

# Trailer Safety

*Know the Hazards and Perform a Pre-Trip Inspection*



Towing a trailer is no time to be in a hurry or to become complacent with safety best practices. There is no more grim reminder than this news account from the Chico Enterprise Record:

<https://www.chicoer.com/2017/04/11/one-dead-when-trailer-breaks-loose-hits-another-vehicle/>

Safety best practices when towing a trailer starts with the proper care of the tow vehicle. Towing places increased strain on the tow vehicle's transmission and engine, causing them to run at a much hotter temperature. Axles, brakes, and tires are also critical systems of concern. Failure of any of these systems will cause loss of control of both the tow vehicle and trailer. Properly maintain the tow vehicle and trailer per the operating manual at all times.

## PRE-TRIP INSPECTIONS

Pre-trip inspections often get neglected. Don't get complacent. This safety best practice should NEVER be ignored under any circumstances. This is especially important when it comes to the trailer. Trailers are not used every day and can become unfit for use while in stow. Of particular importance with the trailer is

proper tire inflation and recommended torque setting of the wheel lug nuts. Proper tire inflation is found on the trailer's compliance certification label placarded on the trailer or on the tire itself. A torque guide for the lug nuts may be found in the trailer operating manual.

## WEIGHT CONSIDERATIONS

Every tow vehicle and trailer has a published Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR). The GVWR is the maximum weight a vehicle may weigh without causing system failures and diminishing handling characteristics. The GVWR for the tow vehicle is found on the compliance certification label, located in the door jamb. The GVWR for the trailer is typically determined by the Gross Axle Weight Rating (GAWR) found on the compliance certificate. For example, the compliance certificate on the trailer shows 3,500 lbs. per axle. If the trailer has two axles, the GVWR of the trailer would be 7,000 lbs.

The most important weight to consider when towing a trailer is Gross Combination Weight Rating (GCWR). This is the maximum weight the combined tow vehicle and trailer may weigh without causing system failures and diminishing handling characteristics when in tow. This weight is sometimes hard to find as it is seldom listed on the tow vehicle compliance certificate. Refer to the towing section of the tow vehicle operating manual to find the GCWR. If the GCWR cannot be found there, consider calling the auto dealer, providing the VIN, and asking them to provide the GCWR.

Also, be careful not to get tripped up on these weights. For example, the GCWR of a tow vehicle might be 12,000 lbs. If the GCWR of the tow vehicle is 6,000 lbs. and the GVWR of the trailer is 7,000 lbs., fully loading both the tow vehicle and trailer would exceed the GCWR by 1,000 lbs.

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## **SAFE DRIVING CHECKLIST**

Remember the operating and handling characteristics of a vehicle changes substantially when attaching another vehicle that weights from 1-4 tons to the back of a tow rig.

## **HITCHING AND HITCH CLASS**

Also of concern is having the proper class hitch receiver on the tow vehicle. Depending on class, the hitch receiver determines the towing capacity of the tow vehicle. For basic towing (other than kingpins and fifth wheels) there are four hitching receiver classifications.

| Hitch Class | Tows                    |
|-------------|-------------------------|
| Class I     | Up to 2,000 lbs.        |
| Class II    | Up to 3,500 lbs.        |
| Class III   | From 3,500 – 5,000 lbs. |
| Class IV    | Up to 10,000 lbs.       |

Be certain you know what type of hitching classification is provided on the tow vehicle you will be driving.