

Little Blessings

Author: Kurt Roberts of Little Blessings Farm.

Special Interest Articles:

- This news letter is focused on transporting your alpacas

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10 Commandments of Transporting Alpacas

Alpacas like humans each take to traveling in their own ways. Some lie down as soon as they are loaded and snooze the whole trip, others fight for the window seat to watch the world go by while others are totally stressed as soon as they lay eyes on the trailer. It is important that you can accommodate each of these precious travelers.

The first thing to consider before transporting an alpaca or any animal is whether or not they are fit for travel. The process of transporting any animal is stressful; this includes the snoozers and window watchers. Alpacas form bonds or friendships within the herd. It is most probable that you will be taking this animal out of a secure, known environment and possibly away from its' herd and placing it into an unfamiliar moving object. It is your job to ensure the animal is in good condition and health before considering a move (unless the animal is being transported to a vet or clinic for assistance). Unfortunately, there have been a number of occasions when animals have been transported and the stress of the move has aggravated pre-existing condition or a

condition that was previously unknown to the owner, making it considerably worse. Please know your animal's health before moving.

Here are 10 commandments for the safe transport of your alpacas:

1. Transporting alpacas across state lines requires proper paperwork, testing, vaccinations and a form of positive identification such as microchips, ear tags or lastly neck bands. You should consult with your veterinarian for rules and regulations for interstate transport of alpacas. You can also consult the following web site: www.aphis.usda.gov/oa/vsoffice2.html.
2. Try to prevent transporting a single animal. If you are transporting your alpaca over any distance (more than across town) consider easing the stress by using a buddy animal. Many farms will use a gelded male as this buddy. If you are transporting a female for breeding, ask the servicing farm if they are willing to agist a
3. Transporting pregnant females is always a delicate proposition but in many cases, is not avoidable. If you wish to reduce all risk, then transport only when they are "open". Otherwise, the best rule to follow is, wait a minimum of 50 days from conception. This should be verified using ultrasound, as spit testing can give a false positive pregnancy. At the other end of the gestation period, avoid moves any later than about 2 months of the cria's birth. Alpacas and for that matter camelids have a high embryonic absorption rate. Moving alpacas during the early stages of pregnancy increases the risk of absorption.

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Likewise, during the last 2 months of pregnancy, the stress of moving can cause pre-mature births or abortion of the fetus.

4. Avoid overcrowding and if transporting full fleeced animals, take into account the extra room needed for heat dissipation. Alpacas generate a fair amount of body heat and can develop heat stress in an overcrowded or under ventilated trailer. If possible, limit the number of full fleeced animals in your trailer, shear if you are not headed to a show and heat will be a factor. Ventilate, ventilate, ventilate the trailer, and monitor both the trailer and alpaca temperature. Most trailers are well ventilated while they are moving, however, the temperature inside a stopped trailer can soar to scorching temps in matter of minutes. Make sure your trailer is outfitted with motorized fans. This keeps the air moving when you are not. Don't panic if your trailer is not equipped with an air conditioner. Icing down your trailer will help to reduce the temperature a few critical degrees as well as give your animals something cool to lie on if they wish. Remember to give your animals a place to lie that does not have ice. At the end of the day, remove the wet bedding so that it does not sour and go bad. If the temperature inside the trailer exceeds 85 - 90 degrees F, watch the respiration of the alpaca and keep a close eye on signs of heat stress. If the combined temperature / humidity (heat factor) exceeds 140-150 degrees F be on the look out for open mouthed breathing, lethargy or a rectal temperature above 106F. If you see these signs, seek out shade, remove the alpaca from the trailer, and cool the alpaca by running water on the underside (belly and legs) of the animal. A towel soaked in cold ice water also works well. Prevent wetting the blanket area as this will actually trap heat and be counter productive.
5. Provide plenty of clean food and water. Every time you stop, check the water to ensure that no fecal material or grass has made its way into the container. As well, check the hay bucket for fecal material or signs of urination. If you see any contamination of the water or feed, change it out. For larger loads, and larger trailers you may have to provide multiple feed stations per compartment to reduce fighting over the feed or water.
6. If the journey is greater than 3 hours, plan to stop about every 2-3 hours to check in on the animals. Get them up and moving, encourage them to eat and drink and reunite moms and crias so that the young ones can nurse.
7. When loading the trailer, think about the order in which the animals will be loaded. Using normal animal behavior can help get them onto the trailer. Pick up and carry Cria onboard, the moms will almost always follow. Follow this group with your females. The last to load, well actually jump onto the trailer will be the very interested male group. If you have an animal that has never trailered or is hard to load, consider using a companion animal that it knows to help you load. Let the companion animal load just ahead but at the same time as the timid animal. This is usually just enough to get them onboard. You can then remove the companion animal if they are not making the trip.
8. Avoid mixing animals that do not get along. A dominant animal can hog the feed or water and fight with other animals causing a high stress situation and or injury. Consider a separate pen for this animal.
9. Scoop the poop at least 2-3 times per day. Don't allow alpacas to lie in urine soaked bedding or poop.

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Stop often enough to allow the alpacas to stand up and relieve themselves. Most alpacas will hold it until you can no longer hold it.

10. Have you checked in on the animals? This is worth repeating a second time. A camera in the cab is good for seeing a catastrophic problem however; it does not tell you if an animal is developing a problem. As mentioned above, you should be stopping every 2-3 hours or more often to check in on the animals. Pay attention to
 - Their breathing, it should be predominately through their nose.
 - How they are chewing, look for a subtle figure 8 motion,
 - Look at their eyes, alpacas are real good at hiding how they feel. If you are in tune with your animals, their eyes will give them away.
 - If they are cushed is their head held up and are they aware of you in the trailer or looking into the windows. An alpaca that fails to pick up their head when you check in on them has a serious problem and should be looked after quickly.
 - If transporting with halters or neck bands on, are any hung up on

gates, panels feeders or waters, or have they become entangled with each other.

There is no other substitute for stopping regularly and physically checking on your animals. Don't be fooled into thinking that a camera is the end all to checking on the animals.

No Ten Commandments would be complete with out the 11th commandment. In this case it is not directly about your truck, trailer or animals you are hauling. It is about the Driver. As the driver you are responsible to get your passengers and your cargo, in this case Alpacas, safely to their destination. You can do this by knowing your limits and following a few simple rules:

1. Get a full night sleep before starting out on any trip. For most people this equates to 7-8 hours of actual sleep time (not the total time in bed).
2. When driving across multiple days, make sure you are getting 7-8 hours of sleep each night.
3. Stop frequently to stretch and walk around. Caffeine will only keep you awake for short periods of time. Sticking your head out the window and blasting the radio are not effective

for relieving fatigue. If you feel yourself getting sleepy or fatigued, pull over and take a short 30-45 minute nap. This is an emergency measure that will help you get to a hotel or motel.

4. During the summer months, open a window and get plenty of fresh air. During the cooler months, moderate the temperature to be slightly on the cool side. Being overly warm can cause you to be drowsy or sleepy.
5. Try not to drive past your normal sleep time. Your body and mind are set to a regular schedule. Pushing beyond this point is flirting with "micro sleep". A micro-sleep is an involuntary reaction by the brain to lack of sleep. The eyes may be open, but the brain is not processing information. Micro-sleeps can last up to 10 seconds. When they occur, no one is driving.
6. Know the signs of driver fatigue
 - a. Can't remember the last few miles
 - b. Experience wandering or disconnected thoughts

"micro-sleep is an involuntary reaction by the brain to lack of sleep. When they occur, no one is driving."

"Avoid eating a big meal and getting behind the wheel. This is just like eating Thanksgiving dinner and snuggling into your favorite easy chair, your eyes are guaranteed to get heavy."

Little Blessings Farm

79809 Stewart Creek Road
Clatskanie , Oregon 97016

PHONE:
(503) 728.0178

FAX:
(503) 728.0178

E-MAIL:
littleblessing@gmail.com

We're on the Web!

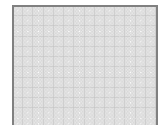
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- c. Have difficulty focusing or keeping eyes open
 - d. Have trouble keeping head up
 - e. Yawn repeatedly
 - f. Drift from lane or jerking car back into lane
 - g. Tailgating or missing road signs
7. When passing emergency vehicles that are stopped on the shoulder, change lanes or give as much clearance as possible.
8. Eat lite meals throughout the day. Avoid eating a big meal and getting behind the wheel. This is just like eating Thanksgiving dinner and snuggling into your favorite easy chair. It's guaranteed that your eyes will get heavy and you will become sleepy because your body is exerting all its' energy into digesting the food.
9. Plan to drive long trips with a companion. Passengers can help look for early warning signs of fatigue or take over the driving duties when needed. Passengers should stay awake to talk to the driver.
10. Avoid alcohol or medications (prescription or over the counter), that may impair your ability to drive.
11. Finally, enjoy your drive. If driving during the day stay alert by finding something you enjoy looking at. There is a lot of beauty in America if you are willing to look for it.

LITTLE BLESSINGS FARM
40144 S.E. Louden
Corbett, Oregon 97019



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40144 S.E. LOUDEN
CORBETT, OREGON 97019