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“Your time is limited, don’t waste it living someone else’s life. Don’t be trapped by dogma, which is living the result of other people’s thinking. Don’t let the noise of other’s opinion drowned your own inner voice. And most important, have the courage to follow your heart and intuition, they somehow already know what you truly want to become. Everything else is secondary.”—Steve Jobs



RV Spring Preparation

Is your RV ready for the upcoming camping season?

When I park our RV after the last trip of the season I look forward to this time of year rolling around again, time to go camping. Last winter I was a little lazy and put the RV in storage knowing there were some maintenance related issues that would need to be addressed this spring. When you combine those items with routine spring preparation checks you need to dedicate some time to get the RV ready to go camping again.

If you follow my work you have more-than-likely heard me use the term preventive maintenance. I spent an entire career in the Army teaching young soldiers the value of preventive maintenance, and a second career passing the same valuable lessons on to RV owners. For those of you not familiar with the term, preventive maintenance is maintenance you perform on your RV, automobile, house or anything else *before* a problem exists. Preventive maintenance checks are designed to prevent or identify potential problems that

could lead to mechanical breakdown, malfunction, or failure of a component or system on your RV. It consists of cleaning, inspecting, lubricating, adjusting and servicing your RV. To go one step further with my explanation I like to explain that a lack of preventive maintenance and/or scheduled maintenance will eventually result in emergency maintenance. For example, if you don't check the air pressure in your tires (preventive maintenance) the under-inflated tire over heats and prematurely fails resulting in (emergency maintenance). Emergency maintenance usually leaves you stranded alongside the road, not exactly how you want to start the first RV trip of the season!

Preventive maintenance is really nothing more than common sense maintenance. If you're going to take a thousand mile trip in your automobile common sense tells us at a minimum to check all of the fluid levels, the tires and lights on the vehicle. Unfortunately lots of folks assume all of the fluid levels are okay, and the tires look like they are inflated properly so why check them. These assumptions are why we have unexpected breakdowns.

Now consider an RV. It is larger and heavier than your automobile and its not just the chassis you need to be concerned with, it's the entire house sitting on top of the chassis. The good news is the average RV owner can perform the required preventive maintenance and prevent untimely breakdowns and costly repairs. To assist with your RV spring preparation this is a checklist from my best-selling e-book,

RV Spring Preparation Checks

- If your RV was winterized it will need to be de-winterized. If you used non-toxic RV antifreeze to protect the water system you need to run fresh water through the entire system until all traces of the antifreeze are removed. Hopefully no antifreeze was added to the fresh water holding tank. If it was, the first step is to drain any remnants from the tank. Add potable water to the fresh water holding tank, turn the water pump on and open all of the water faucets. When clear water is running through the system turn the pump off and close the faucets. Take the water heater out of the by-pass mode (if applicable). If the water heater wasn't bypassed the antifreeze needs to be drained from the water heater tank.
- Next I recommend sanitizing the RV water system.
- With the water system sanitized turn the water pump on to pressurize the system and inspect the plumbing for any water leaks.
- Check the operation of the toilet.
- Remove any protective covering that were put over exterior vents to keep insects or rodents out.
- Check any mousetraps you put in the RV. Open all the doors, drawers and compartments and check for rodent intrusion.

- Inspect the interior and exterior and all seams and sealants for any signs of water damage. **Caution:** When working on the RV roof be extremely careful. A fall can result in serious injury or death. Every seam on your RV and anywhere the RV manufacturer cut a hole in your RV has the potential to leak. It's important you take your time and thoroughly inspect all of these seams and sealants on the RV. I recommend inspecting and resealing the seams and sealants on the RV at least twice a year and possibly more often, depending on storage conditions. Inspecting the seams and sealants as part of your spring checks will help identify any damage that occurred during winter storage, and help prepare the RV for this year's camping season. During your inspection of the RV roof seams and sealants look for signs of cracking or lifted sealants. It's important you consult your RV owner's manual, or your local RV dealer for sealants compatible with the different types of materials you are attempting to seal.
- Inspect the operation of the awning and inspect the awning fabric. Clean the awning if necessary and let the fabric dry thoroughly before stowing.
- Inspect the tires for signs of wear and any cracking in the sidewalls. If there are cracks in the tire sidewalls have the tires inspected by a professional prior to using the RV. Tires lose a percentage of air pressure sitting in storage. Your RV tires can lose 2-3 psi a month, this means they could be dangerously low on air pressure. Check the tire pressure in all tires with a good tire inflation gauge and adjust the inflation pressure to the manufacturer's recommendation based on the load. Don't forget the spare tire! Remember, failing to maintain correct tire pressure based on the load can result in fast tread wear, uneven wear, poor handling, and excessive heat build-up which can lead to tire failure. Tire manufacturers publish load and inflation tables that should be followed for proper inflation pressure.
- Lubricate all hinges and locks with a spray lubricant. Use a dry graphite type lubricant that does not attract dust and dirt.
- Inspect and clean the RV's interior.
- Plug any appliances in that you unplugged for storage.
- Test the operation of the carbon monoxide detector, LP gas leak detector and smoke alarm. When your RV sits in storage it's quite common for dry cell batteries in safety devices to die. Replace the batteries in all safety devices and test the operation of the carbon monoxide detector, the LP gas leak detector and the smoke alarm. Lots of RV owners are not aware that safety devices in RVs have expiration dates. I recommend you write the expiration date on the front cover so you remember to replace it when it reaches the expiration date. Inspect all fire extinguishers to make sure they are fully charged. If you have a dry chemical fire extinguisher turn it upside down and tap

the bottom several times to release any powder that settled to the bottom. Review how to properly use a fire extinguisher in the event you need to use it.

- Reset any breakers that were turned off. If you removed any fuses for storage re-install them now.
- Clean or replace air conditioner filters if it wasn't done prior to storage and remove any covers that were put over the rooftop air conditioners.
- Open vents and windows and air the unit out.
- Inspect the RV batteries. The condition of your batteries depends on how well they were cared for when they were in storage. If the battery was removed for storage reinstall the battery and make sure it is connected properly. Clean the terminals and clamps. A battery in storage can lose up to 10% of its charge every month. If you checked and re-charged the battery periodically during storage the battery should be ready to go. If you did not check the battery while in storage check the state-of-charge now and re-charge as required. **Note:** Water should only be added to lead acid batteries after fully charging the battery, unless the water level is already below the plates. The plates need to be covered at all times. After the battery is fully charged check and add distilled water as required. If you are not comfortable working on or around batteries have the battery maintenance done by a qualified service facility.
- Check the operation of the steps. Lubricate the step hinge points.
- Test the operation of the hydraulic jacks if applicable. Check hydraulic fluid level.
- If your RV has a generator and you didn't change the oil and filters prior to storage this is a good time to do it. Inspect the generator exhaust system for damage prior to starting. Start and run the generator for an hour or two with at least a half-rated load on it. Consult the generators owner manual for load ratings. **Caution:** Do not operate a generator in an enclosed space, Carbon monoxide is deadly.
- Turn the generator off and plug the unit into shore power. Turn the refrigerator on in the electric mode. Allow sufficient time for it to cool and check for proper operation.
- Check all 12-volt interior lights and accessories.
- Test the monitor panel for proper operation.
- Check the operation of slide-outs if applicable.
- Check the remaining 120-volt appliances for proper operation.
- Test the Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) for proper operation.
- Turn the refrigerator off, leave the doors open and allow sufficient time for it to get to room temperature so it can be checked in the LP gas mode. **Note:** The LP gas system should have a leak and gas operating pressure test performed by an authorized RV repair facility annually.

- Turn the LP gas valve on at the cylinders or tank and check the operation of all LP gas appliances. Make sure the water heater is full of water before testing the water heater. If an LP gas appliance is not operating properly have it inspected by a RV repair facility.
- If it is a motorized RV and you didn't change the engine oil and filter prior to storage this would be a good time to do it.
- Check all fluid levels in the transmission, power steering, engine coolant, engine oil, windshield washer and brakes. Consult the vehicle owner's manual for proper levels and types of fluids.
- Start the engine and check for proper readings on all gauges.
- Check the condition of the windshield wiper blades and replace if necessary.
- Check the operation of all lights.

This checklist is not all-inclusive, but it's a good start. You can add or delete from the checks on this list and tailor it to your specific needs. Now for the fun part, load your clothes, food, and personal belongings, hit the road and have fun exploring this wonderful country we live in.

RV Quick Facts

What is a recreation vehicle (RV)?

- An RV is a vehicle that combines transportation and temporary living quarters for travel, recreation and camping.
- Two main categories of RVs are *motorhomes* (motorized) and *towables* (towed behind the family car, van or pickup). Type A motorhomes are generally the largest; Type B motorhomes or van campers are the smallest and Type C motorhomes generally fall in between. Types of towable RVs are folding camping trailers, expandable trailers, truck campers, conventional travel trailers and fifth-wheel travel trailers. Sports utility RVs (also sometimes called "toy haulers"), which feature a built-in garage for hauling cycles, ATVs or sports equipment, are available in both motorhomes and towable RVs.
- There's an RV for every taste and budget. Prices for new RVs are typically \$5,000-\$22,000 for folding camping trailers; \$6,000-\$55,000 for truck campers; \$8,000-\$95,000 for conventional travel trailers; \$43,000-\$200,000 for Type C motorhomes and \$60,000-\$500,000 for Type A motorhomes.

What is the RV industry's economic impact?

- There are more than 12,000 RV-related businesses in the U.S. with combined annual revenues of more than \$37.5 billion. The RV industry employs more than a quarter million Americans. Effects of the recession caused significant RV-related job

losses. Since June 2007, RV-related layoffs totaled approximately 280,000 — 55% of the industry's workforce. RV shipments began to improve in the last half of 2009 and RV manufacturers continue to rehire workers to keep pace with demand. Shipments in 2013 were 12% higher than in 2012.

- RVs are made by American companies employing American workers that are located in America. In fact, more than 60% of recreation vehicles are made in Elkhart County, Indiana.

Who is the RV traveler?

- U.S. ownership of RVs has reached record levels, according to a 2011 University of Michigan study commissioned by Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA). Approximately 8.9 million households own an RV.
- Today's typical RV owner is 48 years old, married, with an annual household income of \$62,000 — higher than the median for all households, according to the Michigan study. RV owners are likely to own their homes and spend disposable income on traveling — an average of three weeks annually, RVIA research shows.
- A leading force behind RV ownership's upswing is the enormous baby boomer generation, supported by strong ownership gains among both younger and older buyers. In fact, high RV ownership rates now extend across a 40-year span from age 35-to-75, the Michigan study found.
- More RVs are now owned by those ages 35-to-54 than any other group, according to the University of Michigan study.
- More than 11 percent of U.S. households headed by 35-to-54 year olds own an RV, exceeding the 9.3 percent ownership rates of those 55 and over. The 35-to-54 age group posted the largest gains in the 2011 Michigan survey.

Why do people choose and use RVs?

- **Flexibility and convenience** — RVs offer a convenient, hassle-free way to see America. RV travelers enjoy the freedom and flexibility to go where they want, when they want — without the worry and stress of inflexible schedules, advance reservations, airport waits and luggage restrictions.
- **Comfort** — With fully-equipped kitchens and baths, rooms that slide out at the touch of a button, central air and heat, flat-screen TVs, surround-sound stereos and more, today's RVs provide travelers with all the amenities of home while on the road or at the campground.
- **Family appeal** — RVing is a uniquely enjoyable way to travel as a family. In fact, families that frequently vacation by RV say it fosters an increased sense of togetherness and helps improve family communication. RV owners say that strengthening family relationships is important for their pleasure trips.

- **Affordability** — RV vacations are more affordable than travel by personal car, commercial airline or cruise ship, according to vacation cost-comparison studies by PKF Consulting. Even factoring in RV ownership costs, and considering resulting tax benefits, a family of four can spend up to 59 percent less when traveling by RV.
- **Lure of the outdoors** — RVers can enjoy the mountains, beaches, parks, popular tourist attractions and small towns whenever they want, without giving up the comforts of home. With sport utility RVs, RV travelers can easily haul their ATVs, snowmobiles, motorcycles or other outdoor vehicles right on board.
- **Versatility** — In addition to travel, camping and outdoor recreation, RVs are used year-round for a variety of other purposes, like shopping, tailgating at sporting events, pursuing special interests like horse, dog and antique shows and other hobbies.
- **Rentals available** — Renting an RV is a popular way to “try before you buy.” The RV rental business is a \$350 million industry, which is continuing to grow.

Where do RVers travel?

- With more than 16,000 public and privately owned campgrounds nationwide, RVers are free to roam America’s roads for a weekend — or months at a time.
- Privately owned RV parks and campgrounds are found near popular destinations, along major tourist routes and even in metropolitan areas. These campgrounds appeal to travelers by offering a variety of activities to keep the whole family happy, including swimming pools, game rooms, playgrounds and snack bars.
- RV travelers seeking a resort atmosphere are attracted to the growing number of luxury RV resorts with facilities such as tennis courts, golf courses and health spas.
- Facilities at public campgrounds tend to be simple, but offer great scenic beauty. Public lands are popular for hiking, fishing, white water rafting and many other outdoor recreational opportunities enjoyed by RVers.

What does the future hold for the RV market?

- Changes in the frequency and duration of vacations favor the RV industry. Americans are traveling shorter distances and on weekends with less planning, according to recent studies. For RV owners, this is a convenient travel pattern.
- RV demand remains robust and the potential for future sales is bright, according to a University of Michigan study. Among U.S. households that have never owned an RV, more than one in seven expressed interest in purchasing an RV in the future.
- Both parents and empty-nesters are strong potential RV buyers, and promising future prospects are emerging among younger, ethnically diverse consumers, reveals a Harris Interactive study commissioned by the Go RVing Coalition. Generation Xers exhibit interests in outdoor activities that are highly compatible with RVing, the study found.

- Ownership and demographic trends favor substantial RV market growth, according to the University of Michigan. Baby boomers are entering an age range — 55 to 64 — with high RV ownership rates historically, according to the Michigan study.
- RV manufacturers are innovating to give consumers an array of product choices. Manufacturers are producing lightweight towables and smaller, fuel-efficient motorhomes. Green technologies such as solar panels are appearing on an increasing number of RVs.

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Debunking Trailer Myths and Half Truths for Horse Trailers

By Neva Kittrell Scheve

People talk and horse people talk more than most. Opinions are many and stories travel quickly throughout the horse world, sometimes opinions get elevated to truth without merit. Since most opinions have some basis in fact, it's difficult to know what is myth and what is truth. Usually the facts are somewhere in between. Opinions about horse trailers are especially subject to scrutiny because there is very little conclusive research or solid information. For someone who is looking to buy a horse trailer, it's important to know the facts. Let's look at a few of the most commonly believed myths.

Horses haul better in slant loads than straight loads

What is the basis for this half-truth? In the early 1980's the first slant load trailers came on the market. The original purpose of the slant load trailer was to put more horses into a shorter trailer. Hauling 4, 6, or more horses in a straight load trailer necessitates a very long

trailer that many people don't want. In addition, the fact that horses will position themselves in a slant position when there are no dividers in the trailer caused people to believe that horses preferred to stand that way because it was more comfortable when the trailer was moving. When the first slant load owners realized that the horses loaded readily into the trailer it was assumed they were also hauling better and this well intentioned, but somewhat misleading concept was readily accepted. The story developed a life of its own. Soon, the slant load trailer was considered the "only way to go".

It sounds reasonable, doesn't it? Maybe, but there are many other factors that should be considered before slant loads can be recommended for every horse.

The first horses to be hauled in slant loads were quarter horses and polo ponies, smaller horses that could cope with the shorter stall length. Slant loads quickly became the fashion in this market and soon, owners of large horses wanted them, too. But it soon became apparent that these horses didn't fit very well. A horse that is cramped in a stall is not able to use its head and neck normally to keep its balance in the trailer. If he is hauled in the trailer this way for long periods, he overcompensates and uses improper muscles to cope.

Because it is illegal for a trailer to be over 8 ½' wide, the stalls cannot be made longer without making some design changes for larger horses. Many manufacturers widen the overall interior, but then the wheel wells are inside the trailer where they interfere with 3 or 4 of the stalls. Other manufacturers configure more of a slant to the stalls, but the severe angles don't really give the horses more room. The only solution is to widen the stalls, which allows the horses to stand in a more forward position. However, widening the stalls defeats the original intent of the slant load trailer because it makes it longer.

Do horses really like to haul on a slant? In my opinion, there are no studies that prove this fact at this time. Common sense suggests otherwise.

The most common argument for the slant is the fact is that a horse will stand on a slant in an open trailer. As an experiment, put a horse in a stall in the barn, stand him against the wall and tie him comfortably with a lead rope. He will immediately move his hindquarters away from the wall. Since the barn stall is not moving, he isn't standing that way to find a "center of balance"; he just doesn't feel comfortable standing next to the wall. Horses like to feel space around them. He also probably wants to look out the stall door or window. In addition, most horses that stand away from the wall in an open trailer don't position themselves on a complete slant with the butt against the opposite wall like a slant load divider demands.

A horse generally feels better in the open trailer because he isn't as restricted when he has more room - not necessarily because he is standing at a slant. A smaller horse in a traditional slant load is able to move around a bit to use his head and neck for balance, and he can also adjust his position somewhat to relieve tired muscles and joints. A horse that fits more

tightly doesn't have that option.

When slant load trailers first came on the market, most other horse trailers at the time were small, dark, and inadequately ventilated. Since horses don't like dark small spaces, the entrance of a large slant load trailer was much less frightening than what everyone had been used to. Most horses popped into the trailer easily. But loading better doesn't always mean hauling better. Rubber torsion suspension also came onto the market at the same time as the slant load trailer. My opinion is that any improvement of attitude about hauling was a result of a smoother ride, not the slant position.

Horses naturally propel themselves forward using both hind legs, and halt by bringing those hind legs up underneath them. All riding disciplines require that horses halt straight with hind legs well under them because that is the correct and natural way for a horse to halt. A horse moves straight when moving forward. Dressage riders do not ask the horse to begin a dressage test by halting at X, slanted to the left. Western riders do not ask their reining horses for sliding stops slanted to the left.

Why ask a horse to absorb the force of acceleration and deceleration in a trailer in a slanted position where he must use the right foreleg and the left hind leg in an uneven manner? Traveling for long distances in this position can make a horse sore. Sometimes stiffness or soreness that may cause behavioral problems, and outright lameness that is not often attributed to the trailer ride, can be caused by it just the same. Hauling in a straight position, either forward or backwards, helps the horse equally absorb the acceleration and deceleration through the length of the spinal column. (Never put horse backward in a trailer that is not designed for it.)

(For smoother ride and less stress on the horses check out a [Gooseneck Air Hitch](#) or a [Receiver Air Hitch](#))

True. However, most manufacturers who build "hybrid" trailers of steel and aluminum together understand how to keep the metals from touching each other by using Mylar tape or a protective coating. Even "all-aluminum" trailers must have steel transition parts where the couplers and axles are attached to the frame because aluminum is not strong enough to hold these important parts onto the trailer. So, in reality, there is no such thing as an "all-aluminum" trailer.

Goosenecks are safer than tag-a-long trailers

Yes and No. Problems generally attributed to tag-a-long trailers are trailer sway and instability, and a higher incidence of trailers coming unhitched. There are more ways to make a mistake when hitching to a tag-a-long than hitching up a gooseneck. It's obvious that a pick up truck is needed to haul a gooseneck and not a lot can go wrong when placing the gooseneck ball in the bed by a qualified installer. However, hitching a tag-a-long can be done

in many ways and there are more ways to make a mistake. A tag-a-long trailer must be hitched with a frame mounted equalizing hitch that is rated to tow the weight of the trailer fully loaded. I always recommend weight distribution bars especially for vehicles with a shorter wheelbase or to increase the capacity of the hitch. A properly hitched two-horse trailer, even with a dressing room, towed by an adequate vehicle, can be just as safe and stable as a gooseneck. For more than two horses, a gooseneck is recommended.

Rear Ramps are slippery, steep, and heavy, and a step up rear entry is better.

There are many bad ramps out there. So many, in fact, that it's quite reasonable for people to assume that all ramps are equal. If the ramp is unsteady or steep and slippery, most horses will be reluctant to load and it's quite possible for a horse to slip when unloading. A ramp can be too heavy for many people to lift without back strain. However, a good ramp is safer than a step up entry. It isn't so much for the loading, but for the unloading. A low, steady, non-skid ramp prevents a horse from slipping under the trailer by miscalculating the landing surface or height of the step when backing out. If a horse slips under a ramp, the ramp can be lifted to get him out and the chance of severe injury is less than if he gets under the trailer itself. Slipping under a step up trailer is more common than most people believe, and such an accident can be severe enough to result in the loss of the horse. A step up can be made safer if the horse can turn around and walk out head first, or if the trailer is equipped with a front unload ramp. Most newer ramps are spring loaded and are very easy to lift.

10 Towing Tips

BY JOHN FULLER

Moving heavy, bulky loads down the road, whether it's a camper, a boat trailer or anything else that attaches to the back of a tow vehicle, can be a tricky process. Driving an automobile with another set of wheels hitched up behind it is a lot different than driving an automobile by itself, so there are several issues you have to keep in mind while towing. Small overlooked details will make the ride bumpy and uncomfortable and potentially shift or damage any load you're towing; bigger, more important issues can result in serious situations like jackknifing or flipping, incidents that cause accidents and harm to you and other drivers on the road.

Although it may look like an elaborate setup, there are several easy steps to take to ensure a safe and secure towing trip. Some involve making quick, regular checkups on equipment, while others involve simply being aware of your vehicle's specific towing capabilities. How

much weight can your car or truck tow, anyway? Is there any extra gear you need to buy before heading out? How should you adjust your driving technique in order to make the drive safer?

Know Your Towing Capacity

Before you start hauling an endless amount of cargo into a trailer or hitch up an 18-foot-long boat, it's best to know the **towing capacity** of your car, truck, SUV or recreational vehicle. Towing too much weight can cause a myriad of problems, no matter how big and powerful your engine is. The first thing to do is refer to the owner's manual of your vehicle, which should give you specific numbers regarding how much weight you can tow.

There are also a few definitions you should keep in mind:

Base curb weight - this is, in simplest terms, the actual weight of your entire vehicle, including all fluids (i.e. a full tank of gas, engine oil, coolant, transmission fluid and others) and any additional equipment.

Cargo weight - cargo weight includes the weight of the passengers, cargo and any optional equipment (i.e. a sunroof).

Allowable Payload - this is the maximum amount of weight, including cargo and passengers, a vehicle can carry.

Knowing how much weight your vehicle can tow will keep your ride safe and help you better prepare for loading. Once you know how much cargo you can carry, though, exactly how you place that cargo is another problem.

Proper Weight Distribution

If you've ever had to move yourself to a different house or apartment, you've probably had to deal with moving all of your stuff, packing things away into a moving truck. Most likely you moved the larger objects like furniture and the television first, maybe tying them down with rope to keep them in place. Next you brought in the smaller objects like boxes, placing them around the bigger objects. You also probably didn't construct tall columns out of your belongings, knowing the slightest turn could send everything toppling.

These same issues need to be taken into consideration when towing, since it's nearly the same thing as moving heavy objects in a moving truck. Keeping aware of the proper weight distribution is a simple way to make a towing job much smoother and safer.

It's always best to begin loading the heaviest cargo first, tying it down with rope or bungee cords so it doesn't shift while the vehicle is in motion. Smaller cargo should follow and fill the spaces in between. The cargo's center of gravity should be low, and about 60 percent of its weight should be toward the front. You should also balance the sides of the trailer in order to reduce the chance of it flipping.

Once you have everything in its right place, the next step involves being able to see behind you.

Check Your Mirrors

If you've ever driven a larger truck or any vehicle without a rear-view mirror, you might understand the importance of proper side-view mirrors. Without the ability to see the cars behind you by simply looking up, switching lanes becomes a much more dangerous maneuver.

Side-view mirrors typically come in two types: Regular side-view and extended side-view. Regular side-view mirrors are much like the ones you can find on in any car or truck -- they help you see traffic in the lanes directly next to yours. Extended side-view mirrors, on the other hand, let drivers see both rear- and side-approaching traffic. They're usually bigger and taller than regular side-view mirrors, and they're necessary if your tow vehicle is pulling a trailer that completely blocks your rear-view sight.

Need to see the light?

Light Your Way

When you're driving at night, it's a given that you need to have all your lights in working order. A busted headlight or a brake light can put other drivers or pedestrians at risk, and if the police take notice, they can pull you over and write you a ticket.

Not only is it doubly important to have working lights when you're towing; you also need to double your lights. Laws in many states require that a towed vehicle, whether it's a car trailer, a boat trailer or a camper, must have operable lights, including brake lights, tail lights and turn signals. All of these lights also need to synch up with the vehicle you're driving, so that the moment you step on the brakes, both sets of brake lights illuminate at exactly the same moment.

Your brake lights won't do you much good if your tires aren't roadworthy.

Routine Tire Maintenance

Checking your tires is a smart thing to do in any situation. Like other automotive components, tires wear down and need continual maintenance and replacement. Ignoring tires is especially dangerous since a flat can either leave you stranded or cause an accident.

It's just as important, if not more so, to closely monitor your tires when towing -- aside from worrying about the tow vehicle itself, you also have to keep in mind the extra sets of wheels belonging to the towed vehicle. You should keep the tires properly inflated, following the manufacturer's guidelines. Tires that are over or underinflated will create trailer sway, so make sure you add the right amount of air pressure. It's also a good idea to check your lug nuts to make sure they're secure.

Proper tire inflation will help you stop safely when you apply the brakes, which brings us to our next towing tip.

Synchronize Your Brakes

Just as the lighting systems on both the tow vehicle and the trailer need to operate simultaneously, so do the braking systems. First off, most state laws require that towed vehicles need to have separate braking systems. This prevents the tow vehicle from having to do all the work when it's time to put on the brakes.

Of course, it's also good to make sure that the brakes are working properly. Poorly functioning brakes could spell disaster on the road, and if they ever failed, the added weight from the cargo would only make a collision that much more dangerous. Give yourself plenty of extra room for braking. Avoiding heavy braking will reduce most wear and tear -- applying your foot gently to the brake is the best method.

Another way to cut the risk of an accident is to watch your speed.

Slow Down!

Sometimes we all feel the need for speed. Pressing our foot down on the gas pedal and feeling the car accelerate can give us a natural rush. Those of us who've ridden in fast, powerful sports cars probably remember the feeling. When it comes to towing, however, excess speed is the last thing you need to feel.

With the added weight and length of a towed vehicle, the faster you travel, the more dangerous things will get. Increasing your speed will increase the amount of trailer sway behind you and make it much harder to stop quickly without the risk of fishtailing or even

flipping. Speed also makes it more difficult to maneuver in traffic. Staying cautious and aware is the best way to ensure a safe trip while towing -- so, slow down!

The hitch is one of the most important elements in towing, and choosing the right one matters.

Choose the Right Hitch

Some tow vehicles come with factory-mounted hitches, but for all the others that give the driver the option to choose, finding the right hitch is a very important step to take.

There are basically two types of hitches: **Weight-carrying hitches** and **weight-distributing hitches**. Weight-carrying hitches are recommended for trips when the combined weight of the trailer and cargo is 3,500 pounds (1,588 kilograms) or less. Weight-distributing hitches, on the other hand, are recommended for heavier loads. When there's too much weight in a trailer, the **tongue weight** -- the downward pressure that the tongue exerts on the hitch ball -- can get too high. This causes the tow vehicle and trailer to sag, which can make the whole setup look like a very wide V. A weight-distributing hitch redistributes the tongue weight to the axles of the tow vehicle and trailer, which keeps both vehicles level, or parallel to the ground.

Everything on the outside of your tow vehicle is important, but the insides are equally so.

Stay Cool

By adding more weight to your vehicle when towing, you're making its drivetrain do a lot of extra work. Extra weight leads to extra heat under the hood, which can add strain to your transmission and wear it out too quickly.

Adding a transmission cooler, especially if your tow vehicle is an automatic, will significantly reduce the temperature of the oil circulating through your vehicle's transmission. Also, simply adding a higher-capacity radiator or installing an additional cooling fan will help save you money in the long run on expensive repairs to worn-out systems.

What's one of the best tips to consider before heading out on a towing trip? As the old saying goes, practice makes perfect.

Practice Makes Perfect

Before heading out onto the road and surrounding yourself with angry drivers and tractor-trailer trucks, the best thing you can do to ensure a safe towing trip is to practice driving.

Choose an area that's far away from traffic, like an empty parking lot, and perform simple driving tasks with everything hitched up. Try backing up and using your mirrors, and pay close attention to the vehicle's turning radius. Learn to accelerate and brake slowly on longer stretches of road -- remember, the more weight you're carrying, the longer it's going to take to slow down.

Once you have the perfect tow vehicle and all the right equipment, sticking to these few simple tips can turn a bumpy ride into an easygoing one.

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