

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS REPORT ON HORSE MOVEMENT BETWEEN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES AND THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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Introduction:

The intent of this report is to shed light on first hand experience of the current process for international movement of horses particularly in the GCC region. The objective is to understand the current situation and to see how we can improve it to ensure better horse welfare and easier horse movements between the GCC members.

Report:

The following events took place on March 10th and March 28th, 2022.

We left our stables in the UAE at 9PM with the intend to cross the border between the UAE and KSA during the night to allow the horses to travel in a relative cool weather and avoid having them wait for long hours under heavy heat. The road between Sharjah and the border is a 6 to 7 hours drive, we therefore started the procedure for the transfer of the horses at 3am. This was handled by an agent, who after checking that we had all the information and papers needed started the procedure allowing us to continue to the Saudi Border.

What does this procedure entail on the UAE side?

1. Transport vehicle documents ;
2. Driver documents ;
3. Livestock (horses) control documents ;
4. Livestock (horses) need to be checked in and controlled by a veterinary endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture ;
5. We need to go back again to the agent with the approved documents ;
6. Then we must take the documents to the customs officer ;
7. Collect your number for shipment policy ;
8. We need to get back to the agent to retype the exit form ;
9. Go again to get final approval by the veterinary and submit it for further procedures ;
10. Vehicle needs to be inspected by customs ;
11. Passport are controlled for the passengers and the driver ;
12. Collect all the aforementioned documents and approvals which than will be submitted to the customs ;
13. Finally receive the exit papers to be allowed to leave the UAE and proceeds to KSA.

Considering that after a 7-hour long trip to the border, we must spend at the minimum another 4 hours to deal purely with paperwork on site, while the sport horses who will have to compete in a few days are stuck in the truck, not allowed to walk, during this all process. Sometimes in extreme temperatures!

This process is further elongated depending on the numbers of trucks in the no-man's land that are waiting to be allowed in by the Saudi customs at the border, as they only open at 9 am.

Upon arrival to the Saudi border and availability of the customer officer you start with the same procedure at the UAE border, having to provide the same documentations with the same verification steps. It is important to note, that no paperwork can be started prior to arrive physically at the border with your truck and your horses.

What does this procedure entail on the KSA side?

1. We need to find a new agent to start the paperwork again;
2. Provide all the documentation already provided (horses, truck, permissions) to start typing the entry form;
3. Passport control for all passengers and driver;
4. We need wait for the agent who has to collect an approval number based on the Equestrian Club documents via email from the Customs Headquarters in Riyadh (documents are also shared electronically with the customs HQ by the agent) ;
5. We need to wait until the customs HQ to send directly via text messaging (sms) to the traveller with the code of approval to continue with the procedure ;
6. The traveller will than contact the agent who can work on typing another form ;
7. Live stock (horses) are controlled and checked again by veterinary endorsed by the Ministry of Agriculture ;
8. Customs proceeds to truck inspection through and X-Ray machine designed for trucks ;
9. Finally, wait for the customs officer to provide final entry approval so we can exit the border no man's land to enter the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

This process is again an additional 4 hours to complete, in total the horses have stayed static in trucks a total of 8 hours at the borders, representing a third of the overall journey.

We proceed with our trip will for another 8 hours to get to the showgrounds and start the competition in the next days.

We need to consider that the horses will have to stay up to 24 hours in a truck before to arrive to destination for a destination of approximately 1000 kms. In contrast, travelling to Hong Kong by cargo plane from Liege, only takes 16 hours with a 2 to 3 hours lay over in Abu Dhabi allowing horses to stretch for a 9300 kms journey.

Return trip

We left the showground on March 27th at 12 pm, we arrived at the Saudi border at 8 am.

The same procedure that we had to go through at the UAE border arriving had to be started again when the Saudi customs office at the border opens at 9am. This took approximately another 4 hours to complete.

Entering the UAE, you take a number, and you must start the same procedures again with the Emiratis customs:

1. Go through the passport control for the passengers and the driver ;
2. Go to the parking lot and wait in line with all other trucks to be processed by the X Ray machine and have your vehicle checked - no consideration or differentiation is made between live stock (horses) and merchandised, no timing or regulation is provided for X Ray machine to do the

check-up, it is left at the “*bon vouloir*” of the customs officer on site. Most of the customs officers aren’t trained for handling live stocks and less so for what concerns sport horses.

3. The traveller needs to find a way on its own to start with the paperwork – agents are not available to enter the UAE.
4. The traveller is left on his own, to move between the different administration offices which are not properly indicated, often unnamed and situated in different zones (far from each other) which elongates the process.
5. Completing the forms with the right information provided by the administrations on site (which takes hours)
6. Collect all the aforementioned documents and approvals which than will be submitted to the customs ;
7. Finally, wait for the customs officer to provide final entry approval so we can exit the border no man’s land to enter the United Arab Emirates.

We effectively had to wait until 9pm to receive the entry permissions. It is important to note that we haven’t imported and exported the horses but used the temporary export papers which normally helps accelerate the customs process to be approved.

In total, we spent 8 hours at the UAE border, of which 6 hours was waiting with the correct paperwork for the entry approval.

Which poses the questions of what is in place in case:

- The paperwork has any mistakes or inaccuracies;
- The agent or the custom officers made an honest error at any time of the process;
- That the horses present any health issues arriving or while waiting at the border.

Following the entry to the UAE, we have another 7 hours drive to the quarantine stables. This meant that the horses have spent between 28 to 30 hours in the truck on the way back.

As you can imagine, horses arrived in very poor condition, needing the urgent and sustain assistance of veterinarians for several days.

Conclusion

As a horseman I can only qualify the current system put in place as clearly inconsiderate of animal welfare. I have travelled with my horses all over the world and never had to witness such a lengthy process. We witnessed with the recent pandemic the capacity of the institutions to put in place seamless procedures while ensuring the highest possible health protection for travellers. I believe that the same could be applied in this case through three proposals:

1. **Digitalisation:** Most of documents should be possible to be complemented prior to the arrival at the border and sent to the Customs electronically and receive approval also electronically with a simple check at the border by the customs officer (this will cut by half the waiting time)
2. **Best practices:** Customs officer and agents should be trained and certified in accordance with the best existing practices internationally – example the border between Switzerland and the EU is very efficient.
3. **Differentiation:** Livestock shouldn’t be treated as any merchandise crossing the border – a more expediated process should be put in place with allocation of a dedicated office and waiting line – separated from the rest of the trucks trying to enter the respective countries.