Towing Safety

Safe Towing Tips

Trailer towing is a special driving experience that places extra demands on a person's driving skills. We have included a few basic tips to pass on to your customers. These will help ensure their safety and that of their vehicles. Remind customers that the owner's manual contains comprehensive and helpful towing tips as well.

Weight Distribution and Sway Control

- Always avoid overloading a trailer. And never exceed the rating of the lowest-rated component of your towing system — axle rating, suspension rating, tires, wheels
- Proper trailer loading can help prevent dangerous instability and swaying. Therefore, place heavy items on the floor in front of the trailer axle so that the load is heavier in the front (60 percent front versus 40 percent rear). Always balance a load side to side, securing it to prevent shifting
- For conventional trailers, the recommended tongue weight should be 10 percent of the loaded trailer weight (15 percent for fifth-wheel/gooseneck trailers). Too low a percentage of tongue weight will cause excessive sway. Too much tongue weight can damage the tow vehicle's suspension and driveline components

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Acceleration and Braking

- The additional weight of a trailer will affect a vehicle's acceleration and braking. Always allow extra time and distance for passing and changing lanes
- Only pass on level terrain where there is plenty of clearance to complete the maneuver. For better acceleration, downshift when passing or climbing a hill. Allow more distance for stopping than you normally would without a trailer
- Use trailer brakes to correct trailer sway
- Downshift when braking on downgrades to employ engine braking

Ride and Handling

- Avoid any sudden moves that will create side force on the trailer
- Allow the inside more room on turns, because the trailer wheels will be closer to the inside path of the turn than the tow vehicle's wheels
- If you must pass or change lanes, signal well in advance and move gradually into the next lane
- After passing, allow extra room for the trailer before moving back to the original lane

Tire Pressure

- Underinflated tires get very hot and can lead to tire failures and possible loss of vehicle control. Overinflated tires, on the other hand, can cause uneven tire wear
- Tires should be checked often to make sure they conform to cold inflation pressures recommended on the Safety Compliance Certification Label for original equipment tires to ensure consistent performance and handling

Cooling System

- To reduce potential for engine and transaxle/transmission overheating, take the following actions:
  - City traffic: When stopped, put transaxle in Neutral and increase engine idle speed
  - Highway driving: Reduce speed
  - Air conditioning: Turn off temporarily if overheating begins to occur
- To reduce the potential for automatic transaxle/transmission overheating, turn the Overdrive off when driving in hilly areas to prevent excessive shifts and provide better engine braking

Parking

- Avoid parking a vehicle with a trailer on a grade
- If circumstances require this type of parking, wheel blocks or chocks must be placed under the trailer's tires after securing the tow vehicle with the parking brake

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Safety checks

With a bit of practice and precaution, you'll be able to tow confidently and safely.

Practice turning, stopping and backing the trailer

- Use an area away from heavy traffic
- Review back-up procedures:
  - Place a hand on the steering wheel at the 6 o'clock position (bottom of the wheel)
  - To move the rear end of the trailer to the left, turn the wheel clockwise
  - To move the rear end of the trailer to the right, turn the wheel counterclockwise

Hitch

- Hitch components tight
- Hitch coupler locked
- Trailer safety chains securely hooked to the tow vehicle

Tires

- Trailer tires properly inflated — recommended pressures indicated on tire sidewalls
- Tow vehicle tires properly inflated — for a heavy trailer, try adding extra pressure to the tow vehicle's rear tires

Trailer lamps

- All working
  - Turn signals
  - Side marker lamps
  - Brake lamps

Load secure

- Tied down so it can't move
- Tie-down straps — winch-type cinch best
  - Check after a few miles
  - Tighten as necessary — stretch a bit with use, particularly when new

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Trailer brakes

- Working properly

Safety chains

- In good condition
- Properly sized for the trailer weight
- Proper length — too long will drag on the road surface
- Proper length — too short will restrict the turning radius
- Crossed under the trailer tongue to support the tongue should it become disconnected from the hitch ball

State requirements

- All states require that trailer lamps be operational during towing
- Trailers should never be occupied by passengers while being towed
- Towing requirements and regulations vary from state to state
  - Check with your state department of transportation to ensure complete compliance with regulations and guidelines

DISCLAIMERS

Customers should not exceed the GAWR, GVWR or GCWR of the vehicle when towing a trailer. It is the customer's responsibility to comply with and not exceed the GAWR, GVWR and GCWR of the vehicle.

The recommended tongue weight for a conventional hitch is 10 percent of the gross trailer weight.

The maximum tongue weight for Class IV hitch receiver is limited to 1,100 lb.

The maximum tongue weight for Class V (receiver hitch) is limited to 1,800 lb.

A weight-distributing hitch is recommended for trailers over 5,000 lb.

For gooseneck and 5th-wheel trailers, the tongue weight (king pin weight) should never exceed any of the manufacturer recommendations including, but not limited to, payload and GAWR.

A 5th-wheel or gooseneck hitch is required for trailers over 18,000 lb; a gooseneck hitch is required for trailers over 25,000 lb.