

TRANSPORTING YOUR CAR WITHIN THE STATES



Whether shipping home a newly purchased classic from an auction or participating in a rally or concours, at some point, nearly every collector needs to transport a car. Choosing a competent carrier can help start your ownership experience off right and ensure a headache-free event.

FINDING AND EVALUATING A TRANSPORTER

An internet search or a look through publications such as *Hemmings Motor News* and *Sports Car Market* will provide information for a number of auto-transport companies. Once you make contact, the easiest way to size up a transport company is to ask how long they've been in business and, specifically, how long they've been hauling cars.

Major auction companies and museums are other good sources for recommendations. Also, ask your local car club members, restorers and other collectors. Never base your decision solely on price. Like any other product or service, in auto transport you get what you pay for. Reputable carriers have similar cost structures and, with few exceptions, an unusually low price is a sign that a carrier is cutting corners somewhere. For more information about a carrier, visit the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration's website, www.safersys.org to look up a company's safety record and insurance status.

There are many top-quality transporters. Several you may want to consider include:

- **FedEx Custom Critical Passport Auto Transport**
800-325-4267, www.passport.fedex.com
- **Horseless Carriage Carriers**
800-631-7796, www.horselesscarriage.com
- **Intercity Lines**
800-221-3936, www.intercitylines.com
- **Reliable Carriers**
800-521-6393, www.reliable-carriers.com

! KEY POINT

Never base your decision solely on price; as with any other product or service, in auto transport you get what you pay for.

Like nearly everything else in the collector car hobby, when considering transporting a car, you're faced with a dizzying array of options. It's not unlike choosing between a quickie paint job, a driver-quality freshening up or a full-blown concours restoration. You must decide what's appropriate for your car and the level of protection that you require.

Open Vs. Closed

The first choice to make is whether you want your car to travel on an open or enclosed trailer. Enclosed transport should be the only choice for a restored or high-value vehicle. While it may be tempting to save a few dollars by going with an open carrier, it can be like stepping over a dollar to pick up a penny.



Photo - Courtesy FedEx Custom Critical Passport AutoTransport

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Enclosed transport should be the only choice for a restored or high-value vehicle.

A fully enclosed transporter provides the maximum protection for your collector car. Conversely, on an open transporter, your car will be exposed to all of the potential hazards of the road such as rock damage, salt or even hail. To add insult to injury, open carriers are

not liable for damage that occurs as a result of “normal road hazards.” Other vehicles may also drip fluids onto your vehicle if it is loaded on the lower level. (Most enclosed carriers don’t have this problem because their trailers have solid floors or drip pans under the ramps). If you’re thinking of using a tarp or cover on an open transporter, think again. The wind will either blow it away or beat it against the paint and damage the finish. At the very least, on an open transporter, expect your car to arrive needing a good bath.

Still, because of price, an open hauler can be an attractive option for a car in need of a restoration or for an average driver. Just keep in mind that most open trailers aren’t equipped with a winch for non-running vehicles. The carrier may charge an exorbitant fee to load an inoperable car. If your car doesn’t run, establish the loading fee upfront and in writing.

Finally, there are some automobiles that should never be shipped on an open carrier regardless of condition: Cars with side curtains or flimsy convertible tops run the risk of having these items blow off in transport. Vehicles with limited ground clearance or narrow tracks should always go on a lift gate-equipped enclosed trailer.

Lift Gate Vs. Ramp Loading

All open transporters (and some enclosed transporters) use inclined ramps for loading. Ramps have several limitations: First, the loading angle can be too steep for

This brand-new Ferrari slid off a wet ramp, damaging the undercarriage and rocker panels. *Photo - Rob Sass*



cars with limited ground clearance. Spoilers on modern cars like a Dodge Viper are at risk on ramps, as would be the exhaust system on a sports car with limited ground clearance like an Austin-Healey 3000.

Additionally, cars with extremely narrow tracks can be harmed by ramps. Ramps can also present a hazard in slippery conditions, which could make loading dangerous, particularly for cars with high-performance tires and lots of torque. Finally, the inclined loading can put stress on vehicle drivelines. Clutches are particularly susceptible to wear during ramp loading.

The alternative to loading ramps is a lift gate, which is a horizontal platform that is raised and lowered by hydraulic cylinders. It provides the ultimate in safe loading. Think of it as an elevator for your car. The car is lifted until it's level with the deck of the trailer, and then driven or winched forward and secured.



Photo - Courtesy Intercity Lines Inc.



KEY POINT

Because ramps can be hazardous when wet, or cars may have narrow tracks or low ground clearance, it's always best to opt for a transporter with lift gate loading.

Simply contracting for enclosed service, however, doesn't guarantee a lift gate-equipped trailer. Soft-sided (or curtain-sided) enclosed trailers are essentially open trailers with vinyl sides and a roof. They provide a modicum of protection from the elements but lack the security of a hard-sided trailer. More importantly, they load with ramps, just like an open hauler. Always ask the carrier about the equipment before committing.

INSURANCE

Insurance is one of the most important criteria for choosing an auto transporter – and potentially the most confusing. Unfortunately, some carriers don't understand the distinction between their liability to the car owner and true "insurance." Consequently, they often don't adequately explain this to their customers.

All properly licensed automobile transport companies carry liability and cargo-loss insurance. But it's the carrier (the transport company), not the shipper (you), who is the insured under this policy. Moreover, carriers are not licensed insurance brokers. They can't legally sell you insurance in the traditional sense. And because the carrier probably has a substantial deductible on its cargo policy, you'll be looking to the carrier rather than its insurer in most cases of minor damage. This is another reason to choose a stable, reputable company. At the end of the day, it's the bill of lading rather than the insurance policy that decides how a claim will be handled, because the bill of lading is the contract of carriage between the carrier and the shipper.

The most misunderstood aspect of the transporter's liability is the fact that carriers aren't insurers who are responsible for anything conceivable that could happen to your car while in their possession. Instead, a carrier is liable only for its own acts of negligence.

For example, if the hauler backs your car into another car, obviously, the carrier would be liable. However, if a freak high wind blows over the truck, chances are the carrier wouldn't be liable; this would be considered an unforeseeable act of nature. For total protection, as

soon as you purchase a vehicle you should immediately secure agreed value coverage from a company that specializes in collector car insurance. The coverage should be in force as soon as the money and title are exchanged. Just remember that the seller's coverage ends at the point of sale and the transporter's liability (for what it does cover) doesn't begin until your car is loaded, which may not take place until several days after the car becomes legally yours.



KEY POINT

For total protection, as soon as you purchase a vehicle, you should immediately secure agreed value coverage from a company that specializes in collector car insurance.

Although it's not unusual for a transporter to disclaim responsibility for something beyond its control, a reputable transporter will never ask you to sign a damage waiver that releases them from liability for their own carelessness. And you should never sign such a waiver, because it may prejudice the rights of your insurance company to collect on your behalf.

Finally, beware of contracts that purport to set an artificially low limit on the transporter's liability, or contracts that use complicated formulas to determine what a carrier will pay in the event of a total loss. These always favor the transporter. At the minimum, you should look on the bill of lading for the following:

- A clear acceptance of responsibility for losses occasioned by the carrier's fault and a clear explanation of what isn't covered.
- Realistic limitations of liability (at least \$100,000 per vehicle for enclosed transport) with the option to purchase increased liability for a reasonable charge if necessary.
- A clear and concise explanation of the carrier's claims filing procedure, including filing deadlines and notice requirements.

A reputable transporter will also be able to provide you with a U.S. Department of Transportation operation authority (motor carrier) number and proof of insurance.

PICKUP AND PREPARATION

Most transporters in the business of shipping collector cars offer “door-to-door” transport. This means that they’ll pick up and deliver to the destination of your choice unless local laws or access issues for a 75-foot tractor-trailer prevent this. Some carriers offer a savings for terminal pickups and deliveries. Be careful with this: a terminal is often an outside storage yard that may be in an unfamiliar or even untrustworthy neighborhood.

When it’s time to ship your car, it’s up to you to get it ready to load. One of the best things you can do is to make sure the car is clean. If it’s clean, it’s easier for you and the carrier to do a proper inspection. This will help avoid damage claim problems at the destination. You’ll also want to provide written instructions regarding anything that the person handling your vehicle will need to know, including information about battery and fuel cut-off switches, hidden switches and any other “tricks” to starting and running your car. These instructions should include any information on how to operate or disable an alarm system. In addition:

- Do not completely fill the gas tank. A quarter tank of fuel is best.
- Batteries should be charged to avoid additional fees for winching.
- Don’t leave loose articles in the vehicle or in the trunk. These items can shift and be damaged or cause damage to your car.
- Be sure the antifreeze level is adequate for the climate at both ends of the trip. Insufficient antifreeze in the coolant can result in a cracked engine block.

! KEY POINT

Whenever you have your car transported, include written instructions for starting and running it, as well as the location of any fuel or ignition cut-off switches.

SETTING UP YOUR TRANSPORT

Auto transport is not a regularly scheduled service in the sense of airplane or train travel. When you place your transport order, the dispatcher must assemble a load of up to six cars, including your vehicle, and route a truck. Depending on your location and the time of year, this may take anywhere from several days to several weeks.

A delay in picking up or delivering one of the cars ahead of yours can affect your scheduling. For this reason, carriers have to quote pickup and delivery times in windows of several days. If you have a drop-dead date for a show or an auction, it's imperative that you inform the carrier. Get any guarantees in writing. Often, you may be required to pay extra for a guaranteed pickup or delivery date. The extra fee compensates the driver if he must press on with an empty spot, passing up other pickup opportunities in order to make your deadline. When the driver arrives to pick up your vehicle, the



Photo - Courtesy FedEx Custom Critical Passport Auto Transport

first thing he or she will do is perform an inspection noting any pre-existing damage. An inspection is also performed on delivery. For this reason, you or someone you trust needs to be present at delivery. You must note any damage at this time to have the best chance of prevailing in a claim. For this reason, insist that the car is clean and delivered when and where there is sufficient light to inspect it carefully before signing off.



KEY POINT

When your car is picked up, the driver will inspect it and note any pre-existing damage. You or a trusted representative will want to perform a similar inspection upon delivery.

Finally, a little insider's knowledge may help you drive a good bargain: During snowbird relocation season (late fall and spring), many carriers are in dire need of cars in certain parts of the country. For example, in the fall, their trucks are empty in Florida. They need cars coming out of Florida going back up the East Coast where they can pick up more snowbirds. In the spring, the need is in the opposite direction.

Often during this time, carriers will actually pay their drivers for fuel and time to move their empty trucks to where there is more freight. Obviously, it's much better to have a car that pays something (even if it's substantially less than the full rate) than to move empty. If you need to ship a car out of Florida in October through early December, try to bargain with the transporter because they need your car. This is the exception to the general rule that an unusually low price is a sign that something may be amiss.

Shipping a car to a concours in an enclosed transporter is the best way to make sure that it arrives ready to win. When dealing with an unfamiliar vintage car that you've just purchased, again, it's more prudent to ship it home than to drive it. Even freshly restored cars often need the kind of sorting out that is best done during the daylight and close to home. Choose the right transporter, and you'll be miles ahead.

Hagerty is the premier source for safety and protection information about the collector car hobby. For more information on enhancing your collector car ownership experience, log on to **www.hagerty.com** or call **888-310-8020**.



Collector Car Insurance™

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