

Hauling Along

Livestock trailers are an important part of your business.

Story & photos by *Mathew Elliott*

One of the biggest revolutions in the livestock industry might be right behind your pickup truck. As with the rest of the world, livestock trailers have evolved since their introduction to the business.

Today you can customize your trailer to fit it to your needs and, more importantly, to your cattle's comfort.

Brad Roepke of Titan Trailers says that with all of the new bells and whistles available, there is still one aspect that sets his trailers apart. "Warranty is

probably the number one thing that customers look for," Roepke says. "You can use great products, but with the wear and tear of the business, even the best can fail."

From there, Roepke explains what else sets Titan trailers apart from the others. "We put four hinges on our center gates, [because] cattle will step on these gates and we want wearable parts." Another feature that Titan uses is Dexter axles. Roepke explains that if there were to be a problem with them, they are the easiest to fix and replace.

Titan Trailers is headquartered in Waterville, Kan., and was established in

1986. In the beginning, they were producing about two trailers per week and were not keeping up with the demand. Today, Titan has a 160,000-square-foot (sq. ft.) facility that can produce more than 100 trailers per week.

Titan produces livestock trailers along with horse, flatbed, utility and dump trailers. Along with a good warranty, Titan wants their products to hold up to the wear of usage while still looking good. That's why they use a galvanized sheet of carbon steel. According to the U.S. Steel Co., to do this process the carbon steel sheet is coated with zinc (Zn) on both sides by a continuous hot-dip process. The zinc coating is then heat-treated, converting the coating to a zinc-iron alloy.

Titan says it's this conversion to the alloy that results in a non-spangled matte finish, which makes the sheet more

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suitable for painting. The zinc-iron alloy-coated surfaces will also enhance welding, and the coating makes the steel harder than a regular galvanized coating, making it more resistant to scratching and damage.

With the galvanized steel, Titan uses a bake oven to help the painting process. This oven can reach 160° F. Titan says that this will cut down on airborne contaminants that are present in some traditional curing systems due to the air needed to process it. The oven can cure a full paint procedure in 20 minutes.

“We ship to anywhere in the United States,” Roepke says. He also notes that Titan ships anywhere in the world, mentioning several trailers a year that have been shipped to Australia and even Norway. Those trailers are manufactured in the U.S. and then shipped overseas. Roepke says shipping a manufactured trailer to Australia, for example, could cost up to \$22,000.

Back in the U.S., most of the trailers are purchased in Montana and Idaho, where

Roepke says the producers want a “rough trailer that holds up well in some rugged and tough conditions.”

‘Cool’ roof

Just down the road, TravAlong Trailers are also manufactured in Waterville, Kan. TravAlong also has an aluminum department that is located in nearby Manhattan, Kan. “For TravAlong, safety is our number one goal,” Tom Grieshaber says. “Some people think of their cattle as pets. They want their trailers to be working properly, for there to be no sharp edges to injure the cattle, and they want it to be durable.”

TravAlong offers steel flatbed, dump and cargo construction trailers, as well as steel and aluminum horse and livestock trailers.

Grieshaber says there are many factors that producers look for when purchasing one of their trailers. Decision No. 1 is whether they want a steel or aluminum trailer. There are several factors that go into this decision.

What will the trailer be used for? Aluminum is not as strong as steel, so for heavy-duty hauling steel trailers are advised. But for someone who is more interested in hauling cattle to the showing, “cosmetics can be important,” Grieshaber says, referring to the shine of the aluminum.

TravAlong trailers are built to keep noise down to a minimum, Grieshaber claims. “The more rattle, the more nervous the cattle are. That’s why TravAlong uses lots of rubber cushioning for gates and for stoppers, as well as plastic latches.” These features are designed to quiet the trailer and keep the cattle calm and comfortable.

Another feature that TravAlong is working on to keep cattle comfortable is a translucent ‘cool’ roof. As anyone who has ever touched the roof of a steel or aluminum trailer in summer when the sun is beating down can attest to, it is hot. This heat is not only uncomfortable for anyone who would touch the roof, but the heat also transfers down to the cattle in the trailer.



► Livestock trailers come in many shapes and sizes to best suit your needs.

“That’s why we offer half tops and bar tops,” Grieshaber says. “But for those who still want a roof overhead, the translucent cool roof will not only allow light to get into the trailer, but it will help keep the heat out of it.” Made with a heavily reinforced plastic, he also claims the roofs are extremely tough and durable, so that even a Texas Longhorn’s horns would not be able to puncture the material.

TravAlong offers gravaneal-treated steel to help prevent rust and help in the finish of the trailer.

Grieshaber says most of TravAlong’s customers are in the U.S. and Canada, with their primary customer base in the Plains area.

Consumers

With all of the special types of steel and translucent roofs, what are customers looking for when they buy a trailer? Bill Conley of Conley Angus, Clarksdale, Mo., says he looks for sturdiness, engineering, at the gate doors and for heavy-duty axles.

Conley owns an M.H. Eby Inc. brand aluminum trailer that is 8 × 28 ft. He says this is bigger than most, but its size is worth it for some longer travels, and it has a good resale value. He also likes the craftsmanship of his “rugged medium-weight trailer.”

“For what we do — a lot of long-distance hauling — this trailer works great,” Conley says. “It is also great for some of the local usage. I will spend more money for quality for distance trips. It’s worth it to me to leave without any question of having trailer problems along the way.”

Another reason Conley likes his trailer is the customizations that went into it. Out of many options, he said he chose to lower the air vents to improve airflow and to get a rolling center gate.

“The rolling center gate allows me to adjust compartment sizes,” Conley says. “I can have either two or three compartments, depending on the load. I can also adjust the size, and this can help balance the load and minimize the movement.”

Also important to Conley are the wheels and undercarriage. He uses 17½-inch (in.) tires and says it helps reduce noise. Each wheel has an electric brake to assist in stopping quickly if needed. The undercarriage was also lifted a little for better clearance in some areas.



► From air flow to door locations, you can customize your trailer to fit your needs and your cattle’s comfort.

Conley says he is not partial to any specific brand when he looks for a new trailer.

“I used to keep them (trailers) forever,” he says. “Now, with resale as good as it is, I bought my last trailer three years ago and will probably keep it for another two or three. My dad had an Eby, and I also had a good friend that hauled cattle and now works for Eby. I figured he’s hauled all his life and he is

intelligent, and as many miles as he’d put on his it would be good for me.”

As with most purchases, customer service is key for Conley. “Customer service makes life easy,” he says. “Now if there are repairs that have to be done, I have no fears. I will pay a higher price for quality customer service.”



Traits of interest

Bill Conley of Conley Angus, Clarksdale, Mo., relied on a friend who hauled cattle for many years when purchasing his last trailer. That friend is Stan Kolstad, who is now a factory representative for M.H. Eby, Inc. Here are Kolstad’s opinions on what customers are currently looking for.

“The size of the trailer depends on the use,” Kolstad says. “Commercial producers look for a narrower trailer, while purebred producers look for width so that they can tie more up for the move and for big bulls.”

Kolstad also offers the other options that are currently popular with customers:

- Something smooth, with no sharp edges anywhere.
- The rolling center gate allowing the producer to move to various sizes.
- A corral panel loop hole to hook up a portable corral.
- A good floor — easy to clean, but durable.
- A tailgate that swings all the way around so animals cannot get behind the gate, and it’s not swinging in the wind.
- Easy to close up and prevent too much cold air flow in winter weather.
- Designs for short bed trucks so the nose of the trailer doesn’t come through the window.