

Horse Trailer Safety Inspection Checklist

Getting your horse trailer ready for long distance trips

By Chris, [Five Star Ranch Staff Writer](#)

Before you pull out your gate to haul your horse on a trip, take a couple of minutes to do a safety inspection of your trailer to ensure its horse and trip worthy. Here's a simple checklist of items to help you arrive at your destination safely.

1. Inspect Trailer Floors

Strip the rubber mats and hose out the floor. Inspect the floor and rivets for any pitting if you have aluminum floors or for weak points or damage to wood floors.

One of my nightmares is a horse falling through the floorboards of a trailer. I don't even like to think about it, but it has happened and its completely preventable. If you haven't seen your bare horse trailer floor lately, take the time to pull up the mats and do a through inspection. It will give you peace of mind knowing your horse is riding on a solid base.

2. Check your Tires AND your spare AND your wheel bearings

Flat tires on a horse trailer are never fun, but if you pull long enough you will eventually have to deal with a flat.

This is where prior planning can help get you through a difficult situation. There is nothing worse than being out in the middle of nowhere, out of cell phone coverage, and you realize your spare is flat too. I've been there and its one of those "I can't believe I was so stupid" moments I won't forget. It doesn't take long to check the condition of the tires and spare, and it can save you a lot of heart ache.

When you check the tires you want to insure the pressure is correct and that there is good tread on the tires. Slick tires or uneven wear can lead to less control and possible ruptures of the tires.

Wheel bearings should be repacked about once a year. It's easy to put this task off, but if you're planning a long haul, make the appointment to get the bearings done before you get on the road.

3. Check your Tool Box and First Aid Kit

Make sure you have the correct jack, tire wrench and any other tools you might need with you. Put them together in a spot that you can access easily should you need them. If you have safety cones or triangles, they can make you more visible to on-coming vehicles which might save your life if you have to stop along side a busy road.

They make an aerosol tire inflator that can fill a flat tire in seconds although the tire service people hate it. I keep a can of the tire sealer in the trailer for emergencies. It won't help if your tire blows out or comes apart (like mine have on trips), but it might help you limp back to civilization if you have a flat and can't get the tire off.

I like to keep a flashlight in my tool box along with my tools. For some reason, I have most of my travel problems after the sun sets.

Keep a well stocked first aid in the trailer and make it accessible. I like having bute and banamine in my first aid kit as well as bandages. A large sponge with your kit can be used to wash a wound or wet down an over heating horse.

4. Test Your Brakes

I was once riding in a car pulling a horse trailer that skidded through a stop sign and most of the way through an intersection because the brakes failed. I can't tell you how dangerous and frightening the experience was, but I can tell you I got gray hairs from it. Point is, ALWAYS check your brakes before a trip.

5. Light Check

Testing the lights is something we do before we drive out of our driveway every time we haul - even if we are just going to a trailhead five minutes from the barn. Lights can mysteriously stop working on trailers. A quick check to discover your plug isn't in all the way is much better than getting rear-ended because the car behind you didn't know you were braking.

Make sure you test the brake lights, the turn lights and the emergency lights. Also, if I'm traveling after dark I test the running lights to increase the visibility of the rig. Finally, don't forget to test that the interior and loading lights are working to make loading and off loading safer.

6. Hitch and safety chains

These are things you should instinctively check each time you hook up but especially look them over if you're getting ready for a cross country endeavor. Bolts can crack or come loose with wear. Make sure yours are in good shape and put a little grease the ball to reduce friction.

Many people forget to look at the safety chains, but they can be a life saver if the worst happens. The chains need to be hooked to the frame of the truck. I actually saw one person hook theirs to their bumper once - that could have been a disaster if the trailer had somehow come unhitched.

7. Paperwork

This is one of those pain in the neck things, but make sure your coggins are up to date and if you're crossing state lines make sure you have a vet inspection that is within requirements. Some states require the health certificate be within 30 days, others it's within 60 days.

Be aware that if you are in a state that requires a brand inspection (even if your horse doesn't have a brand), you need to have that paperwork with you.

Finally, carry ownership papers with you if you can. My horses are registered quarters so I keep their registration papers along with their health paperwork in a notebook in the truck at all times. That way everything is together and has a place so it won't get lost. Also make sure the insurance on your truck and trailer is up to date and that you have proof of insurance in the glove box. Again, this is one of those things that we tend to forget until we need them.

8. Bring your own Water supply

This is one of my prepare for the worst tips. I highly recommend that you carry water for both you and your horses with you when you travel. If you are stranded along side the road in 100 degree conditions, having water available can prevent disaster. Horses can dehydrate, develop heat problems, or colic easily in those conditions. Having water for them to drink can literally be a life saver.

Many horses are reluctant to drink on the road. Some things I've done to help encourage horses to drink are to add a little molasses, kool aid, or other water flavorings to the water. It helps if you start this before your trip but I've also seen where this helps with reluctant drinkers along the road. The flavoring helps mask any strange smells or taste the water may have.

9. Finally and this is a no brainer, don't forget your cell phone.

A cell phone can be a life line when you encounter trouble on your travels. That said, don't forget that there are many places that don't have coverage. If you happen to have

problems in an area with no coverage, try to get to a higher point and see if that improves your reception. In addition, something that might help is to know that sometimes you can text message when you don't have coverage for a call. So, you may be able to text for help even if your phone coverage isn't adequate to place a call.

Travelling Smart

Hopefully this safety inspection checklist may save you from problems along your journey. I'll be adding to this list over time and I welcome your input for additional items to check. Share your favorite item to check with us at [Feedback](#) and we'll add it to our list.

If we can alert someone to check something that could help make the roads safer for all - including our furry hooved friends who depend on us to watch over them.