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Newsletter

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Trailer Safety Checklist and Tips You Need to Know

Hauling trailers can be dangerous, but for many people in the trades it is a daily necessity. Get a trailer safety checklist and tips here.

Create a Pre-Trip Checklist You owe it to the other drivers you will be sharing the road with to make sure your trailer is road-worthy every time you take it out. Check the following items before taking to the streets:

- The ball and the coupler are compatible sizes.
- Chains, wiring harness and breakaway cable are all connected.
- Ball mount pin is in place.
- Locking lever is down and pin installed.
- Ball is fastened securely to the ball mount.
- Tongue jack is raised.
- Tires are properly inflated and lug nuts are tight.
- Lights are all working.
- Ramps and/or gates are in place and secure.
- Load is fastened and secure.
- Brakes are working.

Grease the Bearings Over time, bearing grease breaks down and loses its ability to lubricate and dissipate heat. Many manufacturers recommend **repacking wheel bearings in grease** every year or 10,000 miles, whichever comes first. Under-maintained bearings can overheat, eventually causing them to seize, start on fire, or separate completely so the wheel falls off while you are driving.

Bearing caps with a built-in grease fitting seem convenient but can be a bad idea. Adding grease through the cap can permanently damage the rear seal. Plus, this method fills the axle/spindle area, which should remain dry, with grease. Removing the old grease and cleaning the bearing are vital components of repacking bearings, and both are often neglected when people rely on these caps.

Always Pin the Coupler If poor bearing maintenance is the most common cause of trailer breakdowns, the second most common cause is the trailer's coupler coming loose from the ball mount. Make sure that you are not hooking up a trailer to an undersize ball.

A loose locking lever is another common cause of losing a trailer. As the trailer bounces down the road, the locking lever can wriggle up into the unlocked position. A pin will keep that from happening. Wire lock pins like the one shown here **costs just a few dollars online**, so there's no excuse for not using one.

A Trailer Should Ride Level When Loaded Trailers are designed to ride level. A trailer that is out of level just will not pull as smoothly or as safely. Also, hauling a tandem axle trailer unevenly will cause more wear and tear on one set of tires and suspension than on the other.

The “drop” of the ball mount determines how high or low the tongue of the trailer will ride. Here’s a good way to estimate the amount of drop your ball mount needs:

1. Measure up from level ground to the top of the receiver
2. Measure up from the ground to the bottom of the coupler on the trailer
3. Subtract the first measurement from the second.

But that will only get you close. The problem with this method is that it doesn’t take into account the tongue weight of your particular trailer, or the stiffness of your truck’s rear suspension. The only true way to get your trailer to ride level is to hook it up to your truck, fully loaded and using a ball mount you think has the proper drop. **If the trailer is level**, great; if not, adjust accordingly.

Inspect Your Coupler The friction from the coupler pressing down and twisting on the ball will wear down the coupler, causing the metal to thin out over time. Inspect the coupler periodically and if you find even one hairline crack, replace it immediately. Some couplers are bolted on, but some need to be cut off and the new one welded on. Greasing the ball might reduce the wear a little bit, but it’s not worth the mess. If you’re shopping for a trailer and you know you’re going to put tons of miles on it, buy one with a cast tongue rather than stamped metal; they are thicker and last longer.

Cross the Safety Chains Crossing **safety chains** creates a cradle that the coupler can fall into, and it will reduce the distance the trailer will swing side to side if it uncouples. Crossing chains also keeps them up a little.

Test Your Emergency Brake Most states require electric brakes on large trailers, and many require a backup emergency braking system that activates if the trailer is separated from the tow vehicle. The most common type of emergency braking system consists of a cable attached to a key, which fits into a breakaway switch that’s powered by a dedicated battery. The other end of the cable is attached to the truck. In case of separation, the key would be pulled out of the breakaway switch, which would send an electric charge, provided by the battery, to activate the brakes.

Checking the emergency brake system is simple enough. Hook up the trailer, pull the key from the switch, and pull the trailer forward. The wheels shouldn’t roll if the system is working properly. If the brakes don’t engage, you could have a bad switch or faulty wiring, but a dead battery is the usual culprit. Breakaway batteries receive a charge every time you hook up your wiring harness, but they should still be replaced every couple of years.

Use the Proper Size Ball Mount Not all ball mounts are created equal. Make sure the ball mount you’re using can handle the weight of your trailer and its load. Exact specs can vary, but here are some common ones:

- 1-1/4 x 1-1/4-inch solid steel—1,000 to 3,500 pounds.
- 2 x 2-inches tube steel—up to 7,000 pounds.
- 2 x 2-inches solid steel—up to 16,000 pounds.

Only Use Trailer Tires Installing car or truck tires on a trailer is a bad idea. Trailer tires (ST for “Special Trailer”) and light truck tires (LT) or other passenger vehicle tires are not built the same. The sidewalls on truck tires have more flex, which improves traction and makes for a more comfortable ride. The sidewalls on trailer tires are stiffer. Stiffer sidewalls increase the amount of weight a tire can handle and reduce the risk that a trailer will sway.

Keep a Good Jack on Hand Storing a spare trailer tire on board is a no-brainer, but what about the jack? Some trucks have jacks that may not be able to handle a loaded trailer, or they may have a strange configuration that might not work safely on a trailer. Try out your truck jack on your trailer; if it doesn’t work, buy a dedicated trailer jack.

Use the Proper Size Ball Shank The proper size of the ball is not the only thing to consider when buying a ball for your trailer; the size of the ball shank is crucial. The size of the shank

determines how much weight the ball can handle. Shank capacities vary, but here are some common specs:

- 3/4-inch shank—up to 3,500 pounds.
- 1-inch shank—up to 7,500 pounds.
- 1-1/4-inch shank—more than 7,500 pounds.

Double-Check the Load Tongue weight is the force that the tongue of the trailer exerts on the back of the truck. Proper tongue weight should be 10 to 15 percent of the combined weight of the trailer and its load. So a 2,000-pound trailer with a 3,000-pound load should have a tongue weight of 500 to 750 pounds. The proper way to load a trailer is to keep the bulk of the load over the trailer tires, with a little more weight toward the front.

Too much tongue weight is hard on the truck's suspension and takes weight off the front tires. This makes the truck unwieldy on curves and reduces stopping distance. Too little tongue weight will cause the trailer to sway back and forth and possibly fishtail out of control. Unless you have a super-fancy ball mount that has a built-in scale, you'll have to judge the tongue weight by how much the back of your truck drops down when the trailer is attached. The next time you have a few buddies over, have them climb onto the bumper of your truck. Measure and take note of how much the rear of the truck drops with the added weight.

Even loads that have been properly secured with the appropriate chains or straps can come loose after getting jostled on a bouncy trailer. It's a good idea to stop after driving a short distance to inspect the load to make sure it's still secure. And then every time you make a stop, for gas or whatever, check it again. You can't be too careful.

Horse Trailer Myth – Asking The Experts Gooseneck Vs. Tag-Along Interview

BY USRIDER WITH TOM SCHEVE

USR: Tom and his wife, Neva Scheve, have been advocating horse trailer safety since 1984. Both have written numerous articles for Dressage Today, Horse Illustrated, Equus, Horse and Rider, Trail Blazer, Southeast Horse Journal, and have been safety clinics around the country. Neva has written three books on horse trailers including "The Complete Guide to Buying, Maintaining, and Servicing a Horse Trailers."

We asked Tom some questions about the differences and advantages of different styles of trailers.

USR: Is a gooseneck horse trailer safer than a bumper pull trailer?

Tom: We prefer to call them "tag-along" trailers rather than "bumper pulls". It's just semantics, but the idea is that you should never hook a horse trailer to the actual bumper of a tow vehicle. So, the term "bumper pull" makes people believe it's OK to use a ball installed on the bumper, but it's important to always use a frame mounted hitch, usually with a weight distribution system. That being said, we use the term "bumper pull" on our website since it is the "common term."

USR: Good point. So, is a gooseneck safer than a tag-along trailer?

Tom: Great Question. It's a common misconception that gooseneck trailers are always safer, and that myth needs to be dispelled. But it gets tricky.

USR: How so?

Tom: Well, first of all, I always recommend a gooseneck trailer for 3 or more horses, whether it's a slant or a straight load. But for a two-horse trailer, a tag-along (bumper pull) can be just as safe, and tow just as well if hitched up with the right equipment. The tricky part is the word "safer." There are so many variables with towing that just calling the trailer itself "safer" doesn't take in all the other parts, such as using the proper tow vehicle with the proper hitch. And, of course, the operator's driving expertise is also a factor.

USR: Okay. I get it. So why would one choose a tag-along trailer over a gooseneck?

Tom: The benefits of a tag-along, or bumper pull, over a gooseneck is that it's cheaper, shorter, tracks closer to the path of the tow vehicle when turning, can be pulled with a properly rated SUV or a truck, and it's lighter so you don't need such a big tow vehicle. If you don't have a lot of storage space for the trailer, it doesn't take up as much room in the yard. Unless the gooseneck area is needed for sleeping or storage, it doesn't make sense to spend the extra money, unless one just prefers to have a gooseneck because they like it better.

USR: And the gooseneck?

Tom: Well, if you want a place to sleep or extra room for tack, the gooseneck area gives you plenty of extra room. If you want living quarters a gooseneck is usually mandatory. Also, it's easier to pick the right tow vehicle and hitch because it's obvious a full-sized truck is needed and the hitch only installs in the bed.

One of the reasons people believe a tag-along (bumper pull) trailer is not as stable is because it's so easy to make a mistake when putting the tow vehicle/hitch combination together. And we often see people tow with some scary combinations. For instance, as I mentioned earlier, by towing directly on the bumper, the trailer would be susceptible to sway and other problems. There are also so many tow vehicles to choose from, it's easy to choose a less capable tow vehicle.

USR: Which is easier to hook up?

Tom: Now remember, we're talking about a two-horse gooseneck vs. a two-horse tag-along. The tag-along tongue weight is lighter maybe by 1,000 lbs. or more, so if the jack is in good working order it can be easier to jack up and down. And you don't have to crawl up into the truck bed as you do for a gooseneck to fasten the safety chains, or in some cases, secure the coupler onto the ball.

USR: How about backing up to line up the coupler and ball?

Tom: Both are tricky but can be mastered with practice. If you don't have a built-in tool chest in your truck you can see the ball from the cab when lining up. Because you can't see the coupler or ball on a tag-along, you might need someone to guide you or do a "hit and miss." With experience, it's possible to hitch a tag-along alone with no problems. There are, however some innovative devices on the market that can help, and some tricks I've learned that can help with either style trailer that don't cost anything.

USR: I'm sure our readers would like to know the tricks. Are they secret?

Tom: Not at all. With a gooseneck, the trick is to put your tailgate down, of course, and then place a small stone or piece of tape at the tip of the rear of the tailgate where you can see it from the driver's seat. This stone or tape should be placed directly in line with the ball in the truck. Then, you back straight under the trailer, making sure that the coupler goes right over the stone. If you are driving in a straight line, the coupler should then end up right over the ball.

USR: And for the tag-along?

Tom: With the trailer hitched up to the vehicle, take a piece of visible tape and put it up high on the nose of the trailer directly up from the coupler so you can see it from the driver's seat. If you have a truck or tail gate on your SUV, put another piece on the end of the tailgate to line up with the tape of the trailer. When you next hitch up, just align the two pieces of tape again.

USR: What about length? Do some like to pull the tag-along because it's not as long or big?

Tom: Actually, a two-horse tag-along with a dressing room is an average of 17 ½ feet including the tongue. So, you are pulling 17 ½ feet behind your truck. An average length for a gooseneck with dressing room is 21 ½ feet, but the gooseneck area, which is usually around 7 ½ feet, is over the truck. So, you really only have about 14 feet, give or take, that you're pulling behind your truck. So, the gooseneck can be a bit shorter. Of course, a tag-along without a dressing room is really the shortest option.

USR: Which do you think would fare best in an accident?

Tom: There are a lot of opinions on this, but I'd say it would depend on the type of accident.

USR: How so?

Tom: If it's a major accident, let's say a head on collision, there's a chance the gooseneck could pop off the ball, and if the safety chains break, the trailer is heading straight for the cab where you are sitting. By the way, this is why you always want to use safety chains.

In a minor accident, where you might have to do a severe swerve to avoid hitting something,

the heavier gooseneck would be a bit more stable than being hitched behind the vehicle like a bumper pull. That's why it's important to have the proper hitch. A weight distribution system on a bumper pull adds quite a bit to the safety factor.

So, a lot of it depends on the circumstances and the quality of the trailer. I think either type of trailer should be strong enough to hold up as well as possible in an accident. There are no requirements for trailer strength, and no crash testing is done, so we only have to go on the information we get from examining accidents after they happen to see which type of construction holds up better. In my many years of experience, steel and steel framed trailers hold up much better in accidents.

USR: Any other insight you might want to add about gooseneck vs. tag-along?

Tom: The best choice is a trailer that makes one feel comfortable. Over the years, many of my customers like to see the horses in the trailer while they are traveling. So, a tag-along with big windows gives them that ability which results in a feeling of comfort. Others just like the feeling of a gooseneck because they feel safer or more secure. In that case, a gooseneck is the best choice. The point I've tried to make today is that, for a two-horse trailer, one doesn't need to buy a gooseneck trailer "just because."

RV Full-Time Living

Living in an RV Full Time in a RV Park There are RV retirement Communities that cater to people who own an RV and want to settle down in an RV park. You can stay in the park monthly or yearly and the park offers activities and normally a pool, fitness area, club house, golf course and other facilities. There has also been a surge in RV communities that provide small homes next to a large RV garage. This way you get to park your RV but have a small home to live in. Normally these communities have a pool, golf course, club house and daily get together for the residents. Depending where you choose a long term RV park the costs range from \$300 a month to \$800 a month, with the more high end parks costing more. These types of communities differ from your traditional RV park as they cater more to the residents of the park as a community and they market themselves as being RV park retirement communities rather than just an RV park where people come and go daily.

Living in an RV Full Time Cost Depending on your lifestyle living in an RV can be much cheaper than living in a residence. You do not have many of the costs that are associated with a home. No mortgage to pay, often no high electricity and utilities fees, no home owners association fees, no yearly property taxes and none of the costs to maintain a home. The costs for living in an RV full time will vary based on how much you travel and which RV parks you choose to stay in. Daily RV park costs can really add up especially if you are staying in RV parks charging \$45 to \$60.00 a night. This is where your choice of size of RV can really make a difference. If you have an RV that can fit into State Parks, they are much cheaper than private RV parks. Most State Parks limit the time you can stay in the park to 14 days but there are a lot of State Parks to choose from. If you are going to full time in an RV it is better if you are able to purchase an RV outright and not have the monthly overhead of an RV payment. This normally means that you do a lot of research and find a good used 5th wheel or motorhome that you can afford to purchase. Your main costs associated with living on the road are going to be gas, your RV and tow vehicle insurance, food, RV site payments, medical insurance and any miscellaneous costs for the upkeep of the tow vehicle and the 5th wheel RV. When living in an RV full time is a very good idea to have some reserve funds available just in case there is an unexpected mishap that you will need money for. A breakdown on the road can mean hotel stays while the tow vehicle or Motorhome is repaired and there is always something that can break on an RV that will cause you to suddenly need some cash to fix.

If you are traveling fairly extensively a conservative estimate of \$2000 to \$3,000 a month is what the average full time RVer will pay to live on the road over a month. This can be reduced if you limit eating out, which is very costly, and choose your RV parks carefully. There are full time RVers who pay less than this but they tend not to travel as much and will try and stay on public lands that are free. There are clubs and memberships whereby you can get reduced RV Park rates but these need to be chosen carefully as not all memberships are honored by RV parks. There are also State Park passes where you buy a pass for a year and then you get free or reduced fees on camping in State Parks and you do not have to pay to enter the State Park. These State Park passes are gold and can really save you a lot of money in camping fees. If you are over a certain age like 65, you also get reduced rates in State Parks. Many State Parks will not have full hookups so it is very beneficial to have solar installed in your 5th wheel RV or to always carry a good dependable generator with you.

Living in an RV Year Round One of the benefits of living in an RV year round is that you can take advantage of the different States weather. When it is cold you can move to a warmer climate and when it is hot you can move to a cooler climate. Unlike a house if there is bad weather moving in it is easy to hitch up and move out of the way. Hurricanes and other bad weather are easier to deal with when you have a house on wheels. There are 5th wheel RVs that are made to be all season RVs, meaning they have been manufactured to be able to accommodate both hot and cold climates.

Full Time Living Tips Some of the tips provided by full time RVers are the following. When you do go full time, try and get on the road with the least amount of debt possible. To fully enjoy the lifestyle you do not want to be worried with debts that you might not be able to pay once you are on the road full time.

Choose the correct RV for you and the family. Make sure it is not too big but that it is comfortable to live in. One of the biggest mistakes people make is choosing the wrong RV to live full time on the road. If you do make the wrong choice you can correct it but it does cause you some problems to get rid of one RV and then buy another one. It is better to buy an RV when you have plenty of time to make the decision and a place to stay, like your home before you move into the RV.

Make sure that you have actually RVed before hitting the road full time. Moving into an RV and living full time on the road is a life changing event and it is not for everyone. Some people do well on the road all the time and some people prefer a community, a home and not moving around. Many new full timers say it takes a while to get used to waking up in different places all the time.

One of the biggest challenges that can arise with full time living is that you and your spouse are in a confined space for long periods of time. It is essential that you enjoy each others company otherwise problems will arise. If you are traveling with kids make sure you understand what will be involved with living in an RV. Home schooling, rainy days where the kids cannot get outside and a small living area can get stressful.

Make sure to build an exit strategy into your full time living plans. If you find out that you don't enjoy full timing you need a way to exit the lifestyle. Once you have sold your house and all of your belongings and moved into an RV it can be hard to find an exit if you never thought to plan ahead.

Living in an RV on Your Own Land Having your own piece of land can be very beneficial for full timing in an RV. Because you already have a home that is mobile you are able to purchase a piece of cheap land that allows RVs to be parked on the land and does not require a residence to be built on the land. Finding land that is zoned for an RV can be a challenge but there are states that do allow RVs to be used as the main residence. Most states like New Mexico and Arizona offer zoning like this. It is much more difficult to find land in the Eastern United States that allows an RV to be the main residence on the land.

Having your own land means that when you are not traveling you have a place where you can park and live in your RV and not have any monthly fees that you have to pay. This can reduce your monthly costs considerably. RVers have been able to purchase land very cheaply and there is land for sale from \$4000 upwards. The land is cheaper because it is normally remote and there are no utilities on the land. Since an RV can be self contained with solar installed, there might not be any need to have electricity on the land, which is another large cost saving. One thing you will probably need on a piece of land you purchase is a water supply. There are RV owners who use water harvesting to get a supply of water and that can be beneficial if drilling for water is not an option. Water harvesting means that rain water is accumulated and stored for later use. If you do a search on water harvesting you will find information on how people go about storing water on remote land. You will also need to check if the county where the land is located actually allows water harvesting, which sounds ridiculous but there are in fact counties that prohibit water harvesting. One of the other benefits of having a piece of land is that you will then have a physical address to use for things like getting a drivers licence in that state. If you are a full time RVer you still need to get a physical address as without one you cannot get a drivers license and you cannot be a resident of any State. If you don't have a physical address it is also very difficult to get any type of insurance for your RV and tow vehicle.

Full Time RV Jobs There are full time RV jobs to be had while on the road but these jobs do not always pay very well and some do not pay anything. Below are some of the jobs that you

can find while living in an RV. Most Full Time Rvers use jobs like the ones below to get an infusion of cash to keep on traveling and do not work these jobs constantly.

Workcamping Full Time RV Jobs

Workcamping is one type of job specifically for full time Rvers. Campgrounds both State and private need people to help with cleaning in the campground, checking people in and arranging activities for guests. Many of these types of workcamping jobs will give you a site in the campground for free and some will pay a small hourly wage. The benefit is that you do not have to spend money on a site for the duration you work in the campground.

Amazon Full Time RV Jobs There are other full time RVing jobs like working for Amazon during their busy seasons. Amazon will give you a free site and will pay you an hourly amount to work in their warehouse picking items for shipping. Some people will work for a month or so at Amazon to accumulate some cash to keep traveling.

Beet Harvest Full Time RV Job There is also the Beet Harvest that lasts for about a month and pays fairly well if there are two of you who can work. The work involves working in the winter and is mainly outside all day harvesting beets. Your work would include helping offload the hundreds of trucks that will be transporting beets to a central point where the beets are offloaded onto conveyor belts. It is long hours in cold weather and can be physically challenging. Two people working for a month would be able to earn around \$9,000 and more if you are willing to work overtime.

Gate Guarding Full Time RV Jobs Another full time rv job is working as a gate guard for oil fields and fracking sites. Most of these jobs are in Texas and require you to live in your RV at the gate which can be very remote. The company will provide water and a huge generator for your RV. Depending on how busy the gate is you either get to work a lot or not so much. Your job is to check in all of the trucks that come to the site. Make sure they are supposed to be there, log their plate numbers as they go in and as they go out of the site. This normally requires two people to work shifts as the gate can be busy all day and all night. A couple working a job like this can earn approx. \$4,000 a month. You can do a search on RV oil Field gate guards to find out more information about this job.

The best job for full time Rvers would be to work remotely for a company while they travel. This means that you would need access to the internet constantly and that the access you have is fast enough to do your job.

How To Get Mail When Living Full Time In an RV The Escapees Mail Forwarding Service enables you to receive your mail, no matter where in North America you travel. When you subscribe, you'll get a unique mailing address in Texas. You then give that address to anyone who sends you mail or packages by US Postal Service, UPS or FedEx. (They also offer addresses in South Dakota and Florida for legal domicile purposes.)

Escapees receives and holds your mail (including packages, certified, and registered mail) for you. When you're ready to have your mail forwarded, just call, email, or send them instructions online with where you want them to send it. They will mail it out to you the next business day. If you'll be in one place for a while, you can even ask them to forward your mail on a regular schedule.

Mail scanning With optional Mail Scanning service, Escapees will scan each envelope as it arrives, and notify you by email when you receive new mail. You can then view the scanned envelopes online and specify whether you want each item forwarded or destroyed. We can even scan the contents for you if you request.

Mail forwarding Anytime you want your mail forwarded, just give Escapees the address online, by email, or by phone. They will send your mail the next business day by the most economical method, email you the tracking number if there is one, and deduct the cost from your postage deposit account. You can also instruct them to ship your mail on a specific day, or to use Priority Mail, UPS, or FedEx if you prefer. The choice is yours.

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[5th Wheel Hitches](#) - Omni-Directional 4 air bag vs competitor 2 air bag system

A four-air bag hitch is designed to allow the hitch head to move on the air bags in any direction based on articulation from the trailer itself. The result of such continuous motion results in a smooth ride and decrease chucking and surging forces from the trailer on the truck. In addition to the movement from the trailer, the 4-airbag hitch support 100% of the pin weight, increasing the effectiveness of the air springs. This results in a smooth and controlled motion for the trailer on the truck.

[Receiver Hitches](#) – If you want a smoother ride and the ultimate in control, then you need the advantage provided by Air Safe Hitches with the Receiver Hitch by AirSafe™. With an Air Safe Receiver Hitch you will get a 90% smoother ride than with a traditional hitch, which can save you money. Glide across the highways and roads avoiding the constant bouncing, which leads to a decrease in gas mileage and early wear and tear on your tires. Our Air Safe Receiver Hitches also reduce stress on your truck and trailer suspension and help eliminate breakages inside the trailer. Our design allows total air ride vs the **Shocker Hitch** with the hinged approach.

[Gooseneck Hitches](#) – Air Safe offers the industry's largest selection of air hitches. Innovation and engineering insures you receive the safest and smoothest ride. "Enjoy the ride, arrive alive." With AIRSAFE™ you stop the flow of shock flow between the tow vehicle to the trailer and greatly reduce the explosion of energy when these two forces meet. The patented AIRSAFE™ hitches are engineered so the connection to the trailer is separated from the connection to the tow vehicle by an industrial strength airbag. Air Safe Gooseneck Hitches by AIRSAFE™ are simply the best air product money can buy. They are engineered with you and your precious cargo in mind. Simply remove your existing gooseneck tube and coupler and replace it with the AIRSAFE™ system. Available in round and square necks

[Click to check out the benefits of an air hitch vs a rigid hitch.](#)

Travel Trailer Towing

Towing a travel trailer is generally pretty easy if you know what to expect. This article will cover the basics you need to know and help you be ready for your first towing experience. It can be scary at first. But before long, you will feel comfortable and confident behind the wheel. We'll cover three main tips in this article:

1. **Prepare properly:** Before leaving, make sure you hitch your vehicle correctly, check your visibility, and check your brakes and brake controller.
2. **Be in the know:** Make sure you know your trailer height and route details.
3. **Drive safe:** Be cautious when turning and backing up. Understand how towing a trailer affects going up and down hills and how your truck brakes. Always be on the lookout for trailer sway and remember to take it easy!

This article will go over each of these areas in more depth, so buckle up!

Travel Trailer Towing Tip #1: Prepare Properly Many of the most important things you can do to ensure a good trip happen before you start driving. This will both give you peace of mind, and ensure that you encounter as few challenges as possible.

Hitch Your Vehicle Correctly To drive safely, you need to be hitched safely. You can check

out our guide to safely hitching and unhitching for all the details on getting a safe and secure connection. The basics are to make sure your hitch is on, locked in, and your cables are connected and working properly. If you need a refresher, check out this basic explainer video from FraserwayRV.

You also want to pay attention to the weight distribution. Looking at your tow vehicle and trailer, you want to observe a nice flat plane between the two. If there is tipping towards the hitch, or tipping away from it, they are not well balanced.

An imbalance can cause your trailer to be more vulnerable to sway, which we will talk about more in the driving section of this guide. The most accurate way to check weight distribution is to go to a truck scale and have them measure the weight on all your tires. Still, if you are parked on a flat surface, then you can generally get a good feel for it just by eyeballing it.

Check Your Visibility Unless you have a rearview camera for your trailer, your rearview will be limited to the side mirrors on your tow vehicle. Make sure you can see the rear end of your trailer through both side mirrors.

If your visibility feels too limited, you can buy side mirror extensions meant for towing that will give you a wide-angle view as well as your normal mirror view.

Check Your Brakes and Brake Controller Before you get out on the road, you want to make sure your brake controller is properly configured. The brake controller is what turns on the trailer brakes when you activate the tow vehicle brakes. It has a setting that controls how hard it applies the trailer brakes. To test it, get up to about 10 mph and then apply the brakes as you would for a normal stop.

You should feel like the trailer is tugging back on the vehicle just a tiny bit, especially as you come to a full stop. If you don't feel the trailer tug, or worse, you feel it pushing you, then you need to turn the brake controller setting higher. If your stop is super jerky, then you need to turn it down.

What you are shooting for is to have the trailer braking just a tiny bit more than the tow vehicle. This keeps the trailer from pushing forward on the tow vehicle during braking, which could cause you to jackknife. It also ensures the fastest and smoothest stopping.

Travel Trailer Towing Tip #2: Be in the Know It's important to get everything hitched up correctly, but it's also important to do a little trip planning beforehand.

Know Your Height It is crucial to know how tall your trailer is. The last thing you want to do is destroy it by trying to drive under a bridge that is too low. Find out your height, add a foot just to be sure, and avoid any passage marked with a lower clearance than that value.

Know Your Route You don't want to be confused over where you are going while driving a trailer. Your ability to maneuver in traffic or make course correction is considerably more limited, especially on narrow roads or in urban areas.

I highly recommend having a navigation system that includes a trailer or RV setting. This will do a few things for you. It will steer you clear of low bridges and the like. It will also keep you off of narrow one-way roads. Finally, it will let you know the proper speed for a vehicle of your type. Of course, it also helps you plot a good course to your destination.

Travel Trailer Towing Tip #3: Drive Safe It's actually pretty easy to drive a travel trailer. As you drive forward, the trailer will follow you in a very natural way. Provided your vehicle is rated to tow your trailer, you will not find it hard to go up hills, brake, or do most of the other things you would normally do while driving. That said, it isn't without any special challenges or dangers. Let's look at some of the potentially tricky parts.

Turning This is easier than you might think. The trailer will naturally follow the path of your tow vehicle when moving forward. The only rule of thumb is that the longer your trailer is, the wider you want to turn. A long trailer can end up cutting a corner that was close to the vehicle. Just keep your turn as wide as the roadway reasonably permits, and you should be fine with nearly any right-angle turns. Curves and round-a-bouts are generally no sweat in a trailer.

Any turn sharper than 90-degrees can be an issue. You want to avoid those whenever you can, and if you can't, take them as wide as possible. Trying to do a shimmy where you back up to get more turning room won't generally work in a trailer. Backing up a trailer is a tricky

business.

Finally, don't take turns too fast. Trailers have a higher center of gravity than most vehicles. That means a turn that might be safe for a car, could tip a trailer over. Take it slow and steady and obey the recommended speed limits.

Backing Up This is actually pretty challenging. And the bigger the trailer, the more tricky it becomes. You should practice when there is nothing to run into before you try it for real. The way a trailer backs up is not intuitive and simply takes getting used to before it feels natural. Take it slow and steady, and you should be fine. We have a whole article on pro tips for backing up a trailer complete with diagrams, techniques, and advice. I highly recommend giving it a read.

My biggest tip for you here is to avoid situations where you need to back up under any kind of pressure. Thus, avoid doing it on the roadways, if at all possible. Stress and pressure will only make it harder and increase the chance of making a costly error.

Hills Steep hills and mountain passes can be a challenge for some trailers. If you are pushing the boundaries of your tow rating, they can be a bit stressful. None the less, it's usually not a real problem, so long as you know what to do. The main thing is to keep to the right if you are going to be slow going up the hill. If you are well below the speed limit, I'd suggest turning your hazard lights on to let other drivers know.

Coming down a hill is a bit more dangerous. But again, if you play it safe, there should be no problems. If your tow vehicle is capable of engine braking, this is a good practice. Engine braking is when you put your engine into a lower gear as you go down a hill and take your foot off the accelerator. The drivetrain will run the engine and the mechanical resistance slows your roll down the hill. It's a good way to control your speed, and it eases up the wear on your brakes.

You may still need to apply your brakes as well, especially on a very steep grade. One thing you want to avoid is braking too hard while you are in a turn and going downhill. This can cause the trailer to jackknife and lead to an accident. Try to make sure you are at a slow enough speed going into the turn and then maintain that speed or gently decelerate. Keeping a nice, steady, controlled speed is the key to safety in this situation.

Braking The main thing to keep in mind here is, that with a trailer, your stopping distance is longer. You want to maintain a good distance between you and the vehicle in front of you so that you have plenty of time to stop. Give yourself more room than you would normally allow and don't trust the intuition you developed driving a smaller and lighter vehicle.

Trailer Sway Trailer sway is one of the special dangers of towing a travel trailer. The phenomenon is best described as the trailer and tow vehicle wiggling back and forth. What happens is that something pushes on the trailer, and it, in turn, pushes on the tow vehicle. The back and forth reaction makes the sway action grow stronger until it causes a catastrophic crash.

The best thing you can do to deal with sway is to avoid it happening in the first place. Step one is to make sure you have good weight distribution on your trailer. Bad weight distribution lowers traction and amplifies the swaying. The second is not to drive in high winds. Because your trailer is bigger than your tow vehicle, the wind pushes unevenly on them. That makes the trailer move more and starts the sway. The bigger your trailer, the more sensitive it is to the wind. Finally, don't drive too fast. The faster you go, the more dramatic the sway, and the harder it is to get under control.

The cause of sway that is hardest to avoid is people passing your trailer at a much higher speed. A big semi zooming past you will hit you with a wake of air that can set the sway in motion and take you by surprise.

If you do start to feel a sway, **do not** try and correct the sway by counter steering. This actually enhances the swaying. You want to stay calm and get back to going in a straight line. Here is how you can stop sway.

Stopping Sway The best thing to do is to use the manual trailer brake on your brake controller. This causes the trailer to engage its brakes, pulling back on the tow vehicle, forcing them into a straight line. You should practice this kind of braking in a parking lot or the like, so you can execute it calmly and know what it feels like. It can be a bit jarring. If you have your

brake controller such that it applies the trailer brakes a bit stronger than the tow vehicle brakes – something I recommend- then for minor sway, you can use the regular brakes with some success. I generally do that first, but if it fails, I quickly hit that manual brake.

If braking would be dangerous, say because there is someone right behind you driving too close, your other option is to temporarily hit the gas while steering straight ahead. This causes the tow vehicle to pull harder on the trailer, yanking it straight. The problem with this second technique is that the faster you go, the stronger the swaying forces can become, so you might just make the situation worse. Still, keep that as an option in your toolkit of reactions.

Keeping Right In nearly every state, slower-moving and larger vehicles are required to keep to the right lanes of the highway whenever possible. It's better for the overall flow of traffic, and it is generally safer. The one challenge this can present is when there are many on and off-ramps on the right lane. A trailer, due to its size, can be harder to merge with other traffic.

Many drivers don't get that your acceleration and deceleration are more limited. If I am in a really dense part of the highway, I'll take the next lane to the left to try and ease up on the constant merging. Provided there are at least two lanes to my left, I feel this is a reasonable compromise in this particular situation.

When picking a lane, you can observe what commercial truck drivers are doing and follow their lead. They drive the same roads constantly and tend to know which lanes provide the smoothest travel while still obeying the legal requirements. Not every trucker sets a good example, but they are often the most experienced highway drivers on the road.

Take It Easy I'd tell this to nearly any driver, but with towing a trailer it is especially true. It's much more important to arrive in one piece than it is to arrive in time. Every trailer has a speed at which it becomes unsafe. Excessive speed can easily cause trailer sway, and it makes any situation that comes up harder to react to. You are not in a race, and there is no prize for getting somewhere the fastest. Stay safe and drive at a speed where your trailer is safe to maneuver.

If you feel you are too slow and are blocking other drivers, the correct response is not to go faster than you feel safe, but to find a place to pull over and let the other drivers pass. If you have a big train behind you, this is often a legal requirement. The rule of thumb is that five cars on your tail is enough to pull over for.

When you do need to change lanes or make a turn, be sure to give other drivers sufficient time to react by using your turn signals early and often. Try to be patient and give folks the time needed to make space for where you need to go.

How Do You De-Winterize Your RV?

Hello, Spring! Say goodbye to the cold months and set your sights on warmer days. It's time to open those RV blinds and de-winterize. If you followed our step-by-step winterization guide last season, all you have to do is work that list backwards... we joke! Today we're explaining the de-winterization process and bringing you an easy to follow guide that will get your RV out of hibernation and ready for the open road ahead. Check out the details below.

RV EXTERIOR

THE UNIT: Inspect your RVs exterior. Look for cracks or leaks on all exterior vents, doors, windows, exterior storage, slide-outs, sewer hoses, fresh water hose, etc. Like anything kept in storage for a while, there is a possibility your RV has developed mildew, mold, dust and so forth. Check all exterior holes and vents for animals or bugs that might have gotten in during your RVs long sleep. This is also a great time to practice those spring cleaning principles. Wash the exterior including windows and screens, clean off the awning (check that fabric is still in good condition) and make sure your lights are in working order.

RV TIRES:

Tires lose air pressure when in storage. Check the tire pressure and inflate each tire per the manufacturer's recommendation of your particular RV. If you notice wear in your tread or any

concerning indicators that your tires may not be in a drivable state, be sure to address the problem BEFORE your next road trip. No one enjoys a tire blowout on the interstate.

RV INTERIOR

THE UNIT: Continue to use your spring cleaning principles when freshening up the interior of your RV. Dust, vacuum, mop, wipe down all surfaces and check all storage spaces in the kitchen and throughout the RV to make sure critters haven't gotten in and that there is no mildew lurking in any corners or on floorboards.

RV APPLIANCES:

- Open LP gas valve
- NOTE: make sure your water heater tank is full PRIOR to testing your water heater
- Check working order of all LP gas fired appliances
- Regular RV maintenance requires your LP gas system to be tested for leaks and gas operating pressure annually.
- Plug in and test all 120-volt appliances and accessories to make sure they're in proper working order

RV WATER SYSTEM (SINKS AND SHOWER):

If you used antifreeze in your water system when winterizing your RV, follow these steps:

- Remove antifreeze by running all sink faucets until water is clear
- Flush the toilet and shower until water is clear and don't forget exterior showers!
- Turn the bypass into normal mode
- Fill the hot water tank
- Fill the fresh water tank and run all water systems again
- Check for all leaks
- Sanitize the water system by mixing 1/4 cup of household bleach to one gallon of water for every 15 gallons of tank capacity.
- Pump water through both hot and cold faucets and let sit for 4-8 hours
- Drain all water and re-fill the fresh water tank with potable water
- If you still smell bleach, continue running water until the smell has dissipated

WATER HEATER:

- Close the drain and reset all water heater valves
- Run RV water pump and turn the hot water faucet on and let run until the water heater tank is full
- Turn off faucet
- If the pump comes on, this may indicate you have a leak
- Check under the sink for signs of leakage

ENGINE:

Don't forget about your RV engine! Check oil and all fluid levels. Make sure head and taillights are in working order.

RV BATTERIES:

A battery can lose up to 10% a month while sitting in storage, if you did not recharge your batteries during the long winter months, you'll need to start by charging them.

RV GENERATOR:

- Does your RV have an onboard generator? If so:
- First, check that your exhaust system doesn't have any damage
- If the exhaust system is in working order, turn on and test your generator
- If your oil levels are low, you can **make an appointment** with one of La Mesa RVs service technicians for servicing

THE EXTRAS YOU DON'T WANT TO FORGET:

- Hitches – Make sure all hitches are rust-free
- Filters – change air and water filters
- Propane tanks – refill propane
- Safety check – make sure your batteries are working on all smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors by testing each

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