



Gary Bueckert saved the cost of a new cattle hauler by converting a semi trailer into this ground loading model. The former 53-ft. van carries about 30 head at a time.

Converted Trailer Makes Great Cattle Hauler

Gary Bueckert converted a semi trailer into a ground loading cattle hauler for less than a quarter the cost of a new one. The former 53-ft. van carries around 30 head at a time, broken up into 4 groups of 7, 10, 10 and 3.

"I sized the front pen so I could use it for calves when hauling cow/calf pairs," says Bueckert. "We moved the axles forward and lowered the last 7 ft. of the van to about 18 in. from the ground. It rides on air bag suspension, so when we deflate it, it drops another 4 in. closer to the ground. The cows step right on."

Dropping the rear section of the van nearer to ground level required Bueckert to cut away the floor surface and its I-channel supports.

"We extended the interior frame of the van sides down and installed a sub frame using 2 by 4-in. steel tubing for sides and for a rear bumper in case we had to pull it," says Bueckert. "Cross supports were 2 by 2-in. steel tubing and the old I-channel with 10-in. wide fir planking for the floor."

Once in the rear van section, it's easy for the cows to step up the heavy-duty ramp to the standard deck. Bueckert split the ramp in half because it was built so stout...too stout, he thinks now.

"If I were to redo it, I would build them with aluminum tubing instead of the 2 by 2 1/4-in. steel tubing," says Bueckert. "When the trailer deck is loaded, we hang the ramp on the walls to make room for the last 3 head."

Bueckert installed gates 12 ft., 29 ft., and 46 ft. from the front end. Each gate mounts to 2 by 2-in. steel tubing welded to the original trailer sidewall tubing frame.

"The sidewalls on a dry van are a little flimsy for hauling cattle," says Bueckert. "The added tubing stiffened it up."

The sidewalls were further strengthened when he attached 4-ft. wide, 3/4-in. plywood sheets immediately above the 1-ft. kick plate that ran around the interior. The plywood also sealed off the space behind the kick plate.

At the rear he installed a standard livestock trailer endgate. It opens the full width of the 8 1/2 ft. (outside) width of the trailer, or he can open a smaller sliding door in the gate. He also installed a 16 by 16-in. cleanout door on one side.

Ventilation is provided by 5 1/2-in. holes cut in the wall of each pen area and two in the front-end panel. The sizes were determined by the availability of a 5 1/2-in. hole saw. Bueckert allows that he would make them bigger if redoing it. However, like the rest of the trailer, they have worked well.

"I contacted the transportation department about modifications before I began," says Bueckert. "It has passed inspection every year without a problem."

Bueckert says he paid about \$6,000 for the used trailer and spent another \$6,000 on materials. That represents a considerable saving over the \$34,000 he had considered paying for a similar sized conventional livestock trailer. It's an even bigger savings over a new trailer.

"New ground loading livestock trailers run about \$1,000 per foot or \$53,000 for one this size," says Bueckert.

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The TomTato is a grafted combination of tomatoes and potatoes.

"Tomato Potato" Plant

British horticultural firm Thompson and Morgan has introduced the TomTato, a commercially grafted combo of tomatoes and potatoes.

Spokesperson Paul Hansord says grafting them was a challenge. It took a decade of work to perfect.

"It has been very difficult to achieve because the tomato stem and the potato stem have to have the same thickness," he says. "It's a highly skilled operation."

According to the company, you can harvest up to 500 cherry tomatoes from the plant while 2 1/2 lbs. of potatoes are developing below ground. The TomTato can be grown in pots, or in open fields.

The company expects very high demand. "Many people don't have much space in their gardens," he says. "By the time the tomatoes are ready to pick, the potatoes can be dug."

A company spokesperson said there are no plans yet to introduce the TomTato into the North American market.

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