



## Loading Up, Moving Out

*This article by Marty McGee is meant to help you transport your alpaca wherever you may be heading, as comfortably as possible and with a minimum of drama.*

Early in the morning on clinic days as I wander around organising my equipment and preparing for the weekend I watch as the animals arrive. I have seen alpacas arrive for their weekend with me in all manner of vehicles and in varying states of mind. It could be that my animal student was loaded the morning of the clinic and is experiencing motorised travel for the first time in his life. Other students are problem animals that are difficult to work with and may very well be difficult to halter, lead and load. The process of getting to the clinic could have been unpleasant for both the alpaca and his person. This article is meant to help you get your alpaca wherever you may be heading, as comfortably as possible and with a minimum of drama.

I believe that travelling for an alpaca is much more frightening than we probably realise. From an alpaca's point of view, getting in a small box and jumping out into a totally new environment must be pretty weird. There is nothing in their lives that would prepare them for the sensations involved in travelling in a trailer or van. There are ways to ease an alpaca's fear and reduce the stress of travel without investing an unrealistic amount of time. First of all, just because your alpaca will fit in it doesn't mean the conveyance is appropriate. A feeling of safety and security is very important to an animal under new and frightening circumstances. The back seat of a volvo may be great for the kids but is probably not the way to bring your first alpaca home. Ideally you are hauling your alpaca in something he can stand in (even if he must keep his head down when standing). The good news for us humans is that it is natural for most alpacas to lie down when they are travelling. However, when an alpaca is lying down he has a small area on which to balance and little opportunity to create a stable platform. Nature has not designed an alpaca for balancing while lying down in a moving vehicle. You can help your alpaca relax more fully while travelling if you consider the issue of balance as you plan for his trip.

Uneven flooring, wide expanses of flat area and of course movement all pose problems for an alpaca trying to keep his balance. Orienting your alpaca at an angle to the line of travel will help. Using hay bales or partitions to orient the way your alpacas position themselves will guide them into lying down in a way that contributes to their ability to balance as well as giving them something to lean against.

Unnecessary noise and sudden movements will all contribute to a feeling of anxiety. Wrap metal parts that clank and bang with cloth or duct tape and drive with an awareness of your passenger, brake gently and early and take corners slowly and smoothly. In order to imagine what it would be like the first few times your alpaca is transported, think of yourself being hustled into a new carnival ride- a roller coaster for example. Now imagine riding it for several hours! Ideally your alpaca's first trip is going to be a very short one up the driveway and back home. First impressions are

really important. Your alpaca will learn to relax while travelling if his first few excursions are short and sweet.

Comfort is obviously important when it comes to your alpaca's attitude about travelling. Dense padding is probably the most important factor that will contribute to a comfortable ride. Your alpaca's legs and under belly are designed to rest on the ground for long periods however under normal circumstances the ground wouldn't bounce and shift nor would your alpaca be denied the opportunity to stand up and shift around. In addition many trailer floors are much harder than the ground. Thickness is not the same as shock absorption. Density is much more important. A two-inch dense rubber mat will provide more in the way of comfort than a ten-inch piece of non-dense foam. What ever you use in your conveyance along with any ramps or steps the surface should provide good footing even when wet. An old piece of carpet thrown on top of some dense rubber matting works great. Wind is another factor to consider. Asking your alpaca to endure four hours of a 50-mile per hour wind in his face is a bit much. A windscreen is a fairly easy addition to most conveyances. Wind blowing around inside an open sided stock trailer is a very good reason to avoid bedding with hay or straw. Chaff blowing around inside a trailer is no good for fleece or your animal's eyes.

Your alpaca will do his level best not to go potty in a van or trailer so visit the dung pile before you load. Otherwise your alpacas may spend hours in discomfort trying *not* to go to the bathroom. Before leaving home pick up a bit of poop in a small airtight container and take it with you. That way when you stop at a rest stop you can off load your alpacas open up the poop container and the urge to go will hit.

Alpacas feel safer with another alpaca around. When possible take at least two animals. If you are delivering an alpaca to a new home and you have room, take three and bring two back. Ideally one will be an experienced traveller and can transmit his calm attitude to his more inexperienced travelling companions.

Your alpaca will be using new muscles to keep his balance while travelling and might very well be sore the next day. If your are travelling to a show it might be smart and kind to take a nice walk to help loosen up the kinks before settling your alpaca into his small show stall.

Many people feel it is safer to leave a halter on the alpaca during transport. If you decide to leave a halter on, it is very important to make sure that it fits properly. A properly fitting halter is one that is comfortable and doesn't interfere with your alpaca's ability to ruminate and eat. A properly fitting halter fits well up on the nose bone and has enough slack in the nose band so that your alpaca can easily move his jaw enough to both eat and ruminate. Loading.... In an ideal world we would all have time to train each alpaca to understand how to step up into their particular chariot. Reality is that there are lots of times when the travel day arrives and the alpaca has never seen the inside of a trailer. There are several ways to approach loading a novice; techniques that make it much easier for all concerned. If possible, physically organise the loading process so that you can herd the animal in to the conveyance by exerting loading pressure from behind the alpaca rather than trying to pull him in from the front. Back your vehicle up to the barn or pasture opening. Create an aisle way that leads into the vehicle if you can and then herd the alpaca from the back. Creative use of panels will compensate for a lack of help. Most alpacas would rather not get in a confined space with a human and will load much better if they can get into the trailer by themselves. Look at your watch and be willing to wait 10-15 minutes. You would have used that much time haltering a wild inexperienced alpaca and dragging and fighting him into the trailer anyway. Time is a funny thing it seems

to go by faster when you are busy fighting than when you are waiting quietly for your alpaca to figure out that the thing you want him to climb into is a safe bet. It will help immensely to load two or three animals together. An inexperienced alpaca will gladly jump in a vehicle with another alpaca that knows how to do it. Then you can off load the ones you don't need. Alpacas are very agile and can figure out how to climb into small spaces if they can think and act on their own. Attach a lead rope and you complicate the process five hundred percent.

Trying to pull the alpaca in from the head is almost certainly going to take longer and may result in injury. The tendency of an animal when pulled from the front is to either lie down...(you have now just taught your alpaca to lie down instead of load) or to throw all the weight to the rear quarters and balance on the lead rope. When your alpaca is physically organised in this way it is not possible for him to jump forward. His only physical option is to rear up and back, against the lead. If you are quick, you may be able to pull him forward into the vehicle when he is balanced on his two rear legs. This is not particularly safe for you or your alpaca and is a very scary way for your alpaca to find himself in a strange container. Try this physical test yourself. Hold on to the end of a lead rope and lean back against pressure provided by a second person. Instruct your helper to keep steady pressure on your hands and then try to jump forward while you have your weight against the rope. You will find this to be next to impossible. This is exactly the position we put our alpacas in when we try to pull them into a trailer.

If you find yourself loading a reluctant alpaca by leading him in from the front, try this.... First work your way close to the trailer or van. Get inside, getting as far into the vehicle and as far away from the animal as you can. Use your lead rope only to keep the animal's nose and attention oriented toward the vehicle. Aside from insisting that your alpaca looks directly at the vehicle in question, offer NO pressure on the head. No pressure means that the hook attached to the halter is dangling freely. Often handlers don't think they are pulling on the head when in fact they are. Look at the hook attached to the halter. If the hook is not pointing at the ground you have not taken all pressure off of the lead rope. If the alpaca tries to back up set your hand and resist. Tell him with your hand, "I am not going to pull you into the trailer but ...*no backing up!*" When the alpaca tries to back up use intermittent signals on the lead rope and do your best to transfer the animals weight from the rear end back to the front end. As soon as possible, put slack in the line again and check that hook to make sure you are not putting any pressure on the lead! Look at your watch and wait a full two minutes before giving any signals to the head. BE QUIET. Your alpaca needs time and quiet to think about the trailer. Every time you let loose with Come on Teddy Come on, Come on you can do it. Come on Come on Come on Come on Come on Come on. Load up Come on Come on Come on. You can do it. Come on Come on Come on Come on its okay... you distract your alpaca from the issue at hand. Be totally quiet. Each time you give a signal on the lead you distract your alpaca from inspecting the trailer and making the decision to try getting in. Just be still and quiet and look at your watch.

Each time the alpaca takes a step forward your timer is reset and you must wait a full two minutes before giving signals on the lead. Alpacas hate a vacuum and they are very uncomfortable standing still and doing nothing. Your alpaca wants to move. As long as you don't let your animal either lean backwards on the lead or back away from the vehicle he will move, and the only way is forward into the vehicle. I have used this method when loading animals when it is time to go home and it works very reliably and *quickly*. I have very seldom waited more than 5-10 minutes for an alpaca to figure out how to load himself not very long when you think about it. Using this technique rather than picking your animal up will make subsequent loading a breeze.

Your 15-minute investment will give your alpaca a chance to actually figure out how to load.

When you have the luxury of time to teach your alpaca to load before the day he will actually be travelling, think of your trailer or van as just a new and different kind of obstacle. Plan how you would work your way up to it. Trailers or vans are simply something scary to walk under, and something scary to step up on. Work up to loading by walking your alpaca over and under other natural obstacles in the outdoors. Accepting something low overhead seems to be one of the most difficult aspects of loading in a van. Walking under low hanging branches is a very good way to get your alpaca accustomed to having something over his head. Jumping over logs or deadfall outside is easier for most alpacas than human made obstacles and serves as good practice for jumping into the back of a van or a step up trailer. A big log under some branches does a very good job of teaching your alpaca how to get the hang of the jump and duck manoeuvre.

When it comes to homemade obstacles the most useful ones are those that can be taken apart and made easier. Low jumps leading to higher jumps, platforms that can begin on the ground before being raised off of the ground allow you address challenges incrementally rather than all at once. Pulling your alpaca over an obstacle may get him across but it will also compromise the trust he will feel for you, his handler. Better to make the obstacle easier and work back up to the sticking point. All of these obstacles will pave the way for loading in a vehicle.

Happy Travels.