

Be Prepared When **TRAVELING** With Cattle

BY JANET MAYER



You've entered your best cattle in a livestock show. The anticipation of participating, with dreams of winning a purple banner or a silver bowl, is all part of the fun.

Those sweet dreams could turn into nightmares, however, without some advance planning on how you're going to get to the show. Travel problems such as mechanical breakdowns, extremes in weather or simply not allowing enough time can stress any traveler — human or bovine. Granted, sometimes things go wrong for what seems like no reason at all, but problems also can be a result of poor preparation before the cattle ever leave home.

Here are some travel tips from experienced livestock haulers.

Tips from a veteran

Veteran showmen like Cindy Pribil, manager of Oklahoma State University's (OSU's) Purebred Cattle Center and a former junior showman, adopt the old adage "always be prepared."

"I like to be prepared for whatever comes up, both on the road and when we get to the show," Pribil says. "It is no big deal if you forget adhesive or show foam; but forget something major, and it is going to cost you one way or another."

OSU's show string, which includes both Angus and Polled Herefords, varies in number, but it usually consists of about 15 animals. Pribil and her crew of animal-science students travel to three or four major shows each year, including the Tulsa State Fair, the American Royal in Kansas City, the National Western Stock

Show in Denver and the North American International Livestock Exposition (NAILE) in Louisville, Ky.

Since most of these shows are only 12-14 hours from OSU, located in Stillwater, Pribil and the students usually drive straight through to their destination to reduce stress on the cattle.

Before going to any show, Pribil is adamant about servicing the vehicles used to haul the cattle. She also reviews her own checklist to ensure everything is in working order and safe. To date, she has never had a breakdown that has required major repair. She does recall a blowout in Wichita, a window broken when someone backed into their truck in Louisville, and replacing an alternator in Denver — usual types of things that can happen. In case of emergency, she travels with a cellular phone.

Weather is a major concern for Pribil, especially for the 12-hour trip in January to the National Western.

"I check the weather channels, and if they say it is bad, I will call the highway patrol to find out just how bad the roads are," she says. "I also look at the weather maps on the Internet and try to figure the best times to travel. If we do get caught in a storm, we usually pull over into a truck stop and wait it out."

Pribil starts planning for a show far in advance, making hotel reservations and getting health papers for the cattle. Several weeks ahead, she figures feed rations and has the students get out the equipment to see if anything needs to be repaired.

A medicine box containing several different antibiotics and sulfa is included in the list, as well as a tool box, which Pribil says is a must for setup and repairs. For the Denver show,



the collection of tools is more extensive, and equipment for setting up in the stockyard area includes a skill saw, generator, fuel, propane heaters and tarps. Since the tack is too extensive to haul with the cattle, two or three students usually go ahead of them in another truck to set up stalls before the cattle arrive.

Preparation for the cattle themselves starts a month or more in advance. They are rinsed twice a day and spend their days under fans to promote hair growth.

Pribil says nothing special is done with the cattle on the day prior to the trip, but on the mornings of longer trips, their diet generally consists of hay only. If a trip begins at night, they feed a reduced ration and water the cattle at the trip's halfway point.

Since Pribil feels cattle travel better loose, none are tied unless there are too many or if there is a mix of bulls and heifers. Wood chips are used as bedding and to provide surer footing in OSU's aluminum trailer.

"Getting to the shows early is just good management," Pribil says. "I prefer to get there three or four days prior to showing to give the cattle time to get filled back up and on feed."

"Most of our trips we travel straight through, but since the Louisville show and the Kansas City show are back to back, we sometimes stop over a day between for everyone to get a rest," she continues. When they do that, they leave the cattle at a breeder's place close to the travel route.

Tips from a junior-show family

Although the Parreira family has been showing cattle for just five years, they have rapidly gained experience in hauling cattle long distances to the National Junior Angus Show (NJAS) and to numerous other

shows near their home in Los Banos, Calif. Parents, Paul and Debra, along with Christopher, 8, and junior showmen Melissa, 17, and Paul Jr., 16, have put many miles under their belts since the two older children started showing Angus cattle in 1993.

“One of the most important factors in transporting livestock is to allow yourself plenty of time and to have patience.”

— Randy Lathrop

Cross-country jaunts to shows in Louisville, Ky.; Kansas City, Mo.; and Perry, Ga., have helped the family fine-tune their routine to make these long trips less stressful on both the cattle and the people.

“We have traveled to shows like the National Junior Angus Show in Perry, Ga., with about five to eight head of cattle,” Debra says. “That trip was 2,800 miles, which took us around 50 hours driving time.”

Everyone has a job to do before leaving on a trip, she explains. “Paul is involved with several businesses, so he takes care of mapping the route, entry forms and hotel reservations, and the children and I get the truck and trailer ready.”

Several days before



leaving, the cattle are given their final clipping. The trailer is packed with show supplies, health papers, a good set of tools, vet supplies, oil, a 5-gallon container of water, a fan belt and good spare tires. The family's clothes are loaded the day before departure, making sure to take clothing for all types of weather.

Paul prefers a thick bed of straw to be used on the aluminum floor of the trailer, placing bred cattle to the front for a softer ride and the younger stock in the rear. He believes the cattle can better maintain their footing when loose, so they are seldom tied.

As a former trucker and the main driver on trips, Paul has learned it is best to cross the desert during the coolest part of the day, which is actually at night. “I like to leave about 5 in the evening,” he explains. “It takes us 12 hours to get through the desert. We drive straight through the 1,000-mile stretch into New Mexico, with Debra relieving me when I get tired. When we get east of Albuquerque, N.M., we lay over with the Montoya brothers, who are also Angus breeders and our friends.

“The great thing about the Angus breed and the cattle industry itself is anywhere you go, if you just make a call, people will let you lay over at their place,” he adds.

If you don't know anyone in the areas through which you'll be traveling, Paul advises looking at the state breeder pages in the *Angus Journal* or calling the regional manager for that area. “I guarantee you, people are really great about helping you out.”

Paul knows it is important to make sure the trailer is well-ventilated, whether you're driving through the dry heat of

the desert or the humid heat of the Southeast. As an emergency measure, he packs a fan within easy reach to use with the portable generator if they break down. He also recommends carrying rubbing alcohol in spray bottles to spray the cattle's heads and briskets, which he says helps cool the cattle.

Debra says it is especially stressful on the cattle to go from the low humidity of their California ranch to the more humid conditions in other parts of the country. In order to give the cattle time to adjust before a show, they try to arrive at their destination at least three days in advance.

In all of the cross-country trips made by the Parreiras, only two bad experiences stand out in their minds: a fuel pump going out in New Mexico, with a three-day wait for parts, and multiple tire trouble in the summer heat while traveling through Tennessee.

"I had taken the children and cattle to the show in Louisville, and we were on our way back home," Debra recalls of when the fuel pump went out. "Luckily we were able to send the cattle back with some other people traveling our way."

Tips from a professional

Lathrop Livestock Transportation, based in Dundee, Ill., is well-known by many Angus breeders who use the company for transporting their cattle. The business has supported the National Junior Angus Association (NJAA) Foundation Heifer program since its beginning, donating transportation for the Foundation Heifer.

For much of the year — four or five days a week — Randy Lathrop drives a tractor-trailer hauling 17-25 head of cattle to just about any region of the country.



Started by Randy's father about half a century ago, the business has transported hundreds of cattle to major shows, giving Randy an insight into what goes on behind the scenes.

"One of the most important things in transportation of livestock is to make sure all equipment is in top shape before you jump in the truck and go," Randy cautions. "You can't take an old pickup truck hitched to an equally old gooseneck, load it with cattle and expect to get to a show without encountering problems. Sometimes you may luck out, but a major breakdown could keep your entry from ever reaching the showing."

For the comfort and safety of the cattle, he suggests using a mixture of shavings and straw for bedding and hauling cattle that are not tied, unless, of course, the load is a mix of bulls and heifers. He says he has found show cattle usually have good dispositions, and if some hay is kept in front of them, they tend to be content.

He also advises people in charge of hauling cattle to take into consideration the climate and time of year when making decisions on what time of day to move cattle. He says there have been many times over the years when his business will hold off moving cattle when there are extremes in weather, both summer and winter. Weatherization of haulers in winter should be a must to prevent frostbite.

"One of the most important factors in transporting livestock is to allow yourself plenty of time and to have patience," he concludes. "I have found in our

business that I can take a person and teach him or her to drive a truck in a short period of time, but it takes a number of years to learn how to handle cattle.

Patience is the key, and it can prevent many accidents both in working with the livestock or out on the road."

One final note from the Hooper family

As almost anyone who has ever hauled cattle long distances will note, even with careful planning, things do go wrong. Flat tires for Graham and Patty Hooper and their daughters, Cindy and Laura, happened on an 1,800-mile trip between their home in Bliss, Idaho, and the NJAS in Louisville.

"We all remember that show well," Patty says. "We had three flat tires for reasons we couldn't explain. We had just replaced all of the tires with new ones before we began the trip, but they kept blowing out. After three, it made us a bit nervous wondering when the next one would blow. We were relieved when we got to our destination."

Patty says the family, which includes son, Tim, considers going to the national shows a vacation and entertainment. Most of their trips take about three days with arrangements made in advance to lay over at county fairgrounds or at the ranch of someone they know to rest the cattle.

"We also look forward to rest stops, and fortunately a few do have an area just for cattle and horses where we can unload and tie the cattle to the side of the trailer for feeding and watering. Once the cattle are loaded, we clean up the area before we leave."



Penn State researchers look to make livestock better travelers

Want to make sure your livestock weather a trip with less weight loss? Give them plenty of "Gatorade," according to researchers in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences.

Lowell Wilson, professor of animal science, teamed with project assistant Darron Smith to combat the significant weight loss that occurs in calves, pigs and lambs when they are transported from farm to livestock auction to the farm of their new owners.

"All animals will lose weight when transported — that's known as shrinkage," Smith explains. "Weight loss can approach 10% in transported animals due to numerous environmental and physiological factors. We want to minimize this shrinkage, which results from the stress of being handled and transported."

Smith found that providing livestock with electrolyte-restoring liquids, similar to sports drinks for humans, before and during transportation can reduce shrinkage.

"Offering these liquids apparently increases the amount of fluid the animals consume while they're waiting for sale at the auction or even before they're loaded on the truck at their original farm," Smith says.

"This may be because the animal has a nutritional requirement for some of the elements contained in the electrolyte mixture, or it may be because the mixture is flavored; but increased liquid consumption tends to cut down on stress and weight loss."

For the experiment, scientists transported the animals 50 miles in the morning, kept them for four hours in unfamiliar pens, then transported them another 50 miles. All animals were weighed immediately before and after their trips, and again 24 and 48 hours later. Other data were collected, including feed and liquid consumed, body temperature, heart rate and respiration.

Wilson and Smith videotaped the animals during transport, tracking such behaviors as loss of balance, aggression and position changes. Researchers kept track of eating, drinking and other behavior during the four-hour holding period.

The animals were divided into three groups: One group wasn't transported at all, a second was transported with access to water, and a third was transported with access to a standard electrolyte-enhanced liquid drink. While the water-fed animals spent more time lying or standing in the pen, the electrolyte-fed animals showed increased frequency of eating and drinking. While all animals lost weight during transport, electrolyte-fed animals tended to lose less weight than water-fed animals.

"We think that an increase in liquids and electrolyte consumption may promote feed consumption during stressful events like handling and transporting to auctions," Wilson says. "Electrolyte-fed animals didn't demonstrate the fasting and binge-eating seen in water-fed animals, so they didn't have the large weight losses and subsequent large feed intakes that water-fed animals did. This results in animals that maintain a more constant weight through the transportation process."

The monogastric animals (pigs) showed the greatest benefit from the electrolytes, losing even less weight than the ruminants (lambs and calves) after transportation. Wilson says the benefits were especially evident in hot weather.



— Penn State University