

ARK & TENT



Uniting people & animals...through travel

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PONY EXPRESS*Ever Wondered What Goes into Transporting a Horse? Then Read On...***By Erin Caslavka**

A few years ago I attended a performance of the Lippizaner Stallions in the beautiful Austrian city of Vienna. Chatting with the riders afterwards at an informal meet-and-greet, I asked about their upcoming show schedule and was astonished to learn that they travel around the world to perform.

How, I wondered, could they get those enormous horses - some of which weigh up to 1,200 pounds - across the Atlantic: Did they put them on a ship? Fly them there? The thought was mind-boggling, to say the least.



What I discovered was that they do, indeed, fly the performing Lippizaner horses to other continents to perform. And, to err on the side of caution, the horses and riders are divided up into two groups so that if one of the planes goes down, not all will be lost...

While performance horses certainly aren't limited to the Austrian Lippizaners, neither is the task of transporting a horse from home to venue. On behalf of ARK & TENT, I recently interviewed two experts on what goes into the transporting of horses: Tamara Folsie, who rides show horses, and Paul Riggs, owner (along with his wife, Sherry) of Southwest Livestock Services in Forney, Texas. And what I learned about the world of companion-animal transportation was both informative, and fascinating.

Tamara Folsie and her daughter Nicole own four horses that they board in San Diego county. Their animals are trained show horses, and as such they need to get them to wherever it is that the competitions are being held.

"Nicole competes in American Quarter Horse Association (AQHA) events. They're what I call the 'A' events," explains Tamara Folsie, a petite blonde in her mid-forties.

"And I compete in what I call the 'C' events; shows I do with other 'old women,'" she says with a slight giggle. "And we have a blast. We compete in Arizona, Utah,

and all up and down the California coast.

“The trainer we use keeps a number of horses at their facility, so they have 3, 6 or 9 horse-trailers. It costs about \$75 to get our horse transported to a local show, but some people do trailer their own.”

When I ask what, exactly, a “quarter horse” is, Folsie explains to me that it’s a particular breed. Originally a racing horse, they ran the quarter-mile. They are the breed of choice for those who are really interested in showing a horse as they are elegant, almost regal animals.

It’s not unusual for some of the horses shown at AQHA events to be worth upwards of \$200,000; so it stands to reason they’re an investment worth insuring. To that end, the insurance is pricey - but so is the cost of replacing the horse should something happen to it.

“Some of the young girls who compete are so into it,” Folsie tells me, “that they’re home- schooled so they can spend the maximum amount of time with their horses.”



Because horses and riders come from all over the country (or world) to compete, it’s of the utmost importance that the horse is kept comfortable, stable and healthy the entire trip. “You have to be extremely careful who you trust your horse with,” explains Folsie. “They have to know what to do if a horse gets sick along the way, or starts having anxiety or stress issues. And temperature variances along the route are

another issue they have to pay attention to.”

So what does an expert animal transporter have to say on the topic? As I found out speaking to Paul Riggs - a lot.

Riggs is a polite Texan who peppers our phone conversation with a “Yes, m’am” or a “No, m’am” as he answers my questions. Having been in business for over 30 years, he’s obviously a man who knows of what he speaks.

I ask what got him going in the livestock transport business in the first place, and he tells me that it started with a “Hey, can you help me with this?” request.

Unlike the Folsies’ horses, which are specifically meant for show, Riggs’ primary business is transporting livestock bound for the rodeo circuit. But don’t assume that because they aren’t AQHA show ponies that the financial stakes aren’t just as high, as a desirable bucking horse can fetch upwards of \$20,000. Likewise, a horse that’s meant to be ridden in the arena at the start of a rodeo is a prized possession. Hours of training have gone into making it feel comfortable in front of a crowd and not be spooked by the bright lights and noise; so no one wants to loose that animal, either.

“I like to say, ‘If it walks, we can transport it,’” Riggs tells me with a slight Texas drawl. “But you know, they’re all living, breathing creatures so we need to make sure they’re comfortable during the journey. We put quilted wraps on the horses’ legs so they’ll stay safe on the road. We have to protect their legs against sudden stops or jolts in the road, and they have to have ankle support.” (The exception to that rule, however, are bucking horses that don’t get their legs wrapped, unless - as Riggs puts

it - you have a "death wish.")

"Horses are a lot like people," he continues. "So we treat them as such. If you've got a grandmother who's never traveled but 50 miles from her home, she's going to travel differently than a young person who's seen a fair bit of the world.

"So before we transport an animal for the first time, we ask a lot of questions: Is the horse accustomed to being hauled? Do they like being with other horses? What's their personality like? Are they used to being outside most of the time?

"But the biggest thing we take into consideration is where do the horses live and what temperatures are they used to? Going to Billings, Montana from Phoenix - there's likely to be a severe weather change, so they have to be kept warm, or cool, depending on the situation."

Like many animal transporters, the Riggs' use stock trailers to keep the animals cool; but come the wintertime when temperatures are cooler, they haul in a trailer with an insulated roof to keep them warm.

Every situation is different, and as such there's no panacea for determining what each and every animal will need. And there are other factors to consider that many of us not of the 'horse world' would even think of.

"We're in Nebraska right now," Riggs tells me, "and the water tastes different here. We've had horses go off their water when it doesn't 'taste right' to them - which is extremely dangerous. If he's off for 24-36 hours, you've got problems.



"So we try to bring along water from where they live. If we can't do that, we put a small bit of Gatorade or Kool-Aid in their water so they get accustomed to the taste. That way, they're used to what we give them no matter where we are."

I ask what happens when there's a medical emergency on the road - do they have trained vets that go along for the ride, or have they taken animal husbandry courses?

Riggs lets me know that his wife worked for 20 years for a large-animal vet. They also carry approved drugs that are the animal-equivalent of Ibuprofen or aspirin for aches and pains, and liquid electrolytes. And they have a laptop on hand if they need to find a vet close to where they are to make a house (or in this case, *trailer*) call.

"Horses that aren't used to being hauled need to stop every 100-150 miles," says Riggs. "So we stop every so often and unload them to give them a break from being in the trailer. And depending on the time of year, if it's really, really hot, I'll make a lot of stops including finding a trailer park where I can water them down with a hose. I've also hauled horses that won't go to the bathroom in the trailer, so you need to unload them to go."

Because the livestock he transports spend the entire time standing up, Riggs is adamant about one fundamental thing: that they ride on rubber mats. The mats cushion the shock of the road, he tells me, as do "rubber torsion" axles and air ride suspension. And since most of the animals *do* relieve themselves in their trailer stalls, things get slippery in there. To that end, they also put shavings down to absorb

any wetness.

Southwest Livestock doesn't do any commercial hauling; instead, Riggs works for "individuals who know me." But that doesn't mean he doesn't know about large-scale transports. "There were two huge semis that just came in here," he says, "with over 50 bucking horses inside. They're taught to stand head-to-tail, and they learn pretty quick that if they kick, they've got horses on either side of them that can bite - so the kicking is pretty nominal in the trailer."

As for gender segregation? Riggs' has an answer for that, too: "You don't mix mares and geldings, and you sure as hell don't mix mares and studs. I have a 'stud compartment' so he can't get to another horse. And we rub a bit of menthol on his nose so he can't smell who's next to him."



When I ask if he's seen any changes in his 30-plus years of being in the animal transport business, he's quiet for a moment and then responds, "Yes, m'am; I have seen some changes. The equine industry has evolved to become more of a 'companion animal' industry. We keep about 30 horses ourselves and I still consider myself to be a cowboy, but it's not the 'wild and woolly west' anymore. The majority of horses, especially in the South, are companion horses. And they are treated as such."

So with all of these "companion animals" being transported from so many locations to so many different destinations, how do you go about figuring cost for the horse owner?

I can hear Riggs laughing softly before answering.

"I use what we call the "swag" method. You ever heard of that?"

No, I say, I haven't.

"Stands for: systematic, wild-ass guess," he says.

I decide that for a gentleman cowboy from Texas, who operates a successful business based only on word-of-mouth, that makes perfect sense.

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