

TRUCKING ALONG

Horse transportation companies quickly adjust to COVID-19 protocols

BY FRANK ANGST

“ANOTHER BIG DAY in the office,” reads a recent Facebook post from Campbell Horse Transportation above a video showing horses unloading from a trailer at Hagyard Equine Medical Institute.

Another post from the Paris, Ky.-based company reads, “When asked what we

are doing during quarantine?”—a photo of a view from behind the steering wheel of a truck heading down an interstate highway provides the answer to that query. And still another post reads, “The show must go on,” above video of a stop at Highpointe Farm & Training Center.

These recent social media postings

from Campbell Horse Transportation reflect the pride and get-it-done nature of many in the horse transportation business specifically—as well as in the industry overall—a feeling that is present at all times but more on the surface during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Horse transportation companies have quickly adjusted to the new protocols put in place, allowing them to continue services that are critical during breeding season as well as adjusting to new demands for transport from tracks to farms. They wait at the ready for additional racing and sales to come on-line soon.

When COVID-19 policies began to be



Personal protection equipment, masks, and gloves are part of today's business attire

put in place, Larry Campbell and Kristi Fly at Campbell Horse Transportation immediately put in time researching the National Thoroughbred Racing Association's COVID-19 special website, advice from the Kentucky Thoroughbred Farm Managers, and other well-sourced websites. They communicated the information they found to their drivers, making sure all would liberally be using Lysol—or other products proven to kill coronavirus.

Soon after, Rusty Ford, equine operations consultant for the Kentucky Office of State Veterinarian, followed with guidance specific to breeding season in Kentucky. The activity would continue as an essential business with new protocols in place on maintaining social distancing, limiting individuals in facilities at any given time, and additional cleaning and disinfection guidance.



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Protocols for safely transporting Thoroughbreds have changed a great deal in 2020

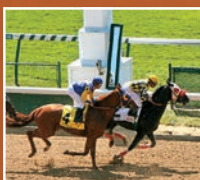
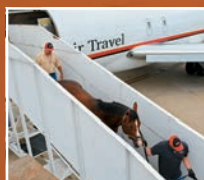
Fly complimented that first-rate communication from parties in leadership positions; the only hitch in moving for-

ward would be the one connecting trailer to truck.

“When the guidelines came down

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The breeding season for 2020 has continued during the COVID-19 pandemic

from the state vet and the sheds had adjusted their protocols, we immediately went and combined that with what we were already doing and put in place,” Fly said. “It was a fairly smooth transition for us. Each shed has a little bit different variation on the theme, whether it’s staying in your truck until you’re called or standing behind your trailer and waiting until they hand the mare off while

wearing masks and gloves.

“Obviously, when we receive the mares back, even though nobody else was touching the shanks, the shanks are sprayed down with Lysol again. And we make sure the gloves and everything were handled properly to keep everything as aseptic as possible. They’re following that protocol on the farms as well.”

Fly recalls the many unknowns when much of the economy was shut down, but she has been immeasurably impressed with how the breeding industry has put a plan in place to keep workers safe while continuing to conduct essential business.

“When you hear about this, the wheels start moving in your brain with the first question being, ‘How do I keep my crew safe?’ You want to maintain the health and safety of the farms and respect everybody’s space,” Fly said. “So in thinking about this and putting the protocols in place to provide structure, it really, truly has been a team effort working with the state protocols, and the drivers, and the sheds, and the farms. It definitely has been a team effort, and I know that’s a bit of a cliché right now with Team Kentucky, but I don’t think there could be a better phrase right now during breeding season. Everybody has had to come together and adjust so that we could get through breeding season.

“Larry and I talk about this, and we can’t thank the state vet enough for allowing this to continue and have a breeding season. We can’t thank the sheds enough for adjusting their protocol so that it could meet the state vet’s requirements. Obviously, we have been notified as well.”

While Thoroughbred breeding has been able to continue in Kentucky, race meets have not fared as well. Keeneland canceled its spring meet and Churchill Downs, in working with Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear and state lawmakers, pushed back its opening date to May 16. The Kentucky Derby Presented by Woodford Reserve (G1) was moved from the first Saturday in May to the first Saturday in September.

While racing has continued at Gulfstream Park and Tampa Bay Downs in Florida, and a few other tracks (Oaklawn Park’s meet ended May 2), the reduction to the spring schedule has meant a reduction in need for transporting horses from track to track.

Brook Ledge Horse Transportation was preparing for some added business when Churchill Downs began accept-

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ing horses on its backstretch May 11. Officials at the Louisville track worked with Beshear on plans to reopen the track and conduct a spring meet without spectators.

“Yes, May 11 should be a busy day for us, and we’re gearing up for a big weekend,” said Andrea Gotwals Boone of Brook Ledge Horse Transportation. “We’re getting everyone’s time scheduled. All drop-off times are being approved by Churchill Downs in order to ensure that there aren’t a bunch of trucks—and people—there at the same time dropping off horses. I guess you could call it ‘track distancing.’”

Brook Ledge welcomes the added business, noting that without a Keeneland spring meeting and Churchill’s pushed back start, track-to-track transport this spring in Kentucky had declined.

While that corner of the business had been reduced, there has been some de-



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With several racetracks opening in May, shippers will be busy

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Sign at Airdrie Stud entrance notes a signature quote from Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear

mand for shipping horses from the track to farms.

“A lot of people have moved horses to farms because with no racing it’s cheaper to keep them at farms and not pay the day rates,” Gotwals Boone said. “We’ve done a lot of farm moves, and when things start to lift, I’m sure we’ll see a lot of business of everyone coming back out of the farms and going to their tracks or training facilities.”

Like other horse transport companies, Brook Ledge is fully operational as an essential business during the COVID-19 crisis.

“For us, in-house we’ve made sure we’ve provided people with personal protective equipment, the PPE, masks, gloves, and personal wipes with the correct amount of alcohol so that they can wipe down trunk handles, door handles, steering wheels, lead shanks, and what

have you so that they’re not exposing themselves to anything that someone else may have been touching,” Gotwals Boone said. “We’re trying to limit that anyway.

“I don’t think anyone in transportation has been shut down by this, and certainly not agriculture. It is an essential business.”

Fly notes that the Thoroughbred business is facing challenges, but the fact that breeding season was able to continue has helped. She noted the importance of continuing breeding season, in part because of the many jobs directly and indirectly tied to Thoroughbred breeding.

“The show must go on—it’s kind of funny and humorous, but it’s true at the same time,” Fly said. “Breeding season needed to happen. I know that we’re going to be moving into the sales market and hopefully getting through that as safely and as profitably as possible; but if we had had breeding season shut down, it would not have been good at all for next year.”

With the exception of the Ocala Breeders’ Sales’ March sale of 2-year-olds in training, all other juvenile sales have been moved or canceled. The majority of those sales have been moved to June and July. The OBS June sale is June 9-12, and the July sale is slated for July 14-17. Fasig-Tipton’s Midlantic sale is on the docket for June 29-30.

Both Fly and Gotwals Boone noted that their customers are always appreciative, but that gratitude might have reached another level during the current circumstances.

“We get a lot of ‘thank you.’ And we’re always appreciative to be of service to our clients who choose us. We never take that lightly,” Fly said. “Life has changed for everyone, but to have some semblance of normalcy to be able to send their horses with their trailers that they trust, I’m sure that has been one less thing to worry about for a lot of owners and a lot of farms.”

One other posting on the Campbell Horse Transportation Facebook page: A sign outside Airdrie Stud noting “We will get through this TOGETHER!” **BH**



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