

TRAILER SAFETY

IDENTIFY

Towing a trailer registered heavier than 4,540 kilograms (10,000 pounds)?

- Check your trailer's gross vehicle weight as it appears on your trailer registration. If it's more than 4,540 kg (10,000 lb.) you must hold a Class 1, 2, or 3 driver's license.

Towing a trailer heavier than 4,500 kilograms (9,920 pounds)?

- Check your trailer's gross vehicle weight. It appears on your trailer manufacturer's compliance label.

For all trailers other than camper trailers, if it's more than 4,500 kilograms (9,920 pounds), you must obtain an annual inspection as required by the Periodic Mandatory Vehicle Inspection Regulation.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

Match your trailer and towing vehicle

Make sure your trailer and your vehicle are a proper match. Never tow a trailer that's too large or too heavy.

You'll need to consider these two factors:

- How heavy your trailer is when loaded.
- How much power your vehicle has. (Check your vehicle owner's manual and compare your vehicle's towing capacity to the weight of the trailer you're towing.)

Unsure if your trailer and your vehicle are a proper match? Check with a dealer who sells that type of vehicle, or its manufacturer.

How wide, how tall, and how long is the trailer?

Whether your vehicle and your trailer are attached or apart, each one can be up to:

- 2.6 metres (eight feet, six inches) wide
- 4.15 metres (13 feet, six inches) tall (including anything that sticks up, like antennas or air conditioners)

When attached to each other, your towing vehicle and trailer can be up to 21.5 metres (70 feet) long. When apart, each can be up to 12.5 metres (41 feet) long.

Preparation general tips

Practice towing your trailer away from traffic.

You'll become more skilled at handling your trailer, and gain confidence.

- Inspect the trailer wheels and tires, axle(s)
- Turn off all propane appliances including shut-off valves on the propane tanks.

Make sure all the lights work and the hitch and chain connections are secure.

Check that your tires are in good shape and properly inflated, lug nuts or bolts are tight, the load is secure, vents are closed, the breakaway switch is connected and the trailer is riding level.

Limit the weight on the hitch or else the tow vehicle's back end will be pushed down. This will strain the rear springs, tires, and axle and also affect steering, braking, headlight aim, and mirror alignment.

Check the tongue weight of the trailer and adjust the load as needed. Keeping enough weight on the hitch prevents fishtailing.

Top up your radiator, as it may help prevent your vehicle from overheating. If your trailer has brakes, inspect the linings each year.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

Key points about loading your vehicle

Don't overload your vehicle's trunk. Too much weight at the back will raise your vehicle's front end. That affects your steering, braking, headlights and mirrors. Keep the following in mind:

- While your trailer is being towed, it's illegal for passengers to ride in it.
- In an open trailer, you must secure your load to make sure it doesn't fall out.
- Keep the load 91 kilograms (200 pounds) below the rated capacity.
- On utility trailers, keep heavy loads between axles.
- Divide your load evenly on each side and secure it there, to prevent sway.
- Keep heavy items low in the trailer — either on the floor or in lower cupboards.
- To prevent sway, keep water tanks either full or empty.
- On a boat trailer, place the heaviest load where the hull support is the greatest (usually over the keel). Adjust the roller and hull support so that it supports all points.
- If your boat or utility trailer is empty, avoid braking too hard. This may cause your trailer to swerve severely.
- An empty trailer may be harder to control on bumps and turns.

Checking your trailer's tongue weight

You will need a two-by-four board, two pieces of pipe, a brick, and a bathroom scale.

1. Place the two-by-four on the two round pieces.
2. Screw the jack extension down on the top of the two-by-four until it supports your trailer.
3. Multiply the reading on a bathroom scale by three. This is the tongue weight of your trailer.
4. If you exceed the capacity of the scale, increase the two-foot dimension to three or four or more feet, but always multiply the scale reading by the total number of feet between the brick and the scale.

Is your trailer's tongue weight correct?

What the tongue weight should be depends on the type of hitch.

For fifth-wheel hitches, tongue weight can be up to 25 per cent of your trailer's gross trailer weight (GTW). For all other hitches, tongue weight should be 10 to 15 per cent of your trailer's GTW.

If the tongue weight is too high, shift your trailer's contents to the back. If the tongue weight is too low, shift your trailer's contents to the front.

After adjusting your trailer's load to the back or front, recheck the tongue weight to make sure it's correct.

Driving safely with your trailer in tow

Take it slow and steady:

- Accelerate slowly. Fast starts can strain your engine.
- Steer gently. Sudden turns of the wheel can cause swaying or even an upset.
- Stop gradually, by applying your brakes at intervals to prevent overheating and wear.
- Drive at a steady speed. Drive at the speed limit or below, but avoid going too slowly. If traffic lines up behind you, pull over and let it pass.
- If it's rainy or windy, slow down.

Passing

- Be especially careful when passing. Allow at least twice the normal passing distance — your trailer's added weight slows you down. That means it'll take longer for you to pass.
- When returning to the right lane, move over gradually and allow enough space for your trailer.

COMMUNICATE AND CONTROL

Being passed

- Stay in the right lane.
- Leave enough room ahead for the passing vehicle to re-enter the lane.
- If cars are lining up behind you, pull over, stop and let them pass.
- Avoid driving on the shoulder.
- If a bus or semi is passing you, limit swerving by gripping the steering wheel firmly and accelerating slightly. This will help you regain control.

Following

For every 16 km/h (10 mph), leave at least two trailer lengths between your vehicle and traffic ahead of you. That's more space than you'd need if you weren't pulling a trailer, but there's a good reason for it: pulling a trailer increases the distance you need to stop.

Turning

- Avoid sharp turns.
- Allow for the length of the trailer behind you. Check the traffic carefully and pull straight ahead about half a metre (18 inches) before turning. This will prevent the trailer from cutting the corner too sharply.

Curves

- When going around a curve to your left, keep to the right side of the lane. This prevents you from crossing the centre line.
- When rounding a curve to your right, stay in the centre of the lane, away from the shoulder.

Grades

- Downhill, use your engine to slow down by downshifting. Brake on and off, not continuously.
- Uphill, get more pulling power by downshifting.

Backing up

- Check the conditions (ground, clearance, pedestrians and other vehicles) before backing up.
- Before backing up, ask someone to act as a guide and agree on the signals you'll use. Make sure the guide is standing on your driver's side to be easily seen.
- Back out of traffic, not into it.
- If possible, back in a curve on the driver's side. This gives a better view and better control.
- Back up slowly and check both sides. Do not depend entirely on mirrors to judge the distance to the rear.
- If you don't have a guide, check the conditions and back up promptly. Remember, conditions may change quickly. If your trailer starts to jackknife, stop, pull straight ahead, and start again.
- Practice backing up away from traffic until you can do it smoothly.

Parking

- When parking on a highway, park away from curves and hills and clear of the pavement.
- Park where you won't block the view of oncoming traffic.
- Avoid parking on soft ground.
- Always apply the tow vehicle's parking brake.
- Always block your wheels.
- Choose a level spot for parking overnight.

THE QUIZ

1. What is the minimum gross vehicle weight for a driver to be required to have a Class 1, 2, or 3 license?
 - a) 10,000 kilograms
 - b) 10,000 pounds
 - c) 15,000 kilograms
 - d) 15,000 pounds
2. Overloading your vehicle's trunk is safe and will not cause its front end to raise:
TRUE _____ FALSE _____
3. You can prevent sway in your trailer by evenly dividing your load and securing it:
TRUE _____ FALSE _____
4. Which of the following is NOT recommended when being passed?
 - a) Stay in the right lane
 - b) Avoid driving on the shoulder
 - c) On the highway, turn off your lights when a car is passing so you do not shine your lights in their mirrors and disturb the passing driver
 - d) Pull over, stop, and let other cars pass if there is a lineup behind you
5. When parked, which of the following is recommended to ensure you are secure in your spot?
 - a) Secure your trailer to a nearby object such as a tree
 - b) Block your wheels
 - c) Unhitch your trailer and re-hitch before travelling again
 - d) Park your trailer against another vehicle or the side of a building
6. A trailer can be _____ wide and _____ tall including antennas and air conditioners.

ANSWERS:
1. b; 2. FALSE; 3. TRUE; 4. c; 5. b; 6. 2.6 metres (eight feet, six inches), 4.15 metres (13 feet, six inches)