

LAMA TRANSPORTATION

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So you have a llama or alpaca (genus *lama*) and want to do a short program at your local school, library, nursing home, etc. Getting from here to there and back is a problem? It shouldn't be. Let's look at solutions.

Llamas and alpacas can be transported in a horse trailer, mini-van or a pick up with a high cap. We use all three options regularly. Our favorite mode is our full size pick up with a 36" cap, but the Dodge Grand Caravan, modified by taking out the rear seats and cutting down a Tacoma bed liner to fit, works well too. When we have several animals to transport, we often use a two-horse trailer with the inside barriers removed.

Whatever we use, we have a four to six inch pad of hay on the floor. The reason is that llamas and alpacas travel lying down. *Note that llamas and alpacas are not tied during transport!*

The big question is how to get them into the van/truck/trailer. It is easy, but do be prepared to spend a bit of time training. Look at the training process. We will presume that you have acquired a lama that has been taught to lead well, but is timorous about new, strange things – loading, for example.

We introduce lamas to new situations fairly slowly, but with the understanding that we will complete the process. Having said this, we must also say that we find the attention span of an untrained lama to be around 15 to 20 minutes. Later this will increase to an hour or more. For now, we will live with the shorter period, since they seem to mentally shut down if we exceed their capability.

To load a green lama into our truck, we first back the truck into a convenient ditch, lowering the tailgate to around six to 12 inches, an easy step up for lamas. We first load a lama familiar with the process. The green lama watches with interest, but not understanding. With the experienced lama in the truck, we bring the new guy across the opening of the back of the truck so he can see what is inside. Initially we do not ask him to enter. If he seems afraid, we go back and forth several times, getting closer to the tailgate each time, helping to overcome his fear.

When he seems to accept that his buddy is doing ok inside, we stop on the next pass with the lamas head about two thirds of the way across. We go into the truck, keeping a steady pull on the lead so he does not back away. Reaching the end of the rope inside, we turn and work at coaxing him in. Quite often, a green lama will go in after only a minute or two of gentle persuasion. Sometimes, however, we wait for as much as five minutes without success. We then we get out of the truck and start the leading process all over again. We will repeat this several times if necessary.

From time to time, we get an animal that truly does not seem to understand. With these we coax them to the tailgate and, while keeping a taught rope one of us will lift a front foot onto the truck and walk around the animal and lift the other foot in. They seem to get the idea and jump in. The person outside closes the tailgate and door, and the person inside releases the lead ropes (note that lamas always travel untied), and goes out the back, being careful not to let the animals escape.

We try to do this with every lama at around six months of age. Once they have learned it, they will retain the lesson for life. Exactly the same process is used with a trailer or mini van. Animals that have been around for a while will walk up to the back of the truck and jump in with no urging.

Lamas that have had good experiences with people can be trained in a few minutes; others take longer. If you have a lama problem you would like to discuss, call us or e-mail us:

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