



By: Steve Chase-Circuit Rider, ND LTAP

December 2013

TRAILER TOWING

Hitch systems, towing packages, tongue weight, and driving permits- there's a lot more to towing a trailer than just hitching up and taking off down the road. Towing a trailer is no small responsibility and should be undertaken with great care and an eye toward safety first. The elements of a trailering system are driver, tow vehicle, hitch system, and trailer and load. The most important- is you the driver.

MATCHING VEHICLE TO TRAILER

Trailers without brakes- weight of trailer and load doesn't exceed empty weight of towing vehicle.

Trailers with brakes- weight of trailer and load may exceed empty weight of towing vehicle depending on trailer design and recommendation of trailer manufacturer.

MATCH HITCH SYSTEM COMPONENTS

The hitch is a device that connects directly to the rear of the towing unit and connects to the trailer. The hitch ball is the round ball device of the hitch. The trailer tongue is the part that extends from the trailer to the coupler which connects to the hitch ball.

Safety chains are permanently connected to the trailer tongue and are connected to the towing unit hitch.

Hitching components must be matched to weight rating and sizing of these components. Each component is labeled with weight ratings and ball diameter is labeled on the ball and trailer coupler.

The hitch system is only as strong as the weakest link.

PROPER HOOK UP

Don't get distracted until the hook-up is complete. Attach the trailer tongue to the ball on the hitch. Couplers either have a hand wheel or latch style that must be tightened or secured. After the hand wheel or latch is tightened, lift up on the tongue or push trailer backwards, then recheck hand wheel or latch and tighten if necessary.

Safety chains must be crisscrossed then routed through holes on the hitch. Adjust slack in chains so you can still turn without binding but the chains don't drag on the ground. Then secure the chain hooks to the chain.

Hook up the light wiring from the trailer to the tow unit. Check trailer lights to be sure all are working which include running lights, turn signals, and brake lights.

Before starting and at each fuel stop inspect hitch assembly, safety chains, lights and tire pressure. While driving if you hear unusual noises or suspect something might be wrong, stop at a safe location and correct any defect.

PROPER LOADING

Loading the trailer in the front half will prevent swaying and whipping. Trailer cargo should be loaded 60% front and 40% rear. Cargo should be secured to prevent shifting and keep the cargo in the front half of the trailer.

SLOW DOWN

Always reduce your driving speed when towing a trailer. Maximum speed for a car/pickup and trailer combination is 55 MPH. Towing a trailer increases the risk of losing control of towing unit because of cross winds, poor road and weather conditions. If whipping does occur, take your foot off the gas pedal and hold steering wheel in a straight ahead position. Never brake hard or speed up as this will make the whipping worse. Because of the weight of the trailer, braking and following distance must be increased. The rule of thumb is the 4 second rule under ideal conditions. More room is needed to make turning maneuvers.

BACKING UP

Backing a trailer can difficult and sometimes confusing. Place your left hand at the bottom of the steering wheel, look over your shoulder through rear window, if you want to move the trailer to the left, move your hand to the left. If you want the trailer to go to the right, move your hand to the right. If the trailer jack-knifes, pull ahead and straighten out and try again. Try to park so you don't have to back when leaving a parking position.

Content Source: U-Haul (Users of Safety Talk are advised to determine the suitability of the information as it applies to local situations and work practices and its conformance with applicable laws and regulations).

Montana LTAP does not discriminate on the basis of age, color, disability, gender identity, marital status, national origin, public assistance status, sex, sexual orientation, status as a U.S. veteran, race or religion.