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Are Reverse Facing Trailers Better for Your Horse?

OVERVIEW

Brad, owner of Double D Trailers, read an article written by Italian researchers for the Journal of Veterinary Behavior about how different positions during transport affect a horse's stress levels and behaviors. For decades, people have been trailering their horses in a forward-facing position (like we ride in our cars). The problem is that not all horses are content with this arrangement. Below is an excerpt from that study:

...Twelve horses made three-hour journeys (200 km) on the same route, with the same driver, and in three different positions: facing forward, backward, and sideways in relation to the direction of travel. Physiological and behavioral parameters were registered before, during, and after the journey. Horses were checked at...[.] hours after returning from the journey... Highest serum cortisol concentration value was recorded soon after unloading horses that had faced in the direction of travel. Although facing backward was the travel position that provoked the greatest number of horses' movements, it did not have a negative effect on physiological and behavioral parameters during and after the journey. We concluded that, for Standardbred trotters accustomed to travel, the latter may be the less stressful position during [the 200-km] transport. Source: Effects of different positions during transport on physiological and behavioral changes of horses. 2012. Authors: Barbara Padalino, Aristide Maggolino, Marianna Boccaccio, Alessandra Tateo.

It appears that when horses are trailered in the rear-facing direction - opposite of the direction of travel - they are less stressed and safer because they can balance better. Read on to learn about Tina's experience, and read the science that backs up rear-facing travel for horses.

CHALLENGE

Even just one horrible trailering experience can scar your horse and make him never want to set foot in a trailer again. That's what happened to one of Tina's horses. Her horse had a few bad trailer accidents that made him, in Tina's own words, "impossible to tie into a trailer."

So, she installed an onboard camera system to watch her horse as he traveled untied in the back of the trailer. She found that during every trip her horse would face towards the back door, just starting out of the openings.

When Tina heard about Double D Trailers and their reverse load configuration, she thought that would be perfect for her "tough to load" horse, who already liked traveling in the rear-facing position. She hoped that a new trailer would help him ride more calmly and comfortably - ideally, while tied.



SOLUTION

Tina was searching for a rear facing design that also had all the safety features she desired.

Double D Trailers has designed the SafeTack Reverse Slant Load horse trailer with safety in mind. This reverse load configuration is patented and unique to Double D Trailers and not available from any other trailer manufacturer in the United States.

Not only is this reverse-facing design better for your horse during travel, but it also makes the unloading process much easier. With Double D Trailers, you can also avoid all the stress of backing out your horse from the trailer with the walk-on/walk-off unloading design.

Simply load your horse into the trailer from the wide side loading door and walk him to his stall in the trailer. Then, when you're ready to unload, just open the back doors. Since your horse is already in the rear-facing position, all you must do is walk him out the back of the trailer! Problem solved.

Read More about our US Patent

Double D Trailers holds patent number 9132762 on this unique design. Only the Double D Trailers Safetack Reverse Slant Load horse trailer addresses the safety shortfalls found in other reverse slant load designs.

WHAT THE SCIENCE SAYS

How do horses prefer to travel? While we can't ask them, we can observe their behavior. Here's what the science says:

- One Japanese study observed horses during travel without any barriers in the trailer. They took yearling Thoroughbreds and loaded them into a trailer without tying them up. They found that the horses naturally situated themselves in the backward-facing position. They noted that the horses were more balanced and stable when there were abrupt trailer movements if they were facing backwards. The study concluded:

...the horses' behavior of facing away from the [forward] direction of travel increased significantly. Source: Behavior of untethered horses during vehicle transport. 1996. Authors: Ryo Kusunose and Kyoko Torikai.

- Other scientific studies have proven that horses are less stressed when they travel in the rear facing direction. One European study published in the Veterinary Record researched how different positions during transport can affect a horse's stress levels and behaviors:

...Heart rate monitors were used to record their [the horses'] heart rate before, during and after the journey and the horses' behaviour was recorded by scan sampling each horse every other minute. The average heart rate was significantly lower when the horses were transported facing backwards... The horses seemed to find being transported less physically stressful when they were facing backwards than when they were facing forwards. Source: Effects of transporting horses facing either forwards or backwards on their behaviour and heart rate. 1996. Authors N. K. Waran, V. Robertson, D. Cuddeford, A. Kokoszko, D. J. Marlin

The science seems to be clear - horses that travel in the rear-facing direction have better balance and arrive at their destinations less stressed than horses that travel in the forward-facing direction.



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