

Towing Guide

Your Vehicle

A quick look at the side of a car gives you an idea as to its potential for towing. If it has a relatively long wheelbase, and the overhang at the back is short, (distance between the centre of the rear wheels to the towball), that's a good start. We have listed some important calculations that you should consider in order to set up both vehicles for better towing.

Kerb Weight

The weight of the towing vehicle as defined by the vehicle manufacturer (we suggest that you consult your vehicle's manual for this).

Actual Laden Weight

The total weight of the caravan/trailer and its contents when being towed.

Caravan or Trailer /Towing Vehicle Weight Ratio

The actual laden weight of the caravan expressed as a percentage of the kerb weight of the towing vehicle, i.e: actual laden weight of caravan, divided by kerb weight of towing vehicle, multiplied by 100.

Car to Caravan weight ratio

It is recommended that you do not exceed an 85% caravan to car weight ratio. This means that your caravan, fully loaded, should not be more than 85% of your cars kerb-weight (or max tow weight if this is lower). If you are an experienced caravanner you can go up to 100% weight ration but this is not recommended. If the caravan is more than the kerb-weight of the car and you are stopped by the Police you could be prosecuted.

Towbars



New technology in vehicle manufacture has led to new car cars being much lighter than older cars. In addition, modern cars only have a few points strong enough to attach a tow-bar. It is always that the proper towbar for the car is fitted otherwise it may fail with catastrophic results.



The European Union have introduced new laws, EC Directive 94/20/EC, that requires cars (or other light passenger vehicles, registered after 1 st August 1998 are fitted with a 'type approved' tow-bar.

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Type approval summary

Applies to 'S' registered cars onwards (i.e. registered after 1.8.1998)

Type approved tow-bars have been subjected to a test of 2,000,000 push pull fatigue test

Type approved tow-bars must fit to all the vehicles mounting points

Fitting a type approved tow-bar to new cars will not invalidate the vehicles warranty

If you do not fit a type approved tow-bar to a car registered after 1.8.1998 could result in being

prosecuted under the Road Traffic Act

If you fit a non type approved tow-bar to a car registered after 1.8.1998 and you are involved in an accident you may find your insurance is invalid

All tow-bars must carry a 'type approved' label containing the following information:

Maximum nose-weight

Approval number

country where the towbar was tested e.g. UK is e11

Exemptions:

The new law only applies to cars it does not apply to commercial vehicles.

Stabilisers

Stabilisers are an effective method of increasing safety when towing a caravan. They are designed to reduce vertical (pitching) and horizontal (snaking) instability. This is often caused when an outfit is being overtaken or overtaking. The instability is caused by the air being forced between the two vehicles. Other caused of instability are:



Driving too fast

Side winds

Potholes or un-even road surfaces

What types are there?

There are basically two types of stabiliser

	<p>Blade stabilisers fit to the towing bracket and the caravan and use a tensioned blade with two dampers to reduce movement from side to side and up and down.</p>
	<p>Tow ball devices often fit to the caravan hitch point and involve replacing the tow-ball on the car</p>

Legal Requirements

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Driving licence

From 1 January 1997, new drivers may drive a vehicle up to 3.5 tonnes gross vehicle weight (GVW) with a 750kgs GVW trailer. Towing under a provisional licence is NOT acceptable. If in doubt, contact the DVLA on 01792 772151.

Insurance

Most vehicle insurance policies will cover you for third party liability when towing, but we advise you to check your own policy carefully. If you are unsure about cover when towing then contact your insurance company for clarification.

Speed limits

The maximum speed that a car towing a trailer etc. is 60mph on UK motorways and dual carriageways and 50mph other roads (providing, of course, there is no lower speed limit in force at the time). Vehicles are not allowed to use the right-hand (overtaking) lane of a three lane carriageway whilst towing.

Size of trailer

Assuming that an ordinary car (not a goods vehicle) is the tow vehicle, then the overall length of the trailer, caravan etc. must not exceed 7m, excluding A-frame and hitch. The maximum width of the trailer should not exceed 2.3 m.

Lights and reflectors

All trailers on the road during darkness must have the following;

Two red side lights at the rear

Brake lights

Direction indicators

Number plate light

At least one rear fog light (if the trailer is more than 1.3m wide)

Two red triangular reflectors

All lights must be in proper working order, and correctly fitted to your car's electrics - see below for wiring standards on the 12 'n' and 's' socket.

Tyres and number plates

Wheels and tyres must be capable of carrying the maximum laden weight of the caravan at the maximum speed limit (this varies throughout Europe). Trailers, caravans etc. must be fitted with an approved style number plate.

Suspension

It is vital that the towing vehicle's rear suspension is not deflected excessively by nose weight on the towball. If it is excessive, steering, stability and headlight alignment will be affected.

MOT certificate

This is not currently required for trailers and caravans. However, an un-roadworthy trailer may invalidate your insurance and may mean you are committing an offence under the Road Traffic Act.

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Passengers

It is illegal to allow passengers to travel inside the trailer, caravan etc.

Speed Limits in the UK

	Built-up areas *	Single carriage-ways	Dual carriage-ways	Motorways
Type of vehicle	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)	mph (km/h)
Cars towing caravans or trailers (including car-derived vans and motorcycles)	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	60 (96)

- The 30 mph limit usually applies to all traffic on all roads with street lighting unless signs show otherwise.

You **MUST NOT** exceed the maximum speed limits for the road and for your vehicle (see the table above). The presence of street lights generally means that there is a 30 mph (48 km/h) speed limit unless otherwise specified.

The speed limit is the absolute maximum and does not mean it is safe to drive at that speed irrespective of conditions. Driving at speeds too fast for the road and traffic conditions is dangerous.

You should always reduce your speed when;

- the road layout or condition presents hazards, such as bends
- sharing the road with pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders, particularly children, and motorcyclists
- weather conditions make it safer to do so
- driving at night as it is more difficult to see other road users

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