

Horse Evacuation & Trailer Seminar
Held at Boulder County Fairgrounds Oct. 20, 2002

By Hildy Armour and Amy Bowman

Organized and emceed by BCHA Board member Kathie Hibbard, an enthusiastic and curious group of horse people took a turn at the "trailer rodeo", listened to members of the Boulder County Sheriff's Office talk about emergency plans, learned about the importance of trailer maintenance from Mac Mackin of Mac's Trailer Service, and as a special bonus, watched a Marty Marten trailer loading demonstration. Word has it that the afternoon was most informative and an excellent program.

Beginning at 1:00pm, a few brave souls stepped up to test their trailer pulling skills with a course set up with eight pairs of orange cones and a pole obstacle to back their trailer through. There were a total of nine elements taking up half of the south parking lot at the fairgrounds. Several people had brought their own rigs, however one person asked to borrow a truck and bumper-pull trailer and anxiously tried the course. Another person asked to try driving with a borrowed gooseneck trailer just to see what it was like maneuvering a larger rig through the cones. Kathy Kosorok, you're a natural! There were no winners at this "rodeo" because it was intended to be a supportive practice for whoever was game to give it a try plus it was just a lot of fun!

The Boulder County Sheriff's Office was represented by Animal Control Officer, Teri Snyder, Boulder County Park Ranger, Jeff Hebert and Boulder County Mounted Patrol Officer, Kathy Bryerly. They discussed horse evacuation during an emergency, particularly in a fire situation. Acknowledging that one cannot play out every situation, the Sheriff's office does have the right people and the right equipment ready to go. Terri Snyder said that their main objective is getting people and livestock out soon enough. She went on to say that it depends on the conditions, and having enough time to evacuate is the key. In the event of a forced evacuation, the Sheriff's Department will go in to evacuate animals, taking them to the Boulder County Fairgrounds. Volunteers will be needed at the fairgrounds to help with checking in the animals as well as feeding them. If the Fairgrounds is full, the Sheriff's Office will find another location. If the homeowner is not present at the time of the evacuation, the Sheriff will leave a form at the home informing them where the animals have been taken. It is best to have 2-3 days of food go with the horse including any medications. However, it will be the owners' responsibility to administer any medications, and understandably, horses with any type of contagious disease cannot be accepted at the Fairgrounds.

If there is not time to evacuate, horses and other livestock will be turned loose. In this case, it is optimal to spray paint a telephone number on the horses' hindquarters, and walk the horses as far as possible away from the fire before turning them loose. Horses have been known to refuse to leave a burning barn or even run back to it, so closing the barn doors would be prudent. Another option is that people may choose to voluntarily evacuate their animals. Ideally, you should plan ahead and have someone lined up to haul your horse for you if you do not own a trailer. Since the Fairgrounds will not usually accept horses voluntarily evacuated, plan ahead for a possible destination for them. Call the Sheriff to discuss the specific situation. If the fire is close and they are anticipating an evacuation in your area, the Sheriff's Office can help. Another consideration is to determine in advance what will happen after the emergency. Horse owners need to have a plan of where to keep their horse or horses if they end up with nothing left to take them back to.

Kathie Hibbard who compiled the information for the Emergency Facts Sheet at the seminar is also putting together a Horse Evacuation Kit. It would include a halter, copies of vaccination records (yet another reason to keep up to date on vaccinations), a list of medications for your horse, contact information for the vet, and even a photo of your horse. It all helps in getting your horse back to you, so the more information that is sent with your horse, the better. Another useful sheet that Kathie provided is the H.O.O.F. (Horse Owner's Operation Find) form. In conjunction with BCHA, the Boulder County Sheriff's Office is maintaining a directory of owners, horses and their locations in the event of an emergency or even just a lost horse. It happens!

Mac Mackin was the next presenter of the afternoon. Mac owns and operates Mac's Mobile Hitch & Trailer Service. He offered all kinds of practical information about everything to do with horse trailers. In a nut shell, Mac's advice was "don't take anything for granted." "Remember to always check your hitch before you drive off, take your corners slow and wide, and simply drive slowly when hauling livestock," Mac added. He also suggested that a trailer owner check their rig thoroughly about two times a season depending on how much you travel. A few things to check for would include sharp edges inside your trailer, the corners under the mats where urine can build up, and even clean the floorboards thoroughly with a knife. He emphasized the importance of your breaking system as well. Having no brakes on your trailer can ruin the brakes on your vehicle in a short time, and even more dangerous is pulling a trailer that is too heavy for your vehicle. Mac answered all kinds of questions ranging from the correct weight of safety chains on hitches, dealing with rust on a trailer, to using a 12 volt (not a 6 volt) battery to handle the breakaway system that is now required on all trailers these days. Trailer regulations have been in effect since 1996 and you can be ticketed if not properly hooked up. Wayne Phipps commented that he picked up on the importance of your trailer being visible to other drivers on the road and he is planning to add reflector strips to his gooseneck trailer. Colleen Harris asked if it is better to tie your horse in the trailer or not? Mac graciously referred this question to Marty Marten who was next on the agenda to present a trailer loading demonstration.

Marty's presentation involved three different horses to load. He offered tips and pointers that could be used by anyone. However, Marty's best advice was "start preparing yourself for an emergency tomorrow, and not several months from now or worse yet the day of an evacuation." How do you prepare? First, get your horse operating well on a halter rope, and then get busy with groundwork to develop flexibility and softness with your horse. Marty went on to suggest having fire drills just like some of us did back in grade school. He said have a drill twice a month; one during the day and one during the night. Get your spouse and family involved or another horse friend to prepare for an emergency situation. It may be wise to practice loading your horse at night, especially with a headlamp, bandana and goggles as you might wear in heavy smoke and wind. More importantly, Marty suggested that you think about where your trailer is parked. Is it easily accessible for a quick exit if necessary? These are all excellent things to consider in order to be prepared. During the actual trailer loading, two people mentioned later that they noticed the value of being able to ask your horse to go back and forth inside the trailer without stepping out. Taking the time to prepare your horse in this way will greatly benefit both of you when time is short. Develop respect and willingness before you're in a pinch as it will save time in the long run. Marty did an excellent job with all three horses and gave generously of his time teaching, answering questions, and even staying on later to follow through loading the first horse again with her owners. "He made it look easy," said one observer.

All in all it was a terrific afternoon and a second Horse Evacuation & Trailer Seminar will be offered next spring for those of you who missed out! The County Officers offered a lot of good, solid information as did Mac and Marty in a relaxed atmosphere where it was comfortable to learn and practice. Who knows, perhaps BCHA will offer belt buckles for the next "trailer rodeo"

for those who get really good at navigating their rigs? In the meantime, be safe, do your homework and be prepared! A big thank you to Kathie Hibbard and Amy Bowman for putting this seminar together, and to BCHA volunteers Wendy Small, Jody Marken and Pat Jarvis who also helped out the day of the seminar. Most of all, thank you to Terri Snyder, Jeff Hebert, Kathy Bryerly, Mac Mackin and Marty Marten for their time and expertise.