

# Towing Tips

by Bill and Sherri Duey

Transporting alpacas for showing, for breeding, or as a service to marketing, is certainly a component of the “alpaca lifestyle.” Drive into any alpaca ranch and you usually will find some type of trailer parked near the barn.

Many new alpaca ranchers are also new to towing trailers. **Here are some helpful tips for transporting alpacas:**

1. Decide if you want to transport alpacas or “leave the driving” to professional transporters. The professional transporter makes economical sense for major cross-country treks, moving a large number of alpacas to a show or sale, or if you simply do not have the time to travel yourself.
2. If you decide to trailer alpacas yourself, determine the maximum number of alpacas **and** equipment you will need to haul at any time. Convert this to a total load weight.
3. Visit livestock trailer dealers and become familiar with the types, sizes, and features of trailers. Insure that the size of the trailers you look at match your towing needs.
4. Some important features of alpaca trailers are:
  - Insulated roof to reduce heat from the sun.
  - Side vent panels that can be removed to allow for maximum ventilation in the summer and installed to close in the trailer in the winter.
  - Roof vents to force air flow in and out of the trailer.
  - Rubber floor mats for sure footing, removable for cleaning.
  - Inside lights for night time transports.
  - Inside fans for air flow in traffic jams.
  - Show pen panel carrier brackets.
  - Separate tack room compartment for storing feed, water, farm booth display, halters, portable fans, etc.

- Interior gated animal compartment dividers to separate males, females, moms with crias, etc.
- Tandem axles to help prevent an accident in case of a tire blowout.
- Electric brakes are required on most trailers.
- Tongue jack to save your back when hitching and unhitching.
- Lock systems on the animal compartment, tack room, and trailer hitch. This will give you some security at motels, gas stations, and shows.
- Thermometer in the animal compartment to monitor temperatures.
- Remote video cameras and monitor. These are getting less expensive every day and give you great peace of mind about the condition of your alpacas while moving down the road.

Alpacas *must* have adequate airflow through the trailer to properly cool them in warm weather. Think about what it would be like if you were in your trailer wearing a winter coat on a warm, sunny day. You would want the windows wide open to allow as much air to flow through the trailer and help keep you as cool as possible. On hot days, you would probably even want to travel at night to avoid the heat from the sun.

All vehicle manufacturers have detailed towing specifications in the owner’s manual. Insure that the vehicle engine, transmission, hitch, and ball hitch are adequately rated for your intended gross towing load (trailer weight plus weight of alpacas plus weight of equipment).

### Before towing, check the following:

1. Trailer properly loaded (slightly more weight should be in front of the axles than behind them).
2. Trailer hitched correctly, including a safety pin in the ball hitch mechanism.

3. Brake wires, emergency break-away cable, tail light wires, and safety chains connected properly to the tow vehicle. (A second person should stand behind the trailer and check to see that brakes, lights, and turn signals work correctly when actuated from the vehicle driver’s seat.)
4. Alpacas secured by closing doors and pen dividers.
5. Roof vents and side panel vents properly set for weather conditions.

### A few final thoughts on the towing process itself:

1. Operating a vehicle towing a trailer is different than normal, everyday driving. It takes a greater distance – and thus more time – to stop a vehicle towing a trailer. Quick stops are very difficult, so think ahead and drive extra defensively.
2. Acceleration is also more difficult towing a trailer. Allow extra time and distance for passing.
3. Recheck the trailer towing system after the **first mile** of travel to insure everything was connected properly.
4. Stop about every two hours to allow your alpacas to stand up, eat, drink, nurse crias, poop, etc. Alpacas will typically cush as soon as the trailer starts moving and remain down until you stop again.
5. Think ahead and do not pull onto dead end streets, tight parking lots, or congested gas stations. Don’t change lanes abruptly, slam on the brakes, or stomp on the gas pedal. A simple trick is to place a coin on the dash in front of the steering wheel and then drive smoothly enough that the coin will stay in place during all driving conditions. Your alpacas *and* your passengers will enjoy a much nicer ride if you can do this.

Following these trailer towing safety tips will help you and your alpacas enjoy a successful trip.

1. Low profile trailers reduce risk of injury to alpacas during loading and unloading.

2. Interior gated animal compartment dividers are important to separate animals during transport.

3. Recheck the trailer towing system after the first mile of travel to insure everything is connected properly.

4. Tandem axles help prevent an accident in case of a tire blow-out. Removable side vent panels allow for maximum ventilation.

5. Adjustable roof vents help force air flow in and out of the trailer.



Bill and Sherri Duey operate Southern Iowa Alpacas ranch located 60 miles southeast of Des Moines. They have incorporated a number of innovative features into their alpaca ranch and are happy to share their experience in new ranch setup with alpaca owners. You may view their website at [www.southerniowaalpacas.com](http://www.southerniowaalpacas.com) or contact them directly at [alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com](mailto:alpacas@southerniowaalpacas.com)