



*At last...
Something really new
in horse grooming*



Horse Trailers & Floats

In this article we'll be looking at:

1. An Overview
2. The Law and legal implications for horse trailers & floats
3. Things to check before you go
4. Driving tips
5. Your horse and the float / trailer / waggon

Let's understand that the primary goal in any journey involving your horse trailer / float and its occupants both human and equine is to get your precious cargo from point A to point B safe and sound and of course in peak condition to ride.

Our show sessions are often seasonal rather than all year round so it's a good thing to hone up on your towing skills before the season starts. If you are new to towing then the advice is the same as when you first learn to drive.

GET SOME PROPER LESSONS!

The things that Mum or Dad will teach you, besides the benefits of their experience, are their bad habits too! It's a good idea to learn from an expert and get a towing license first off, since many towing maneuvers are 'counter intuitive' or just plain different as you'll find out when you first attempt it!

The advice given to this author by the police when I contacted them for advice was "Make sure that your trailer or float and tow vehicle are safe & properly

rated". Sounds obvious advice? Lots of traffic police will tell you that listening to advice and then acting upon it are two different processes!!

The Law (for 'trailer' read 'float')

Towing laws do differ slightly from state to state so we'll just cover the common points.

- ✓ Towing more than 1 trailer is not allowed
- ✓ No-one is allowed to travel in the trailer unless authorised (In Vic)
- ✓ L & P plate drivers are not generally allowed to tow although P1 license holders can tow small trailers up to 250 kg unladen which means that at least they can practice!

Registration:

- ✓ Vehicles must comply with registration and roadworthy standards
- ✓ Make sure that you are insured. 3rd party is compulsory but comprehensive insurance is a good addition. If you travel interstate make sure you are covered.

Equipment:

Towing vehicles must be properly equipped with:

- ✓ Suitable tow bar and couplings
- ✓ Electrical sockets
- ✓ Brake connections if the vehicle is fitted with power / electrical brakes
- ✓ An additional oil cooler may be needed on the towing vehicle
- ✓ Witches hat cones or an emergency triangle in case of breakdown.
- ✓ A torch or lantern in case of breakdown at night.

Brakes:

- ✓ Trailers mass 0-750 kg loaded need no extra brakes than those on the towing vehicle. Since horse trailers & floats are heavy this is immaterial
- ✓ Laden mass 751 – 2000 kgs then both wheels on at least one axle has to have brakes fitted.
- ✓ Laden mass 2001 – 4500 kg must have all wheel braking and an automatic breakaway system in case of detachment.

Safety Chains:

- ✓ Trailers / floats with a loaded mass less than 2500kg must have 1 safety chain fitted.
- ✓ Trailers / floats with a loaded mass in excess of 2500 kg must have 2 safety chains fitted.

Towing Weights:

- ✓ Usually stated in the towing vehicle manufacturer's handbook but may have the proviso that they are capable of certain loads providing tow packs and other equipment is fitted. Take care as this may be illegal under state laws and could breach your insurance conditions.
- ✓ The laden trailer must not exceed the kerb weight of the tow vehicle for passenger vehicles

As a rough guide, if you are towing then a vehicle with a capacity of 2 litres or less then you shouldn't tow more than 500 kg, 600 kg if it's a 4 wheel drive. Engine sizes of 2-3 litres are suitable for loads of 500-1000 kg and 3 litres plus in excess of this.

A single horse float, one horse in a double float or two small ponies will probably need 3.5 plus litres and a heavy float with two large horses and weighing 2000 kg or more a much more powerful 2 wheel or 4 wheel drive vehicle.

This list is by no means exhaustive but it outlines the general principles. Consult the RTA in your state for full details or your riding club may have up to date details too. In addition there are lots of 'add-ons' that you can fix to your float / trailer to make towing a safer and more enjoyable activity. Trailer / float

manufacturers and caravan / towing clubs will give you more details but remember to stick to the rules otherwise it can be more expensive than you think!

Things to check before you go

Train your horse properly before you set out on your first journey. Sounds obvious again? Not from the horror stories I get told!! Your horse should feel comfortable and relaxed in the float.

- ✓ Check latches, dividers and any loose items carried in the float / trailer
- ✓ Check hitch attachments, any safety chains, coupler, breakaway cable.
- ✓ Check turn signals, mirrors, brake lights, brake cables, mirrors and tyre pressures. Check spare wheels.
- ✓ Check engine fluids

Make sure that the whole rig is level. When you are hitched and loaded, step back and check to make sure. If the rig points up or down it means that you don't have even weight distribution and that means the rig may be difficult to handle or even dangerous. Drive it around locally or on a piece of land if you have room, to make sure it feels and looks ok.

Believe it or not, these are 'eye witness' accounts of some situations caused by not checking:

'I even saw someone drive off very fast the other day with the ramp still down!' I stopped for the loo and I saw one of the tyres had blown. Then I realised that the nuts on the float tyre were smaller than on the 4 wheel drive. I'd borrowed the float!

The Kick Boards came down in the float and exposed the screws. The horse panicked and the screws then ripped the horse's leg.

Check the horse too!

- ✓ There are no obvious problems like lameness, joint swelling, discharge, raised temperature
- ✓ Horses can suffer from travel sickness too! Consult your vet

Driving Tips

Above all, the watchword for driving a float of horse trailer is

'KEEP IT SMOOTH'.

The first thing to remember is that not only are you towing another unpowered vehicle but that the vehicle has an animal in it and the horse is probably one of the most 'spookable' animal you can find. These points are missed by the public in general and we all know that road manners are about as common as hens teeth! Overall, you're trying to give the horse as comfortable ride as possible and frankly, if that enrages other 'hoon' road users, then that's just too bad.

Believe it or not, every horse has its own limits in the float. Some are calm, some are climbers, others kickers and strangest of all, most wild horses never put up a fuss at all. Now what does that say for human training and inefficient horse floats!

Speed is governed by law but on a straight, level road speed rarely matters or concerns the horse; however it's quite a different matter for corners or roads with varying camber. Camber is difficult for the horse to deal with and will make him slip or slide with his weight trying to equalize the slope of the float. Both negative and positive types exist with negative camber being trickier for the horse to deal with. For instance, in a left hand bend positive camber slopes the surface into the bend to your left. Negative camber would mean that the road slopes away to the right. In either of these situations, slow down and try and

negate the effects of the camber if you can do so safely even if this means crossing the centre white line.

Bends can be tricky too and a good rule of thumb is to take any bend at least 10-15 Kph slower than the bend advisory sign suggests. Again, and only if it is safe to do so, cut the corner. Anyone who's taken an advanced or performance driving course will tell you that the white line in the middle of the road is fine when there's vehicles coming the other way.....otherwise forget it!! Generally the most comfortable way between two corners is a straight line!

Braking & acceleration must be done smoothly. Generally use the brakes with the same motto that we all try to learn when riding, that is with 'soft hands'! Again, if you've done advanced driving then you'll know that thinking ahead and anticipating your driving moves and those of everyone else too helps enormously in smooth driving. You should try to anticipate 2-300 metres ahead all the time and this comes in really useful if you are in an urban area with sets of traffic lights and other obstacles that you can see and plan ahead for so that you have the minimum of stopping and starting.

It's no good travelling up the backside of other vehicles either. Leave around 50 metres gap in front of you and always be prepared to 'give' to the next fool that cuts in front of you. There is no place for anger on the road and even less place when you're towing your favourite animal.

DON'T be hurried or be provoked into rapid movements or violent maneuvers. Stress is a real factor in road rage incidents and it's something you need to avoid at all costs. If there's a long queue behind you then pull off the road at the next safe place and let them pass.

If someone is determined to examine your tailboard from 2 feet away don't use the brakes, don't pull to the left and give them a shower of road debris. You can pull off if you like, otherwise ignore them.

As we've already mentioned, if you are to drive a float or trailer then get some lessons and do it properly. Most of the road organizations will have booklets or web sites with instructions that you can refer to.

One of the best analogies I've found for smooth driving is when, during the UK advanced driving test, they attach a large plastic saucer on to the car bonnet or hood. Then they put a soft rubber ball in the saucer and then you drive around a pre-set course. That really shows you what smooth driving is all about!

Your Horse and Float / Trailer

We could write a whole book on the topics we could cover and even then some would be critical of what we have to say. The fact remains that there are as many opinions about floats and horse trailers as there are about cars. Some are good, and some are shockers! What we'll try to do is to point out the facts and features that will help you with the slant on making the whole process as comfortable as possible for your horse.

Before you take your best friend to a show or a gathering make sure that you've taught him what using a horse float is all about. There are always posts in the online horse forums about bad horses and the problems owners and riders have getting them out and then back in to their floats – the so called 'weekend specials'! It may even look amusing at times but frankly it's bad manners to take a horse to an event if they are going to cause this kind of trouble. For start it can upset other horses and you don't want to have a riot on your hands or to have your reputation follow you around.

We would recommend you buy John Pinnell's dvd on 'Training your horse to float'. As far as we know it's the only one ever made in Australia specifically on this subject. John is a Master Horseman and the programme is a masterpiece also. It's only one step away from having John train your horse himself! It's available from us here:

<http://www.h-10.com.au/shopdisplayproducts.asp?id=15&cat=John+Pinnell+DVDs>

Whatever you do, don't expect to train your horse to float in the morning and hope to take him to an event that afternoon! If the inexperienced horse takes

fright in the float on the move the consequences can be dire and you could lose your horse or face a hefty vet's bill.

Making Life Comfortable

- ✓ Keep the float clean. You wouldn't like to wallow in old manure and debris would you? Neither would your horse.
- ✓ Check obvious things like suitable ventilation in the float
- ✓ Make sure that there's enough water for your horse. Very often the taste of the water at your destination may not be to your horse's liking so carry something that your horse likes to make the water taste good.
- ✓ Feed en route is a sticky subject. It can provide a welcome distraction but there are risks such as choking on hay particles breathed in etc.
- ✓ Make sure you have a comprehensive first aid kit, a torch and a fire extinguisher.
- ✓ Stop at regular intervals and at least every 45 mins – 1 hour and check out everything
- ✓ Carry a mobile phone – make sure it's charged!
- ✓ Carry an extra halter and lead rope for each horse in case of emergencies.
- ✓ Fit your horse with a blanket to meet the conditions so that he will be warm and comfortable.
- ✓ Horses are generally more settled when they travel with their 'pals'.
- ✓ Fit your horse with boots or bandages if necessary. Experience will dictate this.
- ✓ John Pinnell recommends that the side rails in the float extend out by at least 6 inches so that the horse can lean against them to aid balance and avoids 'climbing' in the float. These rails should be removable.
- ✓ Make sure that the centre rail can be lifted out. It does not need to be the whole depth of the float – 45 cms is adequate. If you are carrying two horses and one of your horses likes kicking the other, drape a rubber sheet over the centre rail and down to the floor to minimise his habit.

- ✓ Some professionals recommend the fitting of eye-bolts in the floor adjacent to hoof positions so that you can fit hobble straps and clips for those horses that benefit from this. These bolts need to be fitted to the positions of individual horses. They make a horse stand up so that they can't play up or fall over.
- ✓ You can fit an adjustable chain behind the horse and cover it with a small inflated tyre tube to protect 'tail rubbers'. Some floats have padded 'rump bars' for this purpose
- ✓ Ensure that the tail board is not too steep otherwise the horse will bump its head or drop off going backwards. Both guaranteed to help him get to love the float!! In some countries ramps are not used at all since owners prefer a simple step up for the horse and they regard this as much safer and easier for the horse to master.
- ✓ If you can, have a rubber floor fitted for safety and grip. Always carry sand to spread on the floor to prevent slipping when it is soiled.
- ✓ Tie the horse securely with a quick release knot and allow him enough rope to lower his head. His has been shown to decrease the incidence of travel sickness and respiratory complications considerably. Many authorities recommend long tying or no tying at all. DON'T use a thick chain to tie the horse because if there's an accident or he falls over will you carrying a pair of bolt cutters to sever the chain? Most unlikely! At least if you use a rope you can carry a sharp knife to cut it in emergencies.
- ✓ Many vets recommend that you untie the horse before opening the ramp since the horse can get over excited and try to leave whilst still tied up.

This article is meant to be a synopsis of information on horse floats, trailers their legal requirements and their general use. It is not a substitute for professional or specialist advice and H10 cannot be held responsible for any action arising from the use of this article.

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Material gathered from various sources including:

Equus Magazine.

State RTA sites State transport sites

Horseproblems.com.au

Cyberhorse.net.au

Equisearch.com

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