



VEHICLES AND DRIVING IN THE THOROUGHBRED BREEDING INDUSTRY (UK)

Vehicles and driving play a vital role in the equine industry, where daily work is spread across studs, paddocks, veterinary facilities, sales venues, and transport hubs. From tractors and quad bikes to horseboxes and specialist transport vehicles, safe and efficient driving underpins staff safety, animal welfare, and the smooth running of the yard.

Given the rural nature of much of the industry, drivers often need to navigate narrow lanes and roads with no street-lighting in remote areas. This also applies to any vehicle being driven within the confines of the stud.

Legal responsibilities

Businesses have a responsibility to ensure that all vehicles used for work purposes are safe, legal, and appropriate for their intended use. This includes maintaining vehicles to a roadworthy standard, holding valid insurance, tax, and MOT certification where required. Regular checks and servicing are essential to protect staff, horses, and other road users.

Employers are also responsible for checking that staff are appropriately licensed, competent, and fit to drive, and for putting reasonable measures in place - such as training, policies and procedures, and risk assessments - to promote safe driving and reduce the risk of accidents to people, horses, and property.

There are specific legal requirements for the transportation of horses.

Employers should ensure:

- Appropriate insurance, tax and a valid MOT is in place for all stud vehicles.
- Maintenance and pre-use checks are carried out.
- Driving licences are checked to ensure that they cover the type and weight of vehicle.
- Staff have received adequate instruction and training.
- Vehicles are only used for their intended purpose.
- Maximum weights are not exceeded.
- Appropriate animal welfare arrangements are in place.
- Horses are transported with their passports.

General driving guidelines

Staff should follow these guidelines when driving yard vehicles;

- **Tiredness/illness/medication:** Staff must not drive if they are unwell, too tired or on any medication that could affect their ability to drive safely.
- **Driving routes:** Routes should be pre-planned and sufficient time allowed, including rest breaks on longer journeys, and time for contingencies, e.g. traffic jams, bad weather etc.

- **Vehicle condition:** A visual check of the condition of the vehicle should be conducted prior to setting off.
- **Mobile phones:** Mobiles should be carried for emergency purposes, but must not be used by the driver unless the vehicle is parked/stationary. Although hands-free kits are legal, there is evidence that they still impair a driver's ability to react quickly, and therefore, should not be used unless the vehicle is parked safely.
- **Adverse weather:** Drivers should ensure they have adequate supplies for journeys taking place in adverse weather such as extreme heat, heavy rain, or snow, etc. (water or hot drinks, something to eat, extra layers of clothes and so on).
- **NB:** If it is considered that bad weather would make driving unsafe, employers must be notified.
- **Road safety laws:** Staff must obey the Road Traffic Act and the Highway Code at all times. The driver and all passengers must wear seatbelts at all times, apart from when the vehicle is parked and the engine switched off.
- **Breakdowns and emergencies:** Staff must be familiar with breakdown/emergency arrangements.
- **Vehicle and load security:** Never leave a vehicle unlocked and unattended, and never leave a vehicle unattended with the engine running. Park the vehicle in well-lit areas wherever possible. Drivers should never give lifts to strangers, including, but not limited to, hitchhikers.
- **Issues which may affect business insurance cover:** Drivers should inform their employer as soon as possible regarding any:
 - endorsement points on their licence.
 - accidents, including accidents in their own vehicles.
 - changes in health that may affect their ability to drive safely.

Common hazards associated with horse transportation

Horse transportation poses several hazards that can affect the safety and well-being of both horses and handlers. Common risks include:

- **Improper loading techniques** can result in panic behaviours, endangering people nearby.
- **Sudden braking or sharp cornering**, which can cause horses to lose balance or fall.
- **High winds**, especially for large or high-sided horseboxes, increase the risk of swaying or rollovers.
- **Uneven, potholed, or slippery road surfaces** that affect vehicle stability.
- **Incorrect weight distribution or overloading**, leading to poor handling and braking.
- **Low bridges, narrow roads, or tight turns** that may not accommodate the horsebox size.
- **Driver fatigue or inexperience** reduces reaction time and judgment.
- **Mechanical failures**, such as brake, tyre, or suspension problems.
- **Poor visibility**, including blind spots and a limited rear view.
- **Traffic congestion or aggressive drivers**, increasing the risk of collisions,
- **Inadequate securing of partitions or ramps**, which may shift during travel.

Summary

Vehicles and driving are integral to the safe and effective operation of a stud.. By ensuring vehicles are suitable, well-maintained, and legally compliant, and that drivers are competent, trained, and fit to drive, employers can significantly reduce risks to staff, horses, and the public. Adhering to legal responsibilities, following clear driving guidelines, and recognising the specific hazards all contribute to improved safety, animal welfare, and the smooth day-to-day running of stud operations.

Useful links

[Rules for transporting horses in horseboxes and trailers - GOV.UK](#)

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