

THE CARAVAN TOWING GUIDE



**NATIONAL CARAVAN
COUNCIL LIMITED**

Published by THE NATIONAL CARAVAN COUNCIL in co-operation with THE CAMPING AND CARAVANNING CLUB and THE CARAVAN CLUB

INDEX

What's covered by the guide	page 3
What the guide does	page 3
Definitions – terms used in the guide	page 4
Calculating the caravan/car weight ratio	page 9
Safely match the caravan with the car	page 10
Car/caravan matching information sources	page 11
Loading your caravan	page 12
The towball assembly	page 14
Hitching up and unhitching your caravan	page 15
Caravan electrical connections	page 22
Breakaway cable	page 23
Practical towing guidance	page 24
Car's rear suspension	page 26
Road lighting	page 26
Towing mirrors	page 27
Wheels and tyres	page 28
Driving licences information	page 29
Touring caravan weight ranges	page 31
Helpful organisations	page 32

What's covered by the guide:

The guide has been written to help both experienced caravanners and novices to tow a caravan safely and legally.

The guide applies to all trailer caravans:

- with a maximum laden weight not exceeding **3,500 kg**,
- overall width not exceeding **2.3 metres**
- overall body length not exceeding **7 metres**, excluding drawbar and coupling.

This is the maximum size of trailer that can be legally towed by a motor vehicle whose maximum gross vehicle weight is no more than **3,500 kg**.

Although there are caravans in use whose width is greater than 2.3m, these can only be towed by a vehicle with a weight greater than 3,500kg, typically a commercial vehicle.

What the guide does:

Provides simple, easily understood advice on:

- the safe matching of cars to caravans
- the selection of the ratio of caravan weight to car weight for safe towing
- what you need to take into account before towing a caravan
- good driving techniques so you can tow with confidence.

Definitions: terms used in the guide

THE CARAVAN

The masses defined below are in accordance with European Standards and will usually be given in a caravan's **Owner's Manual**. (*Alternative/previous names of terms are shown in italics*).

Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM)

(*Maximum Authorised Mass*)

As stated by the caravan manufacturer on the caravan weight plate (usually mounted close to the entrance door) - the absolute maximum weight that the caravan must not exceed to be legal on the road. It includes allowances for the user payload - all fluids (water etc) and personal belongings that you may wish to carry (clothes, food etc).

Mass in Running Order (MRO)

(*Ex works weight inclusive of the manufacturer's tolerances, Unladen Weight*)

Mass of the caravan equipped to the manufacturer's standard specification stated on the caravan weight plate. Note: Dealer fitted items must be taken into consideration if it is a dealer special.

User Payload

(*Caravan Allowable Payload*)

Payload relates to the weights of all items carried in a caravan and is the allowance you have for:

- optional equipment
- essential habitation equipment, and
- personal effects

The total of the allowances represents the difference between the MTPLM and the MRO.



Optional equipment

Items made available by the manufacturer or dealer over and above the standard specification of the caravan, e.g. spare wheel, air conditioning, motor mover, awning etc.

Essential habitation equipment

Those items and fluids you require for the safe and proper functioning of the equipment for habitation as defined by the caravan manufacturer (e.g. gas cylinder, fresh water, hook up cable and leisure battery).

Personal effects

Those items which you choose to carry in a caravan and which are not included as essential habitation equipment or optional equipment. (e.g. clothes, crockery, cooking utensils, bedding, TV, radio, footwear, books, awning and food).

Actual laden weight

The actual weight of the caravan when you use it - **including its optional equipment** and the essential habitation equipment plus your personal effects. You need to know this weight because it will determine whether you are towing within the law and also within your caravan towing experience.



Here is a typical example of weights/masses in a caravan:

MRO. Empty weight of standard model.		Kg
Optional Equipment. Spare wheel, air conditioner.		935
Essential Habitation Equipment. Gas cylinder/s, leisure battery, essential fluids.	User Payload 1	75
Personal Effects. Food, bedding, cutlery, crockery, clothing – for 2 people.	User Payload 2	50
Overall User Payload	User Payload 3	100
Actual Laden Weight. MRO plus	Total of User Payloads 1- 3	225
MTPLM	User Payloads 1- 3	1160
Spare capacity payload	Never to be exceeded	1300
	e.g. for awning, external furniture, books, TV, radio etc.	140

Hitch limit

The maximum vertical static load that the towing coupling can bear, stamped on a plate on the coupling. See also the caravan drawbar limit, sometimes printed in the owner's manual.

Hitch height

The height of the centre of the coupling hitch should lie in the range of 395 mm and 465 mm above ground level with the caravan level, front to back.

Noseweight

The downforce that the caravan's coupling head imposes on a car's towball, measured by a noseweight gauge - it should never be greater than the towbar/ball or hitch limit values, whichever is the lower.

THE CAR

The towing vehicle in this guide is assumed to be a car.

Mass of vehicle in running order (MRO)

(Kerbweight, kerbside weight)

The weight of the car as defined by the car manufacturer.

Normally, this includes: 90% full tank of fuel; an adequate supply of other liquids incidental to the vehicle's propulsion; the driver but without any passengers; without any load, except tools and equipment with which the car is normally provided; but without the towing bracket. You should add about 25kg for the towbar and ball.

Note: *Some definitions used by car manufacturers do not include the driver. If you do not know the MRO for your car, add about 100kg to the **driverless kerbweight** of the car to allow for the driver, towing bracket, ball and additional wiring.*

Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)

Weight of the car when fully laden with driver, passengers and luggage and imposed noseweight.

Note: *In other documents this may also be referred to as the Maximum Permissible Weight (MPW) or Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW).*

Maximum Permissible Towing Mass (MPTM)

The weight defined by the car manufacturer as the maximum that the car is to tow.

Gross Train Weight (GTW)

The maximum permitted combined weight of the car and trailer as specified by the car manufacturer.

Towing load limit

The maximum trailer mass that the car can tow. Published by the car manufacturer.

Towbar load limit

The maximum vertical static load that the towbar can support through the towball. Published by the towbar manufacturer and shown on a plate on the towbar.

Towball height

The height of the centre of the towball should lie in the range of 350mm to 420mm above ground level when the car is laden. Some large cars may require a towbar drop plate to achieve a height within this range. See your towbar fitter for advice.

CALCULATING PAYLOAD AND ACTUAL LADEN WEIGHT

The mass of the personal effects required for two people to go caravanning is approximately **100kg**. This may include, for example: bedding, clothing, cooking utensils, crockery, cutlery, food and external water carrier. A further **25kg** for each additional person should be allowed for items such as books, drinks, and other non essentials.

You can

- a) weigh each item before it is placed in the caravan and add the total to the MRO
- or
- b) take the fully loaded caravan to a public weighbridge.

The address of your nearest public weighbridge can be obtained from your local Council's Trading Standards Department (Weights and Measures).

Note: *Although regularly checked, weighbridges may give varying results as they are calibrated for much heavier vehicles. A public weighbridge operator will give you a written or printed record for each weighing.*

Remember: *The weight of the battery, gas cylinders and any manufacturer or dealer options must always be taken into account.*

CALCULATING THE CARAVAN/CAR WEIGHT RATIO

This ratio is the actual laden weight of the caravan expressed as a percentage of the MRO of the car, i.e.:

$$= \frac{\text{Actual laden weight of the caravan}}{\text{MRO of the car}} \times 100\%$$

Why is this ratio important?

It is used to ensure your fully loaded caravan is appropriate for your towing experience as it has a major influence on towing stability.

The caravan industry recommends:

For a **novice** caravanner, ideally, this ratio should not exceed **85%**.

For an **experienced caravanner** the maximum recommended ratio is **100%**, provided the figure is permissible in respect of the tow car's published capability.

Remember: The weight of your personal effects and the optional equipment you have fitted will affect the result:

Keep the caravan as light as possible – the lower the weight, the better the match and, provided items are stowed properly, the safer it is to tow. The greater the actual laden weight of the caravan and the greater the train weight set for the car, the more careful and experienced in towing the driver needs to be.

Note: Care must always be taken not to exceed the car's loading and towing limits including the Gross Train Weight which takes preference over the weight ratios above.

SAFELY MATCH THE CARAVAN WITH THE CAR

1. Check your driving licence is suitable for your car and caravan combination– see page 29.
2. Stay safe and legal:

To ensure that the combination of car and caravan is legal for use on the public highway you must ensure that:

Your car's **MAM** is not exceeded,
Your caravan's **MTPLM** is not exceeded,
Your caravan's **MTPLM** does not exceed your car's **MPTM**,
The combined laden weight of your car and caravan does not exceed your car's **GTW**.
The lowest load limit of these four elements is not exceeded:

- The car's towbar and ball
- The caravan's drawbar limit
- The caravan braking system overrun device
- The caravan hitch coupling.

Then make sure that the caravan noseweight lies within the 5% to 7% range (see below).

Information on car and caravan limits may be found in the handbooks issued by the car and caravan manufacturers, from the Clubs and from caravan dealers.

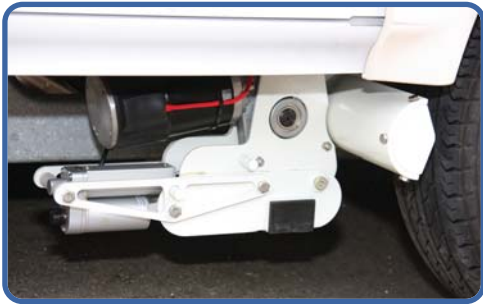
CAR/CARAVAN MATCHING INFORMATION SOURCES

“Can my car tow this caravan safely?”

There are a number of computer programs available on the internet that will match a car to a caravan or vice versa. Some will demonstrate the car's performance when attached to specific caravans. Some of these can also allow a car owner to analyse generic caravan types and to study caravan profiles.

The car/caravan match is produced by a calculation similar to the caravan/car towing ratio explained above. However, since it is not possible to know the actual laden weight of the caravan, particularly if the question is being asked of a caravan that is to be bought, the ratio of the caravan MTPLM to the MRO of the car is used to generate this match. The industry recommendations on ratios for novices or experienced drivers also apply in this calculation.

Your best source of information is your caravan dealer who should be able to advise you. The Clubs are also invaluable sources of additional information.



LOADING YOUR CARAVAN

Follow these guidelines:

- **Never exceed the MTPLM.** Remember that the weight of any optional extras that you may have added will need to be considered in your weight calculations, e.g. a caravan mover
 - In general, the higher the noseweight, the better the stability of the combination. Experience has shown that a **noseweight in the region of 5% to 7%** of the actual laden weight of the caravan is **safest**. However, the maximum noseweight will always be limited by the lowest of the car, towbar or caravan coupling vertical load limits.
- The **way the caravan is loaded** is critical. Heavy items placed at the front and rear or stored at height could destabilise the caravan under tow. The **safest** course is to **place heavy items directly on the floor**, close to the caravan axle, and in a manner to achieve the correct noseweight. All loads should be restrained as loose items within a caravan can move and create an unstable condition.
 - A stabiliser should never be used as a remedial measure when a caravan/car combination has poor stability. However, a good stabiliser can make a well-balanced caravan/car combination easier to handle on poor roads and in windy conditions.

Remember:

Keep it **light**

Keep it **low**

Keep it **even**

Place it **over the axle**

The loading process

Follow these simple steps **before each trip**:

1. Ensure that the handbrake of your caravan is fully engaged, the wheels are chocked and the corner stabilisers are down.
2. Weigh items before loading to ensure that you remain within your payload allowance.
3. Load location:-
 - Heavy items (e.g. your awning) on the floor directly over the axle/s.
 - Medium weight items, e.g. external furniture, barbecue, water carrier, should be placed on the floor, close to the axle.
 - Only light items should be stored in the overhead lockers.
4. Remember:
 - Fixed Beds. If your caravan has a rear fixed bed, do not fill the base with heavy items.
 - Fluids. Empty water tanks or containers and toilet cassette before moving off.

Note: Carry a small container of water in the fridge for en route drinks rather than a part-full container.
5. Ensure that all items are secured to prevent them moving about in transit.
6. When all items are loaded safely, raise the corner steadies, remove any chocks from the wheels and check the noseweight. Use a proprietary noseweight gauge, follow the maker's instructions and ensure that the measurement is made at the tow hitch connection point.
7. If the noseweight is not correct then adjust the position of the items within the caravan until you achieve the correct value. (You might need to take some items out). Do not move heavy items to the front or rear of the caravan to achieve this. Concentrate the load above the axle/s.
8. Finally, be mindful that the weight is distributed evenly in the caravan, so each wheel carries approximately the same load.

Then you are ready to connect up to the car.





THE TOWBALL ASSEMBLY

Care must be taken when matching the towball type to the coupling head. Generally it is best to use the towball supplied with the towbar (assuming that the ball is not integrated into the design, as in the case of a swan neck or detachable bar).

However some caravan coupling heads, e.g. those fitted with AL-KO AKS stabilisers, **MUST** be used with a special AL-KO towball available from AL-KO or reputable towbar fitters. This ensures that these relatively large coupling heads can articulate freely without interfering with the neck of the towball. Failure to use the correct towball in these circumstances can lead to towball and coupling damage and inadvertent detachment.

Very important - if your car is fitted with a detachable towball and you have removed the towball from the connecting socket, you should ensure that it is fully engaged and the lock mechanism has worked correctly when you replace it.

Ensure that any road dirt or debris is cleaned thoroughly from the engagement receptacle prior to refitting and always follow the manufacturer's assembly instructions precisely. Check that the ball has fully locked home after refitting. Failure to follow the towball manufacturer's instructions could result in the towball dis-engaging unexpectedly.

HITCHING UP AND UNHITCHING YOUR CARAVAN

This comes easily with practice. Follow the same routine every time:

Check the noseweight of the laden caravan every time that you hitch up and adjust the position of your personal effects if necessary.

When hitching up to the car:

ENGAGE the caravan handbrake



CHECK the caravan wheels (particularly, if on a slope)





RAISE the corner steadies



LIFT the caravan front on the jockey wheel if necessary and **CHECK** the noseweight



Reverse the car (with assistance) up to the caravan
Note: For your safety, you are strongly advised not to stand between the car and the caravan

ENGAGE the car's handbrake fully and then **RELEASE** the caravan handbrake fully



MOVE the coupling over the towball



LOWER the caravan on the jockey wheel





RAISE the release handle



CLICK the release handle (ensure the coupling is fully on the ball) and then **CONFIRM** coupling engagement by raising the caravan a little using the jockey wheel,



WIND UP the jockey wheel fully then **LIFT** the jockey wheel column fully

CLAMP the jockey wheel with its locking lever



CONNECT the electrical system

Note: The car shown has a 7N and 7S connection, not a single 13 pin plug.



CONNECT the breakaway cable

Note: If the towing bracket does not have a dedicated loop, wrap the cable around the ball stem and then clip back onto the cable.





CHECK all lights, indicators, reversing lights etc on the car and the caravan

RECHECK the coupling, breakaway cable and electrical connection/s, caravan brake lever released.

Collect any chocks and corner steady pads



Always check that the coupling indicator, where fitted, shows green for successful coupling.

Also check that if an integral stabiliser is fitted, the indicator is showing green. If a red indicator is showing in either, then the engagement is not correct.



Walk all around the caravan to ensure that all the doors, windows, lockers and roof lights are closed and locked, check that any mains hook up is disconnected and the gas supply is turned off at the cylinder shut off valve.

Return to the coupling and **CHECK AGAIN** that the hitch is fully secured, the brake is off and that the breakaway cable is correct.

When unhitching from the car:

Note: *If the ground is uneven you may need to level the caravan from side to side using a spirit level or level indicator as a guide. The corner steadies are not intended to level the caravan, and any substantial cross slope may have to be countered using a ramped block under the wheels.*

1. ENGAGE the handbrake on the car and the caravan.
2. TURN OFF the car's engine.
3. LOWER the caravan jockey wheel.
4. CLAMP the shaft of the jockey wheel.
5. CHOCK the caravan wheels, particularly if on a long slope.
6. UNCLIP the breakaway cable and stow carefully (tripping hazard).
7. DISCONNECT the electrical system (Make sure that the cable is not left to trail on the ground where it may become damaged).
8. RAISE the front of the caravan on the jockey wheel and release the coupling clear of the hitch ball.
9. DRIVE the car away from the caravan (or MOVE the caravan away from the towball).
10. USE the jockey wheel and level to get the floor level.
11. LOWER the corner steadies, using pads if the ground is not firm.

CARAVAN ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS



Caravans may be fitted with two 7 pin plugs (I2N & I2S) for attachment to the car.:



Some caravans may be fitted with a single 13 pin plug:



You may need an adaptor, depending upon the electrical socket(s) fitted to your car and caravan. Ensure that the cable/s at the front of the caravan are not so loose as to be able to catch or rub on the ground, nor so tight that they become taut when the car and caravan are at an extreme angle to each other. If possible, align the cable/s so that they are about 30cm (12") longer than the front of the coupling head on the caravan before attachment.

BREAKAWAY CABLE

All caravans with an MTPLM greater than 750kg must be fitted with brakes. Above this limit and below 3500kg MTPLM, all caravans must also be fitted with a breakaway cable. On accidental disconnection of the caravan from the car, the function of the breakaway cable is to apply the caravan brakes and then release.

It is a legal requirement that a breakaway cable is fitted and properly attached.

Ensure that the cable is routed directly to the car without loops or kinks and through any guides in the caravan drawbar. Always replace any damaged cable with the relevant manufacturer's spare to ensure correct function.

The cable should be looped through any large diameter hole or loop in or on the towbar and then clipped back on itself. The cable hook should NOT be clipped directly to that hole as this may lead to premature failure, unless the cable is designed for direct attachment. If there is no suitably sized hole or loop in or on the towbar, the cable must be passed around the neck of the towball, beneath the coupling head and then clipped back onto itself.

The breakaway cable should be long enough so that it does not attempt to apply the brakes whilst in motion, particularly around corners, but not so long that it can contact the road or become wrapped around some part of the front of the caravan when in use. Ensure that the cable is not/cannot be entangled with the electrical cable and/or any external stabiliser in place.



PRACTICAL TOWING GUIDANCE

Experience of towing is not essential for taking up caravanning. Any driver should soon find towing a caravan both rewarding and pleasurable. If you are at all unsure, the Clubs offer towing and manoeuvring courses.

The caravan should always be towed either level or slightly nose down.

You should always build up **speed** gradually to get used to the different handling and braking characteristics when towing. A caravan will alter the performance of the car and the driver will have to anticipate potential hazards at an earlier stage. This experience will allow the driver to eliminate sudden speed and/or course changes by using earlier anticipation to create a calmer and safer driving environment.

The speed at which a caravan is towed is very important. The aerodynamic forces that act on the caravan at speed may tend to reduce the noseweight, increasingly as road speed increases. At a critical speed any loss of noseweight can cause instability and this could occur at a lower speed when driving into a head wind. Gusting cross winds, exposed bridge sections, valleys and proximity to large goods vehicles may also initiate aerodynamic instability. Slow down, but do not brake, to return to stability.

Speed limits:

National speed limits	Car	Car and caravan
Single carriageway	60 mph	50 mph
Dual or more carriageways	70 mph	60 mph

Additionally, caravans **must not** be towed in the outside lane of a three or more lane dual carriageway or motorway.

A good reserve of power is necessary for towing up gradients at altitude.

When **going uphill**, change gear in good time. If your car is running short of power or is behind a slower vehicle, keep well into the nearside and out of the way of other vehicles. Remember that some hills which can be ascended with relative ease often pose an unexpected challenge if you come to a standstill in traffic and then have to re-start from scratch.

When **going downhill**, take extra care to ensure you do not gain speed. This can be avoided by changing down a gear and reducing speed as you **approach** the slope. Don't leave this gear change too late. Using low gears throughout the descent will reduce the strain on the car's brakes. For automatics, you may need to manually change to a lower gear in anticipation of the effect caused by the gradient change.

Note: *If you plan to tow in countries where long, high altitude climbs can be anticipated, you should seek expert advice on the suitability of your car for such journeys. Further experience and training should be gained before tackling some of the more difficult elements of towing (mountain passes, difficult terrain, etc.).*

Reversing competently comes with practice. Watch for slopes, cambers, potholes and other irregularities that can cause the caravan to deviate. As with all manoeuvres, the secret is to do things smoothly and at low speed. At night, additional lighting and/or a second pair of eyes may be needed.

Steering a caravan in reverse is counter-intuitive:

1. To cause the rear of the caravan to turn one way, the steering wheel has to be moved initially in the opposite direction from how you would normally steer the car.
2. One technique is to remove the hand from the steering wheel in the direction in which the turn is intended and pull downwards on the steering wheel with the other hand.
3. Once the initial turn is established, the steering wheel is turned through the straight ahead position to provide a small amount of positive steering.

Note: *Reversing in a straight line may be difficult if there is a significant camber or irregularities on a road surface.*

CAR'S REAR SUSPENSION

When a caravan is attached to the towball on the back of a car, some of the weight of the caravan is borne by the rear suspension of the car. This may cause the car to achieve a 'nose up' attitude, in addition to any change caused by a load carried in the rear of the car. This attitude can be seen from the side of the car and may well be sufficient to mis-aim the headlights significantly and potentially reduce the effectiveness of the steering system.

To alleviate this 'nose up' attitude, it may be feasible to change or augment the car's rear suspension stiffness, though this will not increase the maximum load allowable on the rear axle. This suspension alteration may be achievable by fitting a product available from the car manufacturer or a reputable aftermarket suspension/towing specialist.

Advice is available from the Clubs and from specialist dealers.

Note: *Some suspension assisters are designed to stiffen the springs when a caravan imposes noseweight on the towball but they do not come into effect when you are driving your car without towing. A progressive strengthening device offers distinct benefits.*

ROAD LIGHTING

The lights on a caravan must be clearly visible and in working order. The car must also have an audible and/or visual warning device linked to the wiring leading to the caravan indicators. The warning device will indicate whether the caravan direction indicators are working or will indicate whether they are not. On many modern cars this function is integrated into the bulb failure warning system.

If you are going abroad remember to take some beam benders and spare bulbs.

TOWING MIRRORS

The law demands that a motor vehicle must have at least two functional rear view mirrors. There must be one on the offside and one internally, though most cars are equipped with a nearside mirror as well.

Note: *It may not be possible to use the car's internal mirror to see through the caravan windows to the rear of the combination, in which case two external mirrors are required.*

Since many caravans are wider than their towing car, the side mirrors on the car are unlikely to provide a clear view down both sides of the caravan, so extension towing mirrors are needed. You must be able to see clearly down both sides of your caravan, and 4m either side at a distance of 20m behind the caravan.

There will be some combinations of car and caravan which can satisfy this requirement without extension towing mirrors. However, these are likely to be the exception rather than the rule and most combinations will need extension towing mirrors. Unless you are absolutely certain that your vision meets the legal criteria, extension towing mirrors should always be used for legality and safety when your caravan is coupled up. Remember to remove them when not towing.

Ensure that the extension towing mirrors project no more than 250mm* beyond the widest part of the caravan. It is desirable that the offside extension towing mirror contains a plane mirror so that you can judge speed and distance correctly. Also ensure that they have safety glass and/or are e-marked, if required.

* the limit for older cars is 200mm.



WHEELS AND TYRES

The condition of a caravan's tyres is often overlooked, particularly the spare. Caravan tyres rarely wear out though the same legal tread depth limit of 1.6mm applies. You should check the tyre sidewalls and treads regularly for cracks, cuts and bulges routinely. Replace the tyres, including the spare, in accordance with the caravan industry's recommendation: this is no more than **seven years** from the date code on the tyre.

Note: *It is advisable to cover the whole wheel when the caravan is not in regular use, e.g. over the winter.*



Tyres with higher inflation pressures (50 psi and above) may deteriorate faster - check them closely, although the advice on replacement still applies. Take care when replacing tyres. Some caravan tyres are of a stronger commercial grade and these **must not** be replaced with car tyres of the same size.

Tyre pressures and wheel nuts or bolts on both the car and caravan should be checked regularly to comply with the manufacturer's recommendations.



Car manufacturers provide recommendations for increased tyre pressures when towing or under heavier loading. Incorrectly inflated car and caravan tyres can initiate instability and premature tyre failure.

Note: *To get an accurate reading, ONLY check pressure when a tyre is cold.*

Wheel nuts or bolts should be checked with a torque wrench. If undertightened, a wheel fixing can shake loose, but if it is overtightened it can deform the seating (i.e. recess) on the wheel itself – and, again, it can shake loose. A torque wrench ensures that it is just tight enough. Check your owner's manual.

When replacing a wheel, torque the wheel nuts up in the correct sequence and re-torque after the recommended bedding in distance, typically 30 miles.

If the car suffers a puncture and you do not have a normal size spare, refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the suitability of towing with the compact size spare or run-flat tyre supplied – you may find that speed and distance may have to be reduced.

If you have to change a wheel at the roadside, position the car and caravan as clear of the carriageway as possible and ensure the hazard warning lights are operating. Do not put yourself at risk, especially if the deflated tyre is on the offside. In many European countries it is also obligatory to wear a high visibility safety jacket or waistcoat – but this is strongly recommended even if it is not a legal requirement in the UK.

DRIVING LICENCE INFORMATION

WHAT DRIVING LICENCE DO I NEED TO TOW A CARAVAN?

Car licences held before 1 January 1997

All drivers who passed a car test before 1 January 1997 retain their existing entitlement to tow trailers until their licence expires. This means they are generally entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8,250 kg GTW.

Drivers who need to renew their licences beyond the age of 70 should ensure that they retain these entitlements.

Drivers who hold subcategory CI+E, which is limited to 8,250 kg GTW, may apply for provisional entitlement to the new subcategory CI+E, in order to take and pass the test that will increase their combined vehicle and trailer entitlement to 12,000 kg GTW.

Car licences gained since 1 January 1997

Category B: Vehicles up to 3,500 kg MPW and with up to eight passenger seats (including driver)

Category B vehicles may be coupled with:

- a caravan up to 750 kg MTPLM (allowing a combined weight up to 4,250 kg GTW)
- or a caravan over 750 kg MTPLM provided the MTPLM of the caravan does not exceed the unladen weight of the car and the combination does not exceed 3,500 kg GTW.

Note: For example, see below two situations – the same car but with a different caravan:

Car		Caravan		Licence
UW	1,250 kg	MTPLM	1,250 kg	Category B
MPW	2,000 kg			
<i>GTW of this combination does not exceed 3,500 kg and the MTPLM of the caravan does not exceed the MRO of the car</i>				
UW	1,250 kg	MTPLM	1,500 kg	Category B+E
MPW	2,000 kg			
<i>Although the combined mass of the vehicle and caravan is within the 3,500 kg GTW limit, the MPTLM of the caravan is more than the MRO of the car.</i>				

Drivers who passed a car test on or after 1st January 1997 are required to pass an additional driving test in order to gain entitlement to Category B+E and all larger vehicles. Subcategories C1, D1, C1+E and D1+E will involve a higher medical standard. Passing a test for entitlement to one of the subcategory +1 upgrades may allow entitlement to others depending on the trailer size but the +1 subcategory test can only be taken after entitlement is given for the relevant Category.

Category B+E: Vehicles up to 3,500 kg MPW towing caravans over 750kgs MTPLM

Category B+E allows vehicles up to 3,500 kg MPW to be combined with caravans in excess of 750 kg MTPLM irrespective of the weight ratio. In order to gain this entitlement, new category B licence holders have to pass a further practical test for category B+E though there is no theory test. For driver licensing purposes, there are no vehicle/trailer weight ratio limits for category B+E.

Vehicle manufacturers may publish a range of trailer MTPLMs appropriate to each vehicle type and specification within a range, with precise details stated in the vehicle's handbook, at vehicle dealerships and/or in other information sources. Check the exact specification of your car, because there can be a wide variation of maximum values published for different vehicles within the same product range.

TOURING CARAVAN WEIGHT RANGES

There is a wide range of MTPLMs across the range of caravans produced and imported into the UK and you are strongly advised to be aware of the exact weight data for any particular caravan when considering licence entitlement. In the majority of cases, caravans towed by cars should be within the new category B threshold, but it is recommended that you should always check your eligibility for any given combination using the information from the manufacturers' handbooks.

HELPFUL ORGANISATIONS

The Caravan Club	www.caravanclub.co.uk	01342 326 944
The Camping and Caravanning Club	www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk	0845 130 7632
DVLA	www.dvla.gov.uk	0115 901 2515/6
Department for Transport	www.dft.gov.uk	020 7944 8300
Driving Standards Agency	www.dsa.gov.uk	0115 936 6666

Stay legal

If you are in any doubt about specific legislation, please refer to the latest amended text (2003) of The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, The Road Vehicle Lighting Regulations 1989 or the Motorway Traffic Regulations (England and Wales).

These, along with the Highway Code, are available from The Stationery Office or any bookshop that sells government publications.

All references to law within this guide relate to UK law only.

Note: *This guide is not intended to be taken as word of law and should not be construed as a legal document. The emphasis is on health and safety and every effort has been made to provide true and accurate information by which you can make the decision which applies to your personal circumstances.*

Acknowledgements

The National Caravan Council gratefully acknowledges the help and advice received from the Department for Transport (DfT) and The Driving Standards Agency (DSA) in compiling this guide. Neither the DfT nor the DSA accept any responsibility for the accuracy of the contents of this publication.

The National Caravan Council
Catherine House, Victoria Road,
Aldershot, Hampshire, GU11 1SS
Tel: 01252 318251
Website: www.thecaravan.net

Copyright

© National Caravan Council 2008.

This document must not be photocopied or otherwise reproduced in whole or in part without the prior permission in writing of the National Caravan Council.

*Note: The term **caravan** used within this Guide also refers to other relevant types of trailer e.g. trailer tents and folding caravans. The term **car** is a towing vehicle which is the term used in legislation.*

