

Anthony Mountney - Long distance Traveling Tips

All the months of hard work feeding, exercising and planning are done and it's off to the show, endurance ride or races we go. So why is it so many things can go wrong in this final phase of your hard work. Accidents are sometimes out of our control, so is the horse breaking down but the thing we can control is the health of our horses during transport so he or she is at their best come competition day. It's not those short trips I'm talking about it is the big trips for example Brisbane to Melbourne or Sydney to every other major city in the country. We are talking about those trips that take 10 - 12 hours to 3 - 4 days traveling time.

In this article I will express my ideas of what has held me in good stead for over 25 years of traveling and competing many different breeds of horses. I want to concentrate on when we travel our racing horses and their specialised needs. The main points I concentrate on is electrolytes for rehydration when traveling and avoiding any form of travel sickness or stress during or after transport.

Firstly I will talk about electrolytes and rehydration; this usually starts long before the trips. All our race horses are supplemented with electrolytes one way or another but note sometimes the use of electrolytes can have an adverse effect as well so please consult your veterinarian as Australia has a very vast array of different climates from Melbourne's weather in the south to the North Queensland heat with very high humidity.

My horses in training are fed 30 to 40 gms of electrolytes per day but keep in mind my horses are not fed any pre mixed feeds either, we make all our feeds from raw grains, so check your feed bags for the electrolyte content as these bags of high quality pre mixed feeds like Mitavite etc can contain high amounts. If you are ever unsure about the contents ring the company of the feed you use and you can speak with the nutrition expert and they can advise you according.

With all these things in place I start planning my trip, for example if I'm traveling a 12 hour trip then my routine would basically start approx. 36hours before we travel. The horses receive an electrolyte stomach tube administered by a veterinarian, there is plenty of pre mixed electrolytes on the market you can use and also good horse vets carry their own mixes and this is where you consult with your vet on the horses best needs. My horses are drenched in this manner once a week anyway so they are used to this routine. I would at least suggest that you do this once a week for 2 to 3 weeks leading up to the trip so that your horse is used to the experience. Also you may find for 12-18hrs after the drench your horse may feel like not eating much but drinking lots. If your horse gets really tucked up and looks pinched in the sides that could be a sign of stomach ulcers as the salt in the drench would sting them inside. If this happens again consult with your veterinarian. The drench is there to provide a recharge system to the horse's body through encouraging the horse to drink more.

The next thing we look at is to taking the horses temperature once a day as to get a guide as to get they're average temperature. For example my horses temps on average range between 37.9-38 and the day they were leaving for example it is up to 38.5 there would be no way we would travel the horse. The temperature variation means that there is a good chance there is a virus or infection brewing so we call the vet in and we would check the horse all over. I have personally seen horses travel with temperatures and you run the risk of travel sickness, stress laminitis or plural phenomena at the other end and a horse that is very ill and cannot compete and could be out for the whole season.

The things I make sure my horses have when traveling is very good ventilation, in other words good airflow. I don't feed my horses during travel either (meaning no hay bags as well), I always make sure I don't tie their heads up tight either I like them to have some head and neck movement.

If I'm traveling over a 2-3 day period then we will travel for 8-9 hours and stop for 6-8 hours allowing us and the horses to rest. When I stop I will then only feed the horses good quality hay and lots of it. I tend to find I have fewer troubles with stomach upsets than feeding the horses concentrated foods that are rich and high in carbohydrate feeds. When stopping for the 6 – 8 hrs break we give the horses 30gms of electrolyte powder in a bucket of molasses drinking water.

On these long trips I will make sure I'm there 7 days before race time to give my horses time to recover from the travel, get back on their feed and freshen up for the race. We get tired from traveling and so do our horses and that's the way to think about it. Now our trip has gone well and we have arrived. We tend to leave the horses alone on the first day just walking them, hosing them down to freshen them up and let them get their heads down and stretch their legs just like ourselves.

One thing I do after a long trip when I have finally arrived is arrange for a veterinarian to come and administer a 5lt intravenous drip. This isn't something you have to do but it is what I do. Now these things are all done under the rules, regulations and guidelines set out by racing authorities as so no rules are broken. This is very important and again a good vet will be able to help you with this. I find with the IV drips we get an excellent recovery from the trips or racing and these are what they are designed for, an immediate rehydration in the horses body. Any athlete in the world cannot compete at their best if they are dehydrated and you run the risk of competing a horse that is dehydrated and this is not good, not only poor performance as well as poor recovery post-race which can result in a shortening of your race preparation.

So electrolytes and traveling are a very important aspect of what we do. There is no point in putting all the months of hard work in and then not doing the 1 percenters in the count down to race day because all the hard work and dedication will count for nothing if all the small things aren't done as well.

So good luck and good racing.