Animals’ Angels Investigation of a Double Deck Transport of Slaughter Horses from La Junta, CO to Stroud, OK

1. General Information

Date:
10/29/2010-10/30/2010

Transport from/to:
Winter Livestock Auction, La Junta, CO
George Baker Collecting Station, Stroud, OK

Distance:
496 Miles

Time to destination:
9 hours and 26 minutes

2. Observations

Winter Livestock Auction, 7:40am (MDT):
The investigators observed the unloading of horses for the monthly horse sale. They noticed a truck with a double deck trailer arriving at the premises. Information obtained from the truck:
Kory Pierson
Stroud, OK
Not For Hire
Vin 6D891450
George Baker
US DOT 1127211

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The doors on the trailer were open and the investigators were able to document the inside of the trailer.

**Background Information:**
These double deck trailers, designed for cattle, offer not enough head room for horses. Larger horses are not able to stand normally and have to hold their head low during the entire transport. Double deck trailers are already banned for transport of horses to a slaughter facility. However, due to a loophole in the current regulation, they are still legal for any transport to a feedlot or collecting facility. Animals’ Angels has raised this concern for years and has shared numerous reports of the cruelty involved in such transports with USDA. According to an OIG – Report released on September 30, 2010 – the agency has finally addressed the issue and has announced that revised regulations will be released before the end of 2010. However, until this really happens, hundreds of horses continue to suffer on these transports.

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The “loose” horse sale started selling at 10:00am. Kill buyer Charles Carter and the buyer for G. Baker were sitting next to each other and purchased most of the horses. The sale ended at 10:12am, 55 horses were sold in 12 minutes. Of the 55 horses, 5 horses were lame and several were emaciated. The buyer for Baker bought all of them. 2 foals were taken from their mothers, the buyer for Baker took both of the mares and a private party bought the foals.

After the sale the investigators went outside to check the pens. The 2 foals were crying for their mothers, the mares were in Baker’s kill pen. The mares were stirring up the overcrowded pen, the agitated animals were kicking and biting each other.

At 12:00am they started moving the riding horses closer to the ring. At 1:00pm, the registered horse sale started. 1 mare had an enlarged knee, 1 mare was pregnant and several were lame. Most of these horses were bought by the kill buyers. Afterwards, the remaining loose horses were sold. A total of 128 horses went through the ring that day. Charles Carter bought 40 horses and the buyer for Baker bought 40 horses.
After the sale at approx. 2:30pm, the investigators went outside to check on the horses. All kill buyers horses had been moved to the west pens. The horses were still very agitated and continued to fight in the pens.

At 2:58pm, Baker’s truck started backing to the chute and opened the gate on the trailer. At 3:00pm they brought a bay stallion from the pen area and loaded him into the nose of trailer. Then all of the other horses were rounded up and moved to the chute area. The horses were nervous and did not want to go on the ramp leading to the upper level of the trailer. The drivers were very impatient and hit them hard on face and back with their wooden stick. After several minutes, the frightened animals rushed up the ramp. Once they were loaded, the investigators could hear them kicking the sides of the trailer and saw them hitting their heads on the low ceiling.

When the loading of the upper level was finishes, the driver closed the gate and raised the ramp. They immediately continued loading the lower deck. The horses on the upper deck were still kicking and
carrying on. Again, the horses did not want to enter the trailer and the drivers used their sticks excessively to move them forward. The gate was closed and the drivers walked around the trailer poking their sticks through the holes to move the horses forward. All 40 horses were loaded.

At 3:34pm, they pulled away from the chute and started heading south. At 4:40pm, the truck turned left onto US 160 and headed to Springfield, CO. With 40 horses loaded, the truck was most likely overweight and the driver choose this route to avoid the scales in Lamar, CO. They continued east to US 287, then turned right and continued south to the Colorado/Oklahoma line. At 7:00 PM (CDT) they arrived in Boise City, OK. The truck pulled into the “Rockin A Cafe” parking lot and without looking at the the horses, the drivers went into the restaurant.

The investigators walked over to the trailer to check on the horses. With exclusion of the stallion, who was by himself, the horses were crammed into the compartments with no space to move. The taller ones were forced to stand with their heads low, putting them at severe risk of being kicked by the other horses. The stallion and the horses on the upper deck were still very agitated.

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At 7:56pm, the drivers came back to the truck and continued heading south on US 287. At 10:45pm, they stopped again to fuel at the “RAW” truck stop in Woodward, OK. At 11:00pm, the truck left the truck stop and continued south on US 270/183.

At 2:00am, the truck arrived at the feedlot in Stroud, OK. A few trucks were already parked in the driveway. It was quite dark and it took the driver a while to get the trailer straight to the chute to unload the horses. Both the driver and the co-driver opened the gates and started unloading immediately.

Due to the fact that it was too dark to observe the handling or the condition of the horses, the investigators left the feedlot at 2:20am.

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**George Baker’s Feedlot/Baker Stables - Stroud, OK**

The investigators returned to the feedlot at 10:30am. The truck from La Junta was still parked in the chute area. The driver was walking around his truck and checking it. Two other trucks were parked on the premises, all had George Baker’s DOT number.

The feedlot is a very large property with several barns and an extensive pen area. All the pens had water troughs and hay bales. There were approx. 200 horses in the pens, several had the green USDA slaughter tag attached. The horses from La Junta were all together in one of the pens.
Despite the fact that they were on a public road, at 11:18am the investigators were suddenly approached by a guy in a pick up truck and told to leave. Minutes later they noticed that a police car was following them. The Sheriff continued to follow them until they left the county.

**Conclusion:**

The investigation showed that the use of double deck trailers for slaughter horses is still common practice despite the fact that it is inhumane and dangerous. Our observations en route confirm that the taller horses are unable to stand normally and therefore are at greater risk to suffer from injuries and exhaustion. A complete ban of double deck trailers for any transport of horses is long overdue.