



## Trailer Maintenance Guidelines

### Hitching Systems

The three most common types of hitches are the weight –carrying hitch, the weight-distributing (or load equalizer) hitch, and the fifth-wheel hitch, or gooseneck. Weight-carrying hitches are designed to carry all the trailer’s tongue weight. Weight-distributing hitches are used with a receiver hitch and special parts that distribute the tongue weight among all tow vehicle and trailer axles. Fifth-wheel hitches are designed for mounting the trailer connection point in the middle of the truck bed.

### Tire Safety

All trailer tires should be the same type, size and construction – do not mix bias-belted and radial tires. In selecting tires for your trailer, buy the size, type, and load range found on the trailer’s certification label or in the owner’s manual. Keep in mind that tires have a load rating that indicated the amount of weight they can carry safely. As with your tow vehicle, always maintain proper tire pressure and replace worn tires. Remember – your tow vehicle tires may require a higher tire pressure for towing, especially heavy loads.

### Loading and Weight Distribution

Your ability to handle and control your tow vehicle and trailer is greatly improved when the cargo is properly loaded and distributed.

- Balance weight from side to side
- Distribute cargo weight evenly along the length of the trailer
- Secure and brace all items to prevent them from moving during travel
- Adjust height of tow vehicle/trailer interface
- Apply load leveling (weight distribution hitch bars)

### State and Local Requirements for Towing

State and municipalities may require special permits and licenses based on the size and weight of your trailer, especially if it is over eight feet wide. Some states require additional equipment for the tow vehicle, such as side and rear view mirrors. Inquire at your local motor vehicle administration to find out the requirements.

### Pre-Departure Safety Checklist

Before driving, make sure your vehicle and trailer maintenance is current. This is very important because towing puts additional stress on the tow vehicle.

- Check and correct tire pressure on the tow vehicle
- Make sure the wheel lug nuts/bolts on the tow vehicle and trailer are tightened to the correct torque.
- Be sure the hitch, coupler, draw bar, and other equipment that connect the trailer and tow vehicle are properly secured and adjusted.
- Check that the wiring is properly connected, not touching the road, but loose enough to make turns without disconnecting or damaging the wires.



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- Make sure all running lights, brake lights, turn signals, and hazard lights are working.
- Verify that the brakes on the tow vehicle and trailer are operating correctly.
- Check that all items are securely fastened on and in the trailer.
- Be sure the trailer jack, tongue support, and any attached stabilizers are raised and locked in place.
- Check load distribution to make sure the tow vehicle and trailer are properly balanced front to back and side to side.
- Check side and rear view mirrors to make sure you have good visibility.
- Make sure you have wheel locks and jack stands.

### Safety Tips for Driving with a Trailer

#### General Handling

- Use the driving gear the manufacturer recommends for towing.
- Drive at moderate speeds. This will place less strain on your tow vehicle and trailer. Trailer instability (sway) is more likely to occur as speed increases.
- Avoid sudden stops and starts that can cause skidding, sliding or jackknifing.
- Avoid sudden steering maneuvers that might create sway or undue side force on the trailer.
- Slow down when traveling over bumpy roads, railroad crossings, and ditches.
- Make wider turns at curves and corners. Because your wheels are closer to the inside of a turn than the wheels of your tow vehicle, they are more likely to hit or ride up over curbs.
- To control swaying caused by air pressure changes and wind buffeting when larger vehicles pass from either direction, release the accelerator pedal to slow down and keep a firm grip on the steering wheel.

#### Braking

- Allow considerably more distance for stopping.
- If you have an electric trailer brake controller and excessive sway occurs, activate the trailer brake controller by hand. Do not attempt to control trailer sway by applying the tow vehicle brakes; this will generally make things worse.
- Always anticipate the need to slow down. To reduce speed, shift to a lower gear and press the brakes lightly.

#### Maintenance

Tow vehicles often have more frequent maintenance requirements, including changes of engine and transmission oils and filters, lubrication of components, and cooling system checks. Check your owner's manual for information on scheduled maintenance of your tow vehicle and trailer. Here are additional maintenance suggestions.



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### **Tires**

Periodic inspection and maintenance of tow vehicle and trailer tires and wheels are essential to towing safety, including spare tires. Proper tire pressure affects vehicle handling and safety of your tires.

- Underinflation reduces the load carrying capacity of your tow vehicle and trailer, may cause sway and control problems, and may result in overheating, causing blowouts or other tire failure.
- Overinflation causes premature tire wear and affects the handling characteristics of the tow vehicle or trailer.

### **Brakes**

On a regular basis, have the brakes on your tow vehicle and trailer inspected. Be sure that necessary adjustments are made and any damaged or worn parts are replaced.

### **Hitch**

Check the nuts, bolts, and other fasteners to ensure that the hitch remains secured to the tow vehicle and coupler remains secured to the trailer. The connection point may require periodic lubrication to permit free movement of the coupler to the hitch ball.

### **Wiring**

Make sure connector-plug prongs and receptacles, lightbulb sockets, wire slices and ground connections are clean and shielded from moisture. Lightly coat all electrical terminal connections non-conducting (dielectric), light waterproof grease.

Clean the prongs with very fine sandpaper, being careful not to damage the contact area.

Clean the surface deposits in the connector holes. (Make sure the lights are off to prevent blowing a fuse.) Try to clean off only the deposits and lubricate lightly with dielectric, light waterproof grease.