

# HORSES, FLOATS, AND ROADS

---

Jane Duckworth April 2010

Lately I have been considering the purchase of a horse trailer, commonly known in Australia as a float. This has made me think about much more than the sizeable financial investment I will be making.

The welfare and safety of the horses, other road users and of course the driver and passengers are the number one considerations when assessing a float for its suitability.

Even if you are only hiring a float for a single trip don't simply roll up and accept whatever is on offer. Carry out a thorough safety check first.

- Is the braking system working properly?
- Can your vehicle tow the float?
- Is the floor strong, without big cracks or holes? Does it have a non-slip rubber covering in good order?
- Are the walls well-built and robust?
- Are the various accessories on the float well fitted and functioning correctly?
- Is there anything projecting from either the inside or outside of the float that could hurt a horse?

Before hiring or purchasing a float ask yourself if the vehicle to be used for towing has the right characteristics for the job. For starters, every model has a certain towing capacity. I won't go into details here but look at suggested websites to see if your vehicle fits the bill.

You will need to check if your towbar is adequate to transport both float and horse/s. As a rough guide standard double floats usually weigh 700-900kg unladen and 1500-2000kg or more when laden. See the excellent guide to safe towing at <http://www.cyberhorse.net.au/safetowing/float.htm>

Remember that a single-axle single-float is not recommended because they are unstable. Double-axle single-floats are much safer. Of course many horses are difficult to load into a single-float as they feel too confined.

There is also a useful information sheet entitled 'Tips on towing a trailer' to be found at the Pony Club Association of Victoria website <http://www.ponyclubvic.org.au/default.asp?id=288> These aspects of towing are applicable to all states.

## **LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Anyone planning to tow a float should obtain a copy of their state Road Rules or go to the web sites as detailed below, to understand the rules regarding horse floats.

As of December 1998, a number of towing regulations relating to issues such as maximum trailer mass and speed limits standardised across Australia. However, it is wise to be sure you know the law before you take to the roads with your float and horse! See <http://www.cyberhorse.net.au/safetowing/law.htm>

The Queensland Horse Council has a fact sheet that should be compulsory reading at <http://www.qldhorsecouncil.com> called *Vehicle and Float Requirements*. It is reasonably easy to understand and does not go into overwhelming detail.

---

© Jane Duckworth | [www.doghorsewelfare.com.au](http://www.doghorsewelfare.com.au)

Author of acclaimed publications:

"They Shoot Horses Don't They?"

"Not every Dog has his Day"

# HORSES, FLOATS, AND ROADS

---

Jane Duckworth April 2010

The best available book covering most aspects of transporting horses is the latest edition of the best selling *Horse Sense: The guide to horse care in Australia and New Zealand* by Peter Huntington, Jane Myers and Elizabeth Owens (2004). The section about float features is excellent if you are like me and considering the purchase of a float. The welfare of horses being transported is a prime consideration. Not only the best reference on transporting horses, but it also contains a wealth of information on horse care under conditions unique to Australia and New Zealand. This resource is highly recommended for your book shelf.

While researching the topic of towing horses safely I came across useful websites that deal with road safety for horse riders. This is the sort of thing that particularly adult riders become very complacent about. Some riders have probably never really considered or known of the correct and safe way to plan a ride on or by a road.

At the Workplace Health and Safety Qld website <http://www.deir.qld.gov.au/workplace/> you can find relevant information on 'Road Safety' in the 'Safety when riding' section.

Again, the Queensland Horse Council has a thought-provoking fact sheet called *Horses and Road Safety: Rider Tips* at <http://www.qldhorsecouncil.com> Some of the more important tips given are:

- Young or inexperienced riders should not be on the roads!
- Never ride a horse on the road without a minimum tack of a saddle and bridle.
- Remember: Drivers may not see, understand or follow hand signals.
- Be alert to the dangers, but remember a nervous rider can upset their horse, so if you find yourself in a sticky situation, RIDE CONFIDENTLY!
- Never ride more than two abreast on the road and always have the most experienced rider on the least experienced horse.

I must get back to the *Melbourne Trading Post* and *Horse Deals* websites to browse through the horse/horse transport section. Wonder if there are any reasonably priced double floats? Maybe I need a new vehicle first...