

Welfare aspects of the long distance transportation of animals – the Animal Transportation Association

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Summary

The international and long distance movement of animals is a far larger business than most people imagine. Some reasons are outlined in this paper, along with the history of the AATA (Animal [Air] Transportation Association). This trade association has been involved for over 30 years in developing standards and procedures for the movement of all types of animals. The competence of animal handlers is of paramount importance. Competence of flying groomers is assessed by the AATA. This paper is written from the viewpoint of someone who has been a member since the Association's inception. The subject will be of interest to airlines, transporters, veterinarians, farmers, animal relocators, zoological establishments and legislators.

Keywords

Animal, Competence, International trade, Legislation, Relocation, Transport, Welfare.

Aspetti del benessere animale nel trasporto a lunga distanza – l'Associazione per il trasporto di animali

Riassunto

La movimentazione di animali su lunghe distanze è una questione economica di gran lunga più importante di quanto non si creda. Nel presente lavoro vengono delineate alcune motivazioni, insieme alla storia della AATA (Associazione per l'[Avio]trasporto Animale). Questa associazione commerciale è stata impegnata per 30 anni nello sviluppo di standard e procedure per il

trasferimento di tutte le specie animali. La competenza degli addetti alla movimentazione degli animali è di vitale importanza. La competenza degli stallieri a bordo degli aerei è garantita dall'AATA. Il presente lavoro è stato scritto partendo dal punto di vista di chi è stato membro dell'associazione fin dalla sua costituzione. L'argomento potrà essere di grande interesse per le linee aeree, i trasportatori, i veterinari, gli allevatori, gli addetti alla movimentazione di animali, gli stabilimenti zoologici e i legislatori.

Parole chiave

Animale, Benessere, Commercio internazionale, Competenza, Legislazione, Trasloco, Trasporto.

Introduction

This story begins in the late 1950s when research was being conducted in Europe to develop the Salk vaccine for the prevention of polio in humans. Many primates were required for testing purposes and these were being shipped in large numbers from India and East Africa to the United Kingdom by BOAC (British Overseas Airways Corporation, a forerunner of British Airways). With dreadful losses running as high as 80% mortality in transit, the *raison d'être* of the trade was rightly questioned. So often, when faced with a problem, the simplest commercial decision is to say 'no' and cease to provide the service. To their credit, BOAC decided that if the job were to be done at all, it should be done well. Their reasoning was that they had a company doctor to look after the well-being of their crews and, indeed, their passengers to

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some degree. Today, for example, one will find helpful advice in the flight magazines on how to relieve stress and risk of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) through simple exercises whilst seated. So, by extrapolation: 'why not have a company veterinarian to look after the well-being of our animal passengers?'

In the late 1950s, problems relating to the carriage of animals by air were recognised in the United Kingdom and the British Standards Institute (BSI) created a working group to investigate and recommend standards to industry. They published various booklets for different types of animals including dogs, cats, birds, primates and rodents.

This is the point at which a good friend and colleague, Graham Joss MRCVS, a private veterinary practitioner now sadly deceased, became involved with the airline industry, along with Vic Attwood who represented the airlines. Graham was born in Switzerland and had found himself practising veterinary surgery as a post-graduate student in the United Kingdom at the outbreak of war in 1939. Being Swiss by birth and therefore from a neutral country, he was not called up into the services and remained in the United Kingdom where he practised veterinary science for the rest of his life. He was based at Reigate in Surrey, near my farm, and I knew him professionally from early meetings in the 1950s. Graham Joss later became advisor to British Airways and to the International Air Transport Association (IATA). Vic Attwood has now retired but acts as an advisor in various airline-related fields and is presently a member of the United Kingdom Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) Import/Export Consultation Exchange (DICE).

Graham Joss was commissioned to correct the dreadful transit losses, otherwise the airline would have ceased the trade. His approach was entirely pragmatic and practical. He went to India to examine what happened from the moment the primates were taken from the trees. Of course, what he found were terrified animals being stuffed into small bamboo cages and hauled directly to the airport for shipment, without proper handling, provision

of food or water, or acclimatisation. It is hardly surprising that so many died, if only from shock, quite apart from receiving a completely different diet, and the noise and confinement to which they were unaccustomed. Carnivores, in particular, missed being able to catch live food as they had done in the wild. Animals were often mixed in cages for shipment, sometimes resulting in a constant and bloody fight to determine the 'pecking order'.

These problems were overcome by the simple procedure of holding the animals for at least 30 days in confinement. During that time, they became accustomed to being handled, to eating dry food and socialising with others; furthermore, cages of the correct sizes could be prepared for transport. Every animal was shipped individually. Transport losses immediately dropped to zero and the entire research programme was able to develop the polio protection we all enjoy today.

Live animals *Manual*

The IATA is the body that defines every aspect of airline procedure. Previously, IATA had a Cargo Procedures Board that was responsible, among other things, for many aspects of the carriage of special cargo, such as dangerous goods. On account of the criticism received in relation to the carriage of animals, IATA set up a Live Animals Working Group with the brief to develop procedures for the safe carriage of animals by air. The working group consisted of interested airlines, with Graham Joss as the veterinary advisor. Vic Attwood was the chairman. This was first known as the Live Animals Board. It became the Live Animals and Perishables Board (LAPB) when perishables were added in the 1990s (5). As the BSI had no procedures at that time to update their recommendations, they assigned their copyright to IATA, and their information became the basis of the first edition of the *IATA Live Animals Manual*, published in 1969. This manual provided only an outline of recommendations for IATA members to begin with, and not all airlines were members. Following discussions with various governments in the mid 1970s, the manual was

upgraded to a 'regulation', making it binding on all member airlines.

For various reasons, many airlines chose not to be members of IATA and several airlines are still not members today. These non-member airlines often believed they were outside these regulations. Some governments sought to legislate on animal welfare in transport and rather than 'reinvent the wheel' in the specialist area of air transport, they generally specified that 'all animals transported by air should be transported according to the current IATA Live Animal Regulations'. The IATA LAPB was enlarged to include representatives from many other agencies with an interest in the subject. The IATA Live Animal Regulations (LAR) are now recognised by some 65 countries around the world including all European Union (EU) member states and the members of the Council of Europe. In addition, the regulations are the working document for the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) and the World Organisation for Animal Health (*Office International des Épizooties*: OIE).

The first objective of the IATA was to define basic principles for animal containers, including size, ventilation, construction materials and handling. One would think this should be fairly straightforward, but just one look at the volume of world trade in animals and the variety of sources, indicates that you need as many different container designs as there are dealers. There was a corresponding range of quality, from excellent to completely unacceptable containers.

There are various peculiarities about transporting animals by air which need careful consideration at a very early stage of planning. Animals generally have three basic requirements, namely: air for ventilation and oxygen, water to drink and space to travel comfortably. Food is usually secondary, since most animals are able to fast for several days, but they cannot go without the first three requirements. It is essential to contain water and urine within a container. Ventilation holes must be adequate, regardless of other freight. Volume must be defined in such a way as to

ensure that the particular animal may travel for several hours in comfort. All this may seem obvious, but live air freight is usually calculated on volume weight rather than actual weight. This led to many containers being too small. The reason is simple.

The old trick question asked: 'which is heavier, a pound of feathers or a pound of lead'? Naturally they are both the same, but a pound of feathers takes up a vastly greater volume. Hence, air freight costs are calculated on 'volume weight' rather than 'actual gross weight'.

The figures are complex, but a simple example illustrates the problem perfectly. A cat may weigh only 10 lb or 4.5 kg live weight (net weight). It may be loaded in a crate measuring 28 × 21 × 21 in (71.1 × 53.3 × 53.3 cm) which itself has a tare weight of only 3 lb (1.3 kg). Tare weight is the weight of a container that is deducted from the gross weight to obtain net weight. For the example of the cat, the total of tare and net weight or the gross weight, is thus 13 lb or 5.9 kg. However, the volume weight is another matter and is calculated as the cubic volume of the crate in inches divided by 366; that is $28 \times 21 \times 21 / 366 = 33.7$. In metric units, the calculation is the cube in centimetres divided by 6 000. i.e. $71 \times 54 \times 54 / 6\ 000 = 33.68$. Rounded up, the volume weight or *chargeable* weight is taken to be 34 lb or 15 kg. This is 2.7 times as 'heavy' as the gross weight and therefore more costly. A tremendous incentive is made to ensure an animal container is as small as possible to save freight costs, but this is to the detriment of the animal.

The next problem to consider is how large should the container be in relation to the animal itself? Here again, shippers sought to save size and cost by only considering the dimensions of the animal in repose. This may be fine whilst the animal is sleeping, but on a long journey the animal must be able to stretch, turn round, stand up, drink and groom itself. The IATA LAR defines how container size should be calculated, based on the measurement of the animal concerned.

It is most important to consider these details because they led directly to the creation of the

Animal (Air) Transportation Association. More than one United States airline was landing dogs in airports in the United Kingdom with the container only 1 in (2.5 cm) shorter than the dog, thus restricting the movements of the animal and not complying with IATA regulations. The specifications required that the internal measurement be at least 4 in (20 cm) longer than the dog. Since these measurements were clearly defined in the legislation, prosecution would invariably ensue. This occurred almost on a weekly basis, with fines of approximately £1 000 to £2 000 (US\$1 500-\$3 000) each time. The airline was prosecuted and paid the fine.

The airlines naturally objected: 'we didn't make the box', 'we didn't put the animal in the box', 'we could not take the animal out and measure it in case it escaped or bit someone!', 'therefore we are not responsible'.

This was not so: under United Kingdom legislation, they were the carrier and therefore 'for the time being responsible for the welfare of the animal'. Faced with this situation, the airlines convened a meeting to attempt to resolve this issue and address many others.

Formation of the Animal Air Transportation Association

The Animal Air Transportation Association (AATA) was organised in response to the concerns of industry leaders, government officials and humane association representatives. The need for such a group was first expressed in October 1975 by some 100 participants attending a two-day livestock transport seminar in Beltsville, Maryland, that was sponsored by three United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies (the Foreign Agricultural Service, the Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service and the Agricultural Research Service). The formal organisation of AATA was subsequently carried out between 1 and 13 May 1976 at a Live Animal/Meat Transportation Seminar sponsored by the USDA Foreign Agricultural Service and the Texas Department of Agriculture in Houston. In 1989, the name of AATA was changed to 'The Animal

Transportation Association' to emphasise that sea, air and land transport were of equal importance in the safe and humane transport of animals. Previous registration of the logo meant, however, that the original lettering 'AATA' had to be retained, which explains the apparent error in the acronym.

Organisation of the Animal Transportation Association

AATA is governed by a board of directors consisting of elected officers (president, president-elect, past president, secretary-treasurer and fifteen directors). Elections are held at the annual meeting. Committees have been established to study special interest areas, namely: animal welfare and banking and insurance, large animal, livestock, equine, marine, membership, programme, awards, small animal, transportation, audit/financial, nominating committees and a future planning committee. In addition to regular conferences, AATA sponsors seminars and special technical meetings at other times as determined by the board of directors. The AATA office publishes a quarterly newsletter, a membership directory and provides referral services for its members.

Mission statement of the Animal Transportation Association

The AATA believes that all animals, birds, fish and other living creatures, domestic and wild, including biological materials, are a vital part of our environment and need to be preserved, humanely treated and utilised for the well-being and benefit of the human race. The AATA understands the need for research, education and some public interest regulation of animal health and transportation. It is the policy of AATA to develop and promote, in collaboration with the industry, the best means of accomplishing these objectives.

In line with these objectives, it is the continuing policy of AATA to encourage research, education, improved service and increased international co-ordination in the

shipment of live animals (including birds, fish and biological cargo) by:

- providing assistance and fully co-ordinating AATA activities worldwide with international and national organisations that have a common interest in welfare and the economics of transporting live animals
- encouraging all nations, for humane reasons, to facilitate international and internal transportation of animals using the most expeditious economic routes, including giving high priority to live animal shipments and in transit privileges consistent with the health requirements of the affected countries
- encouraging the establishment of an animal protection office at principal ports and terminals where live animals are handled to arrange for and oversee adequate protection of and humane and expeditious handling of, live animals shipments
- encouraging the publication of articles and research papers to educate the general public, carriers, handlers, dealers and public officials
- encouraging communications by serving as a clearing house for information on special problems or complaints of consignors, receivers, handlers, carriers or other involved parties and actively seeking information from the industry and researchers worldwide and making that information available; AATA also serves as a medium to gather researchable problems and circulate that information among all researchers
- encouraging research on all phases of animal transportation, by collecting and examining information on the performance of various transport equipment and techniques
- encouraging, along with other interested organisations, the development of prescribed 'standard regimes' by species for the preparation of animals prior to transport, loading, carrying, unloading and during post transport care; it is also recognised that the safe and humane transport of animals can neither be separated from animal health issues relating

to export certification nor from the manner in which animals are cared for following transport; the AATA therefore supports continued discussions and negotiation between exporting and importing countries towards the establishment of practical export testing protocols, as well as an increased emphasis on providing appropriate technical assistance to the importers to ensure proper care and treatment of animals following shipment.

Members of AATA subscribe to the above policies and agree that their first consideration is the safe, humane and expeditious handling of any animals under their care.

The size of the industry

Although the AATA was created with special reference to air transport, every aircraft is loaded and unloaded by two surface carriers, so an extension of AATA's interests to all means and modes of transport was inevitable. This is why the word 'Air' has been dropped from the name, but the registered logo 'AATA' had to be retained. There are also enormous movements of animals by sea. It is hard to quantify the worldwide movements of animals, but the following facts should be considered:

- every farm animal moves by road at least once in its lifetime, if only for its final journey
- racehorses move about the world for racing and breeding
- in developed countries, every commercial chicken moves at least twice in its lifetime
- zoological species need to be moved between collections to avoid in-breeding
- by law, research animals are required in vast numbers for the testing of pharmaceuticals
- tropical fish probably make up the largest single species, as well as the most valuable, moved worldwide.

At a rough estimate, 10 000 horses are moved into and out of Europe annually by air. Many more of course travel by road and many hundreds enter by boat from South America. The human population of Great Britain is

around 56 million. Approximately 700 million chickens are eaten in Great Britain every year. Each one of these makes two journeys in its lifetime: first from hatchery to the rearing farm and then from farm to slaughter. The annual pilgrimage to Mecca draws many thousands of live sheep from the antipodes and South America. Proverbially, there may be more animals in aircraft at any one time than people. Day-old chicks alone could account for these numbers and numbers of fish probably exceed even these.

When this information is taken into account, it is really surprising that the AATA did not develop sooner. Perhaps commercial interests conflicted too much, but increased 'globalisation' and the huge distances now travelled by animals, brings new concerns. Are the animals well cared for? What are the disease risks of moving such vast numbers? How do you learn to do the job properly?

It is worth reading the AATA mission statement carefully. Since AATA is a trade association, it is incumbent upon its members to examine carefully their methods of work, and indeed the ethics of their industry.

Developments in Europe

Graham Joss returned from the meeting in the United States to initiate the AATA and brought me the application paper for life membership of the association. I joined immediately because since 1960 my business had been directly concerned with the export of breeding pigs. Most of my shipments were by road and ferry to France, but I also had experience of flights to Portugal and Africa (Fig. 1). However, there came a day when this French market began to dry up. Since the Chinese represent 20% of the world's population, and they eat pork or pork products every day, South-East Asia became my main market area. I can remember how I struggled to understand the complexities of the different types of aircraft available, particularly their different characteristics in terms of ventilation and door sizes. This affected how I would pack, load and ship my breeding pigs. It was invaluable to have access

to specialists in the industry who assisted by responding to my questions.



Figure 1
Modern-day loading of breeding pigs into an aircraft belly

The EU was struggling into its creation with the declared objective to make a 'borderless Europe'. Much noise was made about reducing paperwork, avoiding delays at borders, increasing trade and even developing a common currency. However laudable these aims may have been, diseases do not respect borders. I remember writing an article for a trade magazine protesting that these objectives would be very difficult to achieve in respect of the live animal trade. Veterinary controls and the tracing of animals would still need to be enforced.

Until the removal of European borders, it was necessary to obtain an import licence from the destination country and an export licence from the United Kingdom. In theory, these were to be swept away. Paris (France) was closer to my farm than, say, Birmingham (England). Since my business at that time largely consisted of establishing pig breeding farms in France, all this seemed very attractive.

However, the largest trade that developed in the export of animals from United Kingdom was not in breeding animals, although I moved 10 000 alone into France – it was in sheep for slaughter. The British Isles hold about one quarter of all the sheep in the EU. The demand for them in Europe and further afield, was enormous. The United Kingdom

had never previously allowed the export of live sheep for slaughter, fearing that they might be killed in less than satisfactory welfare conditions. Under the new EU rules, with a 'borderless' Europe, this position was no longer tenable. Even today, live sheep cannot be sent from the United Kingdom for slaughter outside the EU. Now all of Europe was suddenly opening up. Huge numbers of sheep began to travel from the United Kingdom auction markets to Rungis near Paris, and elsewhere in France. From assembly to delivery in northern France, the journey was seldom more than 24 h and every shipment was closely scrutinised by the United Kingdom Ministry of Agriculture.

Welfare concerns were raised. Animals were now being loaded at one side of the EU and being transported to the other without any rest, either for the driver or the animals. Many animals were packed so tight that they could not have had access to water, even if it had been provided. There were no controls or inspection at loading, in transit, or even at delivery. Imagine a Dutch vehicle, with a Danish driver, carrying German cattle through France on the way to Italy. Suppose this vehicle were stopped in France for a weight check, or even an animal welfare issue, in which country would the charges be placed and which jurisdiction would apply? The fledgling EU really had no answers to these questions, so two directives were drawn up, namely directives 91/628/EEC and 95/29/EC (2, 4) to try and regulate the business throughout Europe. It was a brave try but very difficult to make it work in the midst of the few 'cowboys' who brought such discredit to the industry. Above all, it was very unevenly enforced in the different member states and only related to journeys that exceeded 50 km or cross-border traffic. Most slaughter animals travel short distances from market to slaughter plant, with little veterinary supervision until the meat is inspected for human consumption.

There is much to be commended in these directives, but the reality and their effectiveness was rather different. One particular incident that occurred in the 1990s upset us all. Dreadful film footage of sheep

being unloaded from trucks in southern Italy for onward shipment to North Africa was shown on British television screens. These sheep were clearly identified as being British by their ear tags. Many were injured, even to the extent of having broken bones. Several could not walk. All were handled in a most unsympathetic manner. These animals were obviously being sent to an unknown fate outside the EU and the United Kingdom legislation specifically forbade it. The cry arose to 'stop this trade in British sheep to North Africa'. British hauliers were blamed. However much the United Kingdom haulage industry protested and pointed out that the trucks in the film were not British, it was assumed that any harm to these sheep lay at the door of British truckers.

What really happened was this. The sheep were first transported, quite correctly, with British Ministry supervision, from southern England to northern France. All were delivered in good order. The customer was well satisfied and the trucks returned home. However, there was nothing to stop these sheep being immediately re-loaded on new trucks for their journey to Italy. Even though there controls were supposedly in place for sheep to be unloaded, watered, fed and rested, the flouting of the directives as well as their spirit was dreadful. All livestock carriers, even the most responsible, were tarred with the same brush of vilification and hatred. Some of my drivers carrying pigs in livestock trucks reported angry motorists overtaking them on the highway, shaking their fists at them out of the window, quite without reason. Any caring person had to agree that 'something had to be done'.

Responsible carriers in the industry were naturally as appalled as the welfare lobby, and AATA members became involved in many different forums to try and improve both the situation and the legislation.

Animal Transportation Association involvement in animal welfare protection

There have been many recent European initiatives to address a variety of different aspects of animal welfare in transit. The size and scope of the animal transport industry has been discussed. Every sector has its own representatives, championing one particular mode of transport or even one particular species. AATA seeks to represent all and any of these sectors and welcomes the membership and support of any individual or group that shares these aims. Unless an industry takes its own initiative to police itself, there is a tendency for government and outside influences to introduce legislation that an industry may not like. It is therefore incumbent upon the industry representatives to take an interest by playing their part in developing workable legislation, writing guidelines, holding meetings and conferences and generally looking after the interests of members, as well as considering the best interests of our animal passengers.

AATA members have been involved in many initiatives. Greater detail is not required here, but a list of useful Web links are given at the end of this contribution.

Assessment of competence

The latest European regulation to address animal welfare in transit is EC/1/2005 (3). This has been written as a regulation rather than a directive, so that there is less room for 'interpretation' by member states. Much of this regulation is already in place and it is worth reading in full. One clause was introduced in January 2008. This relates to the need for 'competence' at every level of animal transport. The date for introduction of this clause has been delayed so that member states can establish the necessary standards to define what exactly is meant by 'competence'.

Competence includes not just the handler, but also the person who plans the animal movement, the driver of the vehicle, ship or

aircraft, the people loading or unloading animals and any assistants. At the very least, every stage requires at least one person in charge who is competent in handling the species concerned. It also requires that the person planning the shipment entrusts the animals only to suitably competent persons throughout the chain of delivery.

Much in animal handling might seem obvious, but I can well remember one driver, when asked to collect some deer for the first time from a farm in Scotland, asked 'will they do a "wall of death" circuit of the interior of the lorry?'. The 'wall of death' refers to a motorcycle stunt, where a speeding motorcycle is driven around a circular wall. He was assured that he would have a competent handler to accompany him, and thus allay his concerns as well as meet the requirements of the regulation.

Air transport of horses

As mentioned above, many horses travel regularly by air. They need to be accompanied for various reasons, partly because of their size and temperament. A good groom cannot only calm a distressed animal, but can also anticipate problems. If a horse ever reaches an extreme state of nervousness, it can damage itself, its crate and even risk escape and cause injury to personnel or aircraft. There are also special considerations specific to air travel, such as security and the administration of tranquilisers.

Flying grooms are usually employed by the consignor, but technically become members of the crew during the flight. The airline needs to know something about these grooms and have confidence that they are suitably selected and trained. Furthermore, there needs to be a clear chain of command between the captain and these crew members.

The technical aspects of travel do not need to be presented in detail, but some elements need to be stressed because the support of the veterinary profession is required on this particular issue.

All the best advice, including the current IATA Live Animal Regulations, states that sedatives

are contra-indicated for air transport (5). The reason is simple. Whatever the flying altitude, even as high as 35 000 ft (10 500 m), the cabin pressure is set at about 8 000 ft (2 500 m). Above this altitude and the air pressure associated with it, some people and animals may begin to exhibit signs of stress; including loss of balance, breathing difficulties, loss of auto control of body temperature, etc. Most people who have not climbed above 10 000 ft (3 000 m) are not aware of this. Consequently, veterinary surgeons can come under much pressure from pet owners to provide sedatives for their animals on a long journey by air. The sedatives will put their animals to sleep. However, the sleep may be forever, simply because every sedative lowers blood pressure. This lowered blood pressure combines with the lowered cabin pressure to raise the notional altitude above a level that is quite unacceptable.

Since you cannot rush an oxygen mask to a distressed animal, as you can to a human passenger, the sedative might be better administered to the owner rather than the animal! However, this 'no-sedative' policy is not necessarily always appropriate in the case of a large or potentially dangerous animal, such as a horse. It would be negligent to take a horse onto an aircraft without the necessary means of restraining or calming him if necessary. Here is the dilemma. Grooms are not veterinary surgeons, yet they need to carry tranquilisers which are usually restricted as prescription-only medicines or 'POMs'. The industry has asked for the views of veterinarians on this particular point.

Regulations vary around the world, but in the United Kingdom and some other places, it is a legal convention that a veterinary surgeon may only administer a POM to 'an animal under his care'. In a farm situation, this allows a veterinary surgeon to prescribe a drug for an animal, with clear instructions to some responsible manager to administer it to the named animal under specific conditions. A responsibility remains with the veterinary practitioner to follow up the treatment and for the manager to record the use and final disposal of any surplus medicine or container.

This principle can also be applied to a flight situation. It has been the convention for many years that a responsible and competent flying groom may be provided with a sedative by the veterinary surgeon who supervises the pre-flight quarantine. The animal concerned would have been 'under his care' during this time and it may have become apparent that the animal is prone to anxiety. Provided the veterinarian has confidence in the ability, experience and training of the accompanying groom, he can provide the necessary POM with the knowledge that the groom will act on his instructions.

Some veterinarians argue that they should accompany the flight. Whilst some veterinary surgeons may be able to travel occasionally on a flight to accompany animals, especially when it is a full charter, this is neither very common, nor possible. It requires an additional seat and oxygen bottle for someone who, hopefully, will not be needed. In addition, that person has to be flown home again. In any case, there just are not enough veterinarians to do this, even if it were feasible.

Two issues, however, develop from this. Firstly, the POM provided may not be acceptable in the countries of transit or destination. I remember well the discovery of an empty bottle of tranquiliser in a United Kingdom reception stable marked 'Made in Brazil'. There was no indication that the drug was even licensed for use in the United Kingdom. The second issue is the accountability of the veterinary surgeon who prescribed the drug in the first place. At the very least, he should know if it was used and, if not, what happened to it.

These horse transport issues were addressed by the AATA in 2002. To make any scheme work internationally and to satisfy the requirements of the new EU regulation, it was realised that any proposal to assess competence regarding the air transport of horses would require government involvement. In the United Kingdom, the lead body appointed by government responsible for assessments in every discipline from fork-lift truck driving to tree-felling, is the National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC). On the

initiative of the AATA, the NPTC was asked to establish a scheme for the independent assessment of flying grooms. The AATA is now under contract to NPTC to provide the assessments. To do this, there are four AATA assessors who have been trained by the NPTC in different parts of the world. Since the AATA may have applicants from anywhere, the entire syllabus and the competence examination are now available on the internet (1).

Assessments can be performed on the ground but this requires the assembly of a horse, an airline stall, the candidate and the assessor (Fig. 2). Consequently, assessments are usually conducted in flight, when all these elements are combined and there is ample time to assess the candidate in a real situation. Rather like taking a driving test, you are either considered 'competent' or 'not-competent'. The scheme has been very successful and has been welcomed by airlines, employers and grooms alike. To date, there are about 100 assessed grooms around the world, either employed directly by the shipping companies or by the airlines carrying horses. Trainee grooms may travel as well, if there is space and if the airline allows, but there must be an assessed groom responsible for the team.



Figure 2
A flying groom being assessed in New York

A guiding principle of the NPTC is that the assessment body should be separate from the training body. Many potential candidates ask, 'where can I get training?' The answer is 'on the job' because AATA itself does not provide

the training, it provides the assessment only. This means that candidates must acquire considerable experience from a professional equine transport company before they can be assessed.

Since many other large animal species need to be accompanied by air, there is now a new scheme for handlers of other species and two additional specialist assessors have been appointed.

AATA continues to unite commercial animal transport interests with legislators, welfare groups and veterinarians around the world, who are interested in 'best practice' and improvement at every level. To this end, AATA holds an annual conference (the 34th conference will be held in Dresden from 13-18 May 2008), details of which can be found on the AATA website.

Useful Web links

Organisations

- Animal Transport Association (AATA) (www.aata-animaltransport.org)
- The British Standards Institution (BSI) (www.standardsuk.com/)
- International Air Transport Association (IATA) 2007 (www.iata.org/index.htm)
- Council of Europe (www.coe.int/)
- Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (www.cites.org/)
- Farm Animal Welfare Council (FAWC) (www.fawc.org.uk/)
- National Proficiency Tests Council (NPTC) (www.nptc.org.uk/)
- World Organisation for Animal Health (*Office International des Épizooties*: OIE) (www.oie.int/eng/en_index.htm).

Documents

- AATA Manual for the Transport of Animals, Second Ed. (www.tim-harris.co.uk/aata_manual.html accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Certificates of competence for animal attendants transporting animals by air (www.nptc.org.uk/assessment-schedules/ accessed on 29 November 2007)

- European Convention for the protection of animals during international transport (revised). (conventions.coe.int/Treaty/en/Treaties/Html/065.htm accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Development of guidelines for the transport of greyhounds (www.ngrc.org.uk/site_search.asp?id=223 accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Animal welfare in transport. JRC and animal welfare in transportation. Project regarding satellite navigation systems for long journey transport of livestock (awt.jrc.it/ accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Guidelines for the transportation of animals by sea (www.oie.int/eng/normes/mcode/code2006_back/en_chapitre_3.7.2.htm accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Guidelines for the transport of laboratory animals ([www.lasa.co.uk/downloads/LASA%20Transport%20of%20Lab%20Animals%20\(UK\)%202.pdf](http://www.lasa.co.uk/downloads/LASA%20Transport%20of%20Lab%20Animals%20(UK)%202.pdf) accessed on 29 November 2007)
- Pet Travel Scheme allowing the importation of some rabies susceptible species into the UK without quarantine (www.defra.gov.uk/animalh/quarantine/index.htm accessed on 29 November 2007)
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