

Trailer Basics

Connecting the Trailer to your vehicle

Only one person hooks it up. Once the tongue is on the ball, one person locks it into place, hooks the chains and lights up and cranks up the dolly. If two people do it something will be taken for granted that something got done that didn't get done.

Check out the Trailer - especially the tires This may be the most important thing you can do.

Make sure NONE of the tires show any signs of cracks on the side walls and all have good tread. A blow out on a heavily loaded trailer is very dangerous if you panic. Most people have problems dealing with blow outs anyway. Add a heavy trailer to that scenario and you can see how things can go bad so quick. If you have a blow out DO NOT slam on the brakes or try to stop real quick. The tire is already blown, stopping quickly by slamming on the brakes wont make it any better. Just pull to the shoulder nice and slow gently using the brakes. If the trailer tries to get sideways let off the brakes and accelerate a little. This will jerk the trailer back straight again.

Basic things that will get you in trouble towing a trailer.

Number one. Old tires that are dry rotted or under inflated new tires. The desert heat is going to finish them off for you! 6 and 8 ply Trailer tires are inflated form 50 to 60 psi not 34psi like a car. If you run trailer tires at 34 psi they will get hot and blow out. You should avoid running car tires on a trailer, especially a single axle. Car tire sidewalls are not made for tailoring heavy loads.

Number two. The lack of grease on the wheel bearings. The bearings should be inspected before nay long trip and repacked. The best thing is to install bearing buddy caps that you can grease without taking the hubs off the trailer. They use these on boat trailers primarily but they are also good for any trailer that sees highway use.

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Loading the trailer

Too much weight loaded too high on the trailer. Load heavy items low to keep the center of gravity as low as possible. This helps immensely on how the trailer tows and takes curves. This makes the trailer very squirrely and impossible to keep from Jack Knifing in a panic stop. If the trailer rocks back and forth at highway speeds it is loaded too high and too heavy.

You MUST load the trailer with most of the weight just in front of the axle. If the trailer wants to stand up when loaded, or is very easy to pick up by the tongue, you are too rear heavy. If the trailer wants to "do the twist" at highway speeds, you are too rear heavy... the second you tap the brakes, especially going down hill, you will probably be able to watch the trailer come around sideways beside you!

Always cross the chains when hooking up to your vehicle... when done properly, the tongue should be able to rest on the chains when unhitched. Should you not lock the hitch down properly, and it comes undone while towing, the trailer tongue will then drop onto the chains and probably run into your vehicle, alerting you to the problem a second or two before losing control. Mind you, it will still be ugly, but not nearly as ugly as that tongue hitting the pavement (or a cattle guard!) at driving speeds.

Driving with a Trailer

When pulling a trailer, remember turn WIDE; look where you are pulling into, so you don't get stuck somewhere; drive slower; down gear down hill and down gear up steep hills if needed.

Practice at home in familiar areas before you hit the open road.

If you are not used to pulling a trailer, be careful. Your car may pull it OK, but it will not stop them same. This is especially true if the trailer is not equipped with brakes. Most single axle trailers do not have brakes. If you tow one of these with a lot of gear it is going to take you twice as far to stop. If you ride your brakes on down grades and over heat them you may not be able to stop it in a hurry until the brakes cool down again.

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Using a lower gear to help control your speed going down hill is very important. When we rent the diesel generator for the village they make it very clear the trailer will not leave their rental yard hooked to anything less than a full sized 3/4 ton pickup. This isn't because of the truck's power to pull it. It is because a 3/4 ton truck has big enough brakes to stop it on a down hill grade.