling stock long distances, stop at least every six hours and offer the animals water. If you are hauling an animal that doesn't always reload easily, it may be best to offer them water or food inside the trailer rather than letting them out. You don't want to be stuck on the side of the road somewhere with a horse that won't load.

If you take the time to maintain your trailer properly it will reduce the number of "surprises" you get when you haul and it will help you to keep everybody safe. And if you operate your trailer in a safe way that is considerate to other drivers you not only improve your chances of getting there safely but also help create a positive attitude towards those of us that haul stock by the rest of the road users and hopefully reduce the chance of road rage incidents or accidents



Please contact Marty Jorgensen if you would like to obtain the excerpts from the California Vehicle Code