

Transportation and Trailering – A very important, but often neglected, part of our recreational boating experiences.

By John Gullick.

Those of us with smaller boats might spend almost as much time trailering them from place to place as we do spending actual time on the water or at a show. We spend hours preparing the boat but we may often not spend the time to ensure that our trailer is prepared and properly hooked to our vehicle to ensure a safe and secure drive.

Here are some basic tips for regular inspection, maintenance, care in hitching up and towing:

The trailer must be strong enough and long enough to accommodate the weight and length of vessel that it is to carry. Since there are various types of hull shapes the rollers and/or bunks should be set up to provide maximum support and stability for the vessel. There should be snug even support for the hull. This will help prevent warping and sway. All of the trailer's lights should be working properly and you should carry spare bulbs. The license plate should be clearly visible and the cars mirrors should be set up to ensure that you can see past the trailer.

The combined weight of your boat and its contents should not exceed 80% of the trailer's carrying capacity. Contents should be spread evenly and properly secured. Place heavier items closest to the floor. Make sure the boat is properly secured to the trailer with good tie downs and that there is a line from the boat's towing eye to the trailer's tongue or winch. Transport Canada requires tie downs and security chains from the trailer to the vehicle. It is an excellent idea to fully and securely cover the boat. You will avoid wind damage and lost items that might hit a following vehicle.

Trailer hitches come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Make sure you have the type that suits the towing vehicle and that the receiver bar is at a height that keeps the trailer as horizontal as possible. Make sure you have the correct ball size to match the trailer's hitch. Never use a ball that is too small and remember to adjust the clamp that secures then trailer to the ball. Lock the clamp down after securing it to the ball. Two safety chains should be crossed under the receiver and ball from the trailer to the vehicle. This will allow the chains to support the trailer hitch if it comes off the ball.

Too much weight on the ball will cause "tail dragging" of the towing vehicle. Too little weight will cause swaying. The rule of thumb is to have 10% of the trailers total weight up to a maximum of 135 kgs (300lbs) on the ball. For compact cars the gross weight of trailer and boat should not exceed 450kgs (1000 lbs) even if the ball and hitch have a higher capacity If you are towing any distances a transmission cooler for your automatic transmission is a must and is very inexpensive insurance against transmission overheating.

When it comes to overheating don't forget the trailer's wheel bearings. At the start of each season raise each wheel off the ground and give it a spin. If you hear a grinding

sound it is time to change the bearing. If the wheel is loose remove the cap and cotter pin and tighten the axel nut. Spin the wheel again and if it is still loose remove the wheel and check for excessive wear. Replace all worn parts. Make sure the bearing is well packed with grease. Check this again at least half way through the season. Bearing Buddies, a bearing chamber cap replacement, are a very good idea if used properly. They allow you to fill the bearing through a grease nipple and they have a spring loaded plate that compresses the grease automatically if it leaks out of the bearing chamber. Grease not only lubricates the bearing but it keeps out water, a bearing's worst enemy. **DO NOT OVERFILL WITH GREASE.** Make sure there is room for the expansion plate in the bearing buddy to move both in and out as the bearing heats up and cools down. Injecting too much grease will cause the rear seal to blow out.

It is always wise to carry a spare wheel and tire that is properly inflated and make sure you have a jack and tire iron that can lift the trailer and remove the wheel nuts.

Before starting out on the road each season, practice backing up the trailer so you will become familiar again with how the trailer handles. Remember the trailer moves in the direction opposite to the direction you turn the steering wheel. Take great care in passing other vehicles and remember you will lose speed going up a grade. Allow extra room before you pull back in. If you brake for a prolonged period when going down hill the braking power will fade due to heat build up. Sudden stops can cause the trailer to "jackknife" if the trailer does not have brakes or if they are poorly adjusted. If a loaded trailer weighs more than 1500 kgs (3300 lbs) it must be equipped with a trailer braking system. Check provincial regulations for details.

At the launch ramp pull over to one side and get prepared. Take off the tie downs and boat cover. Disconnect the electrical system from the vehicle and make sure a long line is attached to the boat to assist with recovery when the boat comes off the trailer. The time you take to do all of this will allow the trailers brakes to cool down before they enter the water. Tilt the out drive or out board engine up. **Install the drain plug.** Remove any debris from the launch ramp and if you are launching a sailboat with the mast installed check for any overhead wires. Back slowly down the ramp and if you must leave the vehicle for any reason, put the shift into park, apply the parking brakes and use wheel chocks if necessary. You don't want the boat, trailer and car rolling in. Watch out for children and **make sure the drain plug is installed.** I think I already said that.

When putting the boat back on the trailer follow the above steps in reverse. When leaving your trailer unattended it is a good idea to remove a wheel and lock it in your trunk. Add a hitch lock so the trailer cannot be easily taken away by someone else. If you have dual wheels you can chain and lock two together or if you are in a group you can chain and lock a number of trailers together.

These tips are all about safe and secure transportation. A bit of preparation can save a lot of grief, give you peace of mind and help make every trip a safe return trip.

For lots more boating safety information check out [www.SmartBoater.ca](http://www.SmartBoater.ca)