

# FLYING RABBITS - Bonny Wagoner

I'm going to start sounding like a broken record here but it's important enough I put pen to paper to re-hash flight requirements for flying with rabbits. It's not an issue for the 2003 or 2004 nationals as the hosts planned it before the annual airline moratorium on warm blooded animals. Kudos! I have high hopes the clubs considering entering bids to host the 2005 nationals (and beyond) will take this into consideration and make sure the dates they propose are before the annual flight moratorium goes into effect.

Here's why it's important - there are three basic methods for flying rabbits, only the first one is a practical option for show rabbits. Read on, you'll see why:

**1 - As accompanied baggage.** This is the most cost effective method. Typical rates in 2002 were \$75 per run (up to six rabbits) one way. Besides being the most cost effective way to fly, you are able to fly on the same flight with your rabbits, assuring they make critical connections when you do. Your rabbits arrive when you do. Rabbits are placed in a temperature controlled, pressurized area. **The dates you can fly rabbits as accompanied baggage are September 15th through May 15th.** These dates are NOT negotiable and do NOT change from year to year. Try to fly one the day after the moratorium goes into effect and they won't accept your rabbits as accompanied baggage. Flights have a limit to how many runs they can carry on any given flight so advance reservations are critical. Reservations can be made months in advance. The ONLY way you can move multiple rabbits during the embargo period is as cargo (see below). As accompanied baggage, you will need an airline approved container and a health certificate for each rabbit. Carefully read the marking requirements for the container. The airlines will require you to provide food and water for each rabbit in it's compartment adequate for a 24 hour period even if your flight is only four hours. Rabbits are loaded last and unloaded first. The flight crew can verify they made connections prior to taking off (critical for shows).

**2 - As cargo.** This is a very expensive way to move rabbits. Typical rates in 2002 were \$255 for the same run described above, one way. Unlike accompanied baggage, they are usually loaded on a completely different flight than the one you will be taking. They may not be on the most direct flight with numerous stops and possible plane changes along the way. This creates a lot

of stress for your rabbits which is disaster for show rabbits. The really critical facet to consider when shipping rabbits as cargo is the airlines will not guarantee when your rabbits will arrive at their destination. What good is that when attending a long distance rabbit show, especially our annual Tan Nationals? Rabbits flown as cargo must have the minimum and maximum temperatures confirmed by your vet (an additional fee on the health certificate) and the route verified by specialists at reservations that the temperatures will not exceed the recommended min/max. If the projected temperatures exceed the min/max anywhere on the flight's route, your rabbits will be grounded. The airlines will require you to provide food and water for each rabbit in its compartment adequate for a 24 hour period even if they are delayed somewhere for a longer period of time. **Here's the really critical issue:** *After Sept. 11th, the airlines changed the way they accept and book flights for warm blooded animals as cargo. Each airline has it's own unique criteria you must follow, from becoming a "known shipper", to how many days you can book in advance - for most it's only seven days in advance maximum so there is practically no way you can be certain months in advance that you will be able to move your rabbits on a particular airline until just a week prior to leaving for a show. That is unacceptable for nationals.*

**3 - Carry-on baggage.** This information wouldn't be complete if I didn't also include one other way to fly just one rabbit with you. If you can fit a carrier beneath your seat, you are allowed to carry one rabbit with you. The cost is \$75 one way (per rabbit) and has the same health certificate requirement as the other two methods. This is THE most expensive way to fly a rabbit and there is a limit to two warm blooded animals (total for the cabin) per flight.

It doesn't take rocket science to see we need to plan all of our future nationals before May 15th. If folks are willing to make the commitment to travel all over the United States to attend our annual nationals, then let's make sure we plan for when they can get their rabbits there on major carriers **as accompanied baggage.** There's nothing more disappointing (and frustrating) than to have a breed hold their nationals when it's not possible to get rabbits on a flight. The moratoriums we can't change, but our club CAN refuse to entertain bids for dates after May 15th.