

Trailer-Tying Gui

In my Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue™ course, I partly focus on *preventing* trailering accidents. Far too many of those injuries concern how horses are secured inside the trailer. Should you tie your horse in the trailer at all? There are arguments on both sides. Here, I'll give you trailer-tying pros and cons, plus six tying-related safety tips. Then I'll tell you how to tie your horse safely *outside* the trailer and what to do in a trailering emergency. I'll also tell you a little about TLAER training course, and give you a resource guide to the products mentioned.

Tying Pros & Cons

Trailer-tying pros: Tying your horse in the trailer is *supposed* to help prevent him from hurting himself, turning around, and/or biting/disturbing a neighboring horse. A loose horse can seriously injure another one that can't defend himself, and can cause a wreck as the injured horse seeks to escape from the attack.

Tying your horse also prevents him from lying down, crawling under a divider, and/or from putting his head down under a barrier, then panicking when he raises his head. Tying also controls the head of fractious or aggressive horses and stallions.

Trailer-tying cons: Your horse can catch a foot (or a trailer obstacle) in the tie rope, then panic and injure himself. However,

note that you can tie him tightly enough to prevent him from catching a foot (and annoying his traveling buddy), yet still give him enough slack to balance himself.

You might also forget to untie your horse before opening the trailer door, which can lead to panic and



HEIDI NYLAND PHOTOS

Above: Should you tie your horse in the trailer at all? There are arguments on both sides. *Right:* Your horse will be safer when he knows when it's time to load and unload. Train him with the help of a reputable trainer.



Above: If you decide to tie your horse in the trailer, don't use a bungee-type stretch cord. This type of cord, used in this manner, is dangerous to horses and humans.

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Practice safe trailering with this expert advice on in-trailer tying, plus how to safely secure your horse outside your trailer and what to do in a trailering emergency.

injury. It's extremely important to untie your horse before opening the trailer door. You also should teach him an unloading cue, so he knows when you expect him to start exiting the trailer.

6 Trailer-Safety Tips

When you trailer your horse, even a short distance, follow these six tying-related safety tips.

• **Provide feed carefully.** If your horse is tied, provide hay in a bag that he can't get his feet into, nor wrap around his head. If he isn't tied, place the hay on the floor so he'll be able to maintain a more natural head/neck position. By putting his head down, he can drain debris from his respiratory system, which helps to prevent respiratory issues.

• **Avoid bungee cords.** If you decide to tie your horse in the trailer, don't use a bungee-type stretch cord. This type of cord, used in this manner, is dangerous to horses and humans. I know of one horse that was able to get out of a four-horse trailer while still attached to the cord — then it broke! I know of numerous horses and humans who have lost eyes and had faces cut open using these products.

• **Use a breakaway tie rope.** To avoid a trailer-tying tragedy, use a tie rope that will break under pressure, such as one made

from leather or a hay string. Or, invest in a high-tech option, such as Davis Turtle Snap Cross Ties (available from Equestrian Collections) or safety-release trailer-tie products from JEMAL Escape Mechanisms. Attach the breakaway tie rope directly to the trailer's attachment or ring so it'll function properly.

• **Leave some slack.** One trailer-tying myth is that the tie rope will help your horse balance, and will even keep him from falling down if he loses his balance. This is false. To see how your horse balances in the trailer, get a trailer cam, and watch how he balances during turns, stops, and acceleration.

Your horse needs some slack in the rope so he can use his head and neck for balance.

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HEIDI NYLAND PHOTO

Above: Outside the trailer, give your horse plenty of hay to minimize injury-causing behavior problems, such as fiddling, pawing, playing with buckets, etc.



REBECCA GIMENEZ PHOTOS

Left: Inside the trailer, your horse needs some slack in the rope so he can use his head and neck for balance, but this horse is tied too low. *Above:* Better to tie high, with a quick-release safety mechanism.

Trailer-Tying Guidelines

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KENT & CHARLENE KRONE PHOTO

An overhead tie keeps your horse further away from the trailer than a straight tying does. Dr. Gimenez recommends the Overhead Spring-Tie (shown).

Standing up inside the trailer while it is in motion requires constant minor adjustments of his musculature, even on the interstate at a constant speed. Short ties in particular would make it almost impossible for him to balance with his own weight and normal methods, and to rise after a fall.

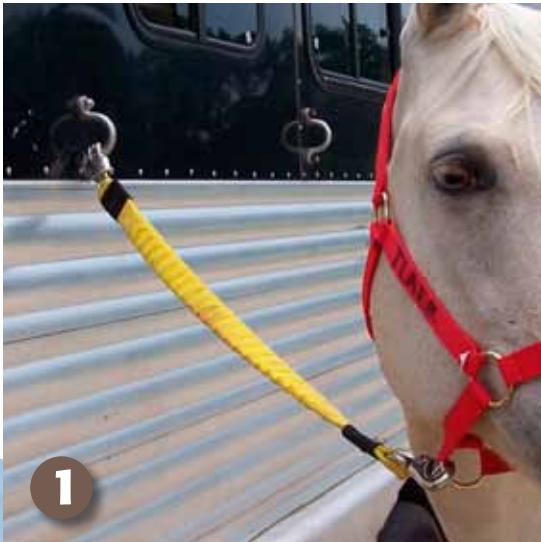
• **Watch the rope ends.** If you choose to tie your horse in the trailer, *make sure* that the tie-rope's loose end can't get outside of the trailer. Outside the trailer, the rope end could become wrapped around the axle or another object. This scenario will likely lead to a tragic death.

• **Train your horse.** Train your horse to safely load and unload with the help of a reputable trainer. Train your horse specifically to yield to pressure and exit the trailer only when given a specific cue. Practice loading him not only for routine trips, but also so that he'll learn this essential evacuation skill. He'll then load regardless of inclement weather and other adverse conditions.

Note: Loading your horse in the trailer is one of the most difficult and most dangerous activities that you'll ever attempt. Owners get crushed, kicked, stepped on, and run over by horses, while horses get nasty lacerations, entrap their heads and legs, and then get scared, which contributes to future unwillingness to go in the trailer at all.

While loading and unloading, stay out of the way of your horse at all times, and patiently teach him to load with the help of a professional.

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1 "I know of numerous horses and humans who have lost eyes and had faces cut open using bungee cords," says Dr. Gimenez. 2 Have something in the tie system that will break if your horse really struggles. 3 A mule tests a bungee-cord-type tie; a dangerous scenario. 4 A recommended safety tie.

REBECCA GIMENEZ PHOTOS

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Trailer-Tying Guidelines

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Outside the Trailer

Horses are well-known for getting their legs and hooves into dangerous places — and the side of a trailer has many potential traps for those fragile structures. Tragic injuries include a hoof trapped between tires, through the windows, or in vents, or a halter caught on a protruding obstacle, such as a hasp, door hinge, or bucket hooks.

Other common scenarios include panicked pull-backs that may cause the horse to fall and become hung by the halter and tie against the trailer, or even underneath it. Here's how to safely secure your horse outside the trailer.

- **Tie high.** Tie your horse higher than his withers to limit the amount of leverage he can place on a tie.

- **Use an overhead tie.** Use a trailer-tying product that will give him more room while keeping him further away from the trailer than straight tying would. I recommend the Overhead Spring-Tie (www.springtie.com).

- **Or, use a safety tie.** Alternatives include a release mechanism that releases your horse after a specific amount of pressure is applied. I recommend the JEMAL Safety Release Trailer Tie or Safety Release Cross Tie. Safety products that prevent your horse from getting loose include blocker tie rings (available from Toklat Originals), the Spring Tie, and the HiTie Trailer Tie System (available from EasyCare, Inc.), and the Tie-Safe Cross Tie (available from SmartPak Equine).

- **Place the panic snap.** A panic snap is a good idea, but be sure to attach it at the far end, away from your horse, not onto your horse's halter. If he starts to panic, you shouldn't get close enough to get hurt.

- **Have a weak link.** Have something in the tie system that will break if your horse really struggles, such as a leather latigo, a hook-and-loop fastener, a piece of hay string, or even a cheap metal clip.

- **Prevent boredom.** Give your horse plenty of hay to minimize injury-causing behavior problems, such as fiddling, pawing, playing with buckets, etc.

- **Give them room.** If you're tying more than one horse, give them plenty of room, so they don't kick each other, or get wrapped or tangled in each other's ties.

- **Consider alternatives.** If you're stay-

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CLIX PHOTO

If you're staying in one place for a while, consider high-lining your horse instead of tying him to the trailer. Or, use a temporary pen (shown).



REBECCA GIMENEZ PHOTO

If you're tying more than one horse, give them plenty of room, so they don't kick each other, or get wrapped or tangled in each other's ties. Horses shown are tied too close together.

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REBECCA GIMENEZ PHOTO



PHOTO COURTESY OF TORI MILLER

Left: Tie your horse with a safety knot so you untie him quickly if he starts to pull back. *Right:* A trailer-related tragedy can happen in an instant. In this case, a horse fought against being forced into a trailer, reared, and trapped his hoof. For what to do in an emergency, see the next page.

Trailer-Tying Guidelines

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ing in one place for a while, consider high-lining your horse instead of tying him to the trailer. Or, use a temporary pen.

Your Emergency Kit

If your horse gets hurt in the trailer despite your best efforts, carry the emergency equipment that will allow you to assist him if he gets trapped or injured, either inside or outside the trailer.

Place this kit (and your emergency hay stash) inside your towing vehicle, not in your trailer, so you'll have access to it if your trailer is compromised. Here's a checklist.

- Road-hazard warning kit.** This includes orange cones or triangles, flares, reflective tape on your trailer, and a reflective vest for you, if you're on the side of the road for any reason.
- Cell phone.** If you have service, you can use your cell phone to call for emergency assistance and emergency roadside assistance. One equestrian motor plan is USRider, *The Trail Rider's* sister company (800/844-1409; www.usrider.org).
- First-aid kit.** Carry a good first-aid

Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue

Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue™ focuses on the technical aspects of preventing injuries to horses and humans in difficult scenarios that would normally require the fire department or professional first responders to assist. This includes response to barn fires, and extrications from trailer wrecks, ditches, and mud.

Ongoing training is available to professionals in the fire service, law enforcement, and veterinary fields to improve their response in these types of incidents, assisting owners and limiting loss of life and injury to humans and animals. (The TLAER textbook is available on Amazon.com.)

Over the last two decades, as large-animal incidents became more common, branches of emergency services have begun to respond. With the increase in the number of incidents involving large animals, the need for specialized training in the field of Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue was exposed and more people, both related and unrelated to emergency services, expressed a need for training in this heavy-rescue specialty of the fire service.

The goal of TLAER is to improve the standard of care for large-animal victims, while improving the safety margin for well-meaning emergency responders, bystanders, and owners. Teaching emergency responders that a horse is a patient and extremely fragile medically is balanced with a prioritization of rescue methods.



Eastern Kentucky University offers courses in Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue. Shown is a training drill with a horse specially trained for rescue training.

We emphasize simple techniques and tools instead of highly technical equipment where possible, and our philosophy is to emphasize the Fire Service's Incident Command System safety, training methodologies, and operational considerations with learning about the behavioral responses of horses that lead to success on an incident.

kit for both equines and humans. (For items to include in an equine first-aid kit, see page xx.)

- ❑ **Sharp knife.** Pack a sharp knife, then use for emergencies only, so the blade stays sharp enough to cut through tie straps and rope that may be entrapping your horse's head or legs.
- ❑ **Saw.** A battery-powered reciprocating saw capable of cutting metal that may en trap a head or leg.
- ❑ **Webbing.** A piece of three- to four-inch webbing (tow strap) can control a leg; or use around the body to maneuver your horse into a safer position.
- ❑ **Cane or boat hook.** Use a cane or boot hook to manipulate the webbing.
- ❑ **Hammer.** You'll use a hammer to drive the pins out of a chest bar or gate that might be entrapping your horse.
- ❑ **Towel or blanket.** You need something to cover the head of a downed horse to help keep him calm until help arrives.
- ❑ **Hay.** Lay in an emergency supply of good-quality hay to allow trapped or extricated horses to eat and relax while you wait for assistance.

Emergency Response

In Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue training, I emphasize to emergency responders that no one should be allowed inside a horse trailer for *any* reason, especially one flipped onto its side or roof with terrified and injured animals inside. This includes owners, bystanders, and veterinarians who may wish to go into that confined space to save the horses.

It's better to wait for trained emergency responders, such as firefighters, to arrive at the scene. They'll perform an external res-

cue using the simple tools to extricate the animals for their safety as patients and to keep humans safe.

Your job is to remain calm, call for help, and assess the situation. By performing these basic response techniques, you can be extremely useful during an emergency and can actually learn to save your own horse.

On the side of the road, responders will be more worried about *your* safety than that of your horse — and for good reason. This is a *very* dangerous place to be with traffic.

Most horses survive trailer wrecks amazingly well if they stay *inside* the

trailer and avoid being ejected. They tend to injure themselves attempting to stand up, which is why a breakaway tie strap is recommended. 

Rebecca Gimenez, PhD (animal physiology), is a primary instructor for Technical Large Animal Emergency Rescue. A major in the United States Army Reserve, she's a decorated Iraqi war veteran and a past Logistics Officer for the American Veterinary Medical Association's Veterinary Medical Assistance Teams. She's an invited lecturer on animal-rescue topics around the world and a seasoned equine journalist.

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Resources

EasyCare, Inc.

(800) 447-8836; www.easycare.com

Equestrian Collections

(877) 872-4415

www.equestriancollections.com

JEMAL - Ultracite Escape Mechanisms

(978) 724-0016; www.ultracite.com

SmartPak Equine

(888) 752-5171; www.smartpakequine.com

Spring-Tie

(720) 314-8141; www.springtie.com

Toklat Originals

(888) 486-5528; www.toklat.com