

*Operational advice:*

## Trailers and towing best practice

*Guidance for LCVs, Pick-ups and Cars*

As a fleet or transport manager, it is crucial to know the towing capacity of your vehicles when selecting a trailer for your operational needs. Whether you need to transport plant and machinery to worksites or increase the load space capacity of your vehicles, understanding the capabilities of your existing vehicles or those you plan to acquire is essential. This will ensure that they are suitable for the intended purpose and are operated safely and in compliance with regulations.

Essential Fleet Magazine has put together a concise guide to towing to help fleet and transport managers navigate this area and comply with legal guidelines. The guide includes information on driving a LCV, pick-up, or car with a hitched trailer.

It's important to remember that disregarding your vehicle's towing capacity can cause damage to the engine, tyres, and A-frame, resulting in extensive and costly repairs. Additionally, unsafe towing can lead to transporting unstable loads, posing risks to the vehicle's stability, the driver's safety, and that of other road users. Overloading a vehicle beyond its maximum permissible weight limit is also illegal.

All drivers and operatives working for your organisation should be adequately trained to use trailers and drive while towing them for work purposes. This is part of your duty of care requirements and aligns with health and safety guidelines.

**Staying compliant and ensuring your**



### drivers have the correct licence

In recent years, the regulations surrounding driver licencing have been updated. Most notably, drivers with a standard car licence are now permitted to tow trailers, but it is vital to verify the date the driver obtained their licence to ensure compliance.

According to the regulations, if a driver acquired their licence before 1st January 1997, they are authorised to operate a vehicle and trailer with a combined weight of up to 8,250kg Maximum Authorized Mass (MAM). Additionally, they can drive a minibus with a trailer exceeding 750kg MAM.

Individuals who obtained their licence from 1st January 1997 can tow a trailer weighing up to 3,500kg MAM.

It is advisable to conduct a licence check for any employees who may be required to drive a vehicle with a trailer and ensure that they receive appropriate training.

### Types of Trailers used for Towing

Two conventional types of trailers can be used for towing purposes. An open trailer which doesn't have sides, and a box or enclosed trailer which is fully covered with four sides and a roof.

Operators may have many different types of trailers, but all must be utilised according to the same guidelines.

### Restrictions applying to Towed Trailers in the UK:

- Maximum trailer width is 2.55m.
- Maximum length for a trailer towed by a vehicle weighing up to 3,500kg is 7m. (Note that this doesn't include

the A-frame)

- The trailer must have working indicators, lights, and brakes (where fitted).
- The trailer must display the same number plate as the towing vehicle.
- Load weight should be distributed and limited to fit within manufacturer guidelines.
- Loads must be secured effectively.

### Speed restrictions apply to towing a trailer and should be adhered to.

#### Trailer speed limits are:

- Built-up areas in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland (30mph), and Wales, a new lower speed limit of (20mph) now applies
- Single carriageway roads (50mph)
- Motorways and dual carriageways (60mph)
- On a motorway with three or more lanes open for traffic, a vehicle towing a trailer is not permitted to use the right-hand (offside) lane.

### Towing Capacity and loading

Knowing your vehicle's towing capacity is vital before you hitch any trailer. You can find this information in your vehicle's manual, on a plate in the door jam, or the manufacturer's website. Towing capacity is the maximum weight a trailer can have, expressed as braked or unbraked. Braked trailers have their own braking system, which increases the load that can be towed. Unbraked trailers rely on the towing vehicle's brakes, which reduces the load capacity.

When towing a trailer, consider the

When towing a trailer, consider the impact on your vehicle's handling, braking, and stability. Drive at a lower speed, allow more braking distance, and be cautious when manoeuvring.

Load your trailer following the manufacturer's guidelines and the

safe loading guide, which usually follows the 60/40 rule. This means placing the heaviest cargo towards the front of the trailer within recommended limits.

Properly distributing the load will prevent 'sway' or 'fishtailing' of the trailer,

which could be dangerous and cause the towing vehicle to overturn.

Securely tie down your load to prevent it from coming loose or falling from the trailer. Ensure that there are no load projections outside the trailer that could pose a danger to other road users.

## Terminology explained...

Understanding the terminology referenced within your vehicles manufacturer handbook or trailer guide is important when determining your load and towing capacities. All images used below are meant for illustration purposes for this guide.



**MAM - Maximum authorised mass** - refers to the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load that can be carried safely when it's being used on the road. This is also known as gross vehicle weight (GVW) or permissible maximum weight.

**GCWR - Gross combined weight** - refers to the maximum loaded weight of your vehicle that ensures safe handling and includes, passengers, cargo and the attached trailer. This weight will be determined by the manufacturer.



**GTW - Gross Trailer Weight** - refers to the total weight of the trailer and the cargo that has been loaded in it.

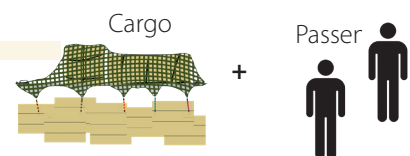


**GVWR - Gross Vehicle Weight Rating** - refers to the maximum loaded weight of your vehicle as determined by the manufacturer that it considered to be safe. This figure will include passengers, cargo and the weight of the vehicle itself. It is basically refers to the maximum loaded weight of the vehicle before any trailer has been attached.

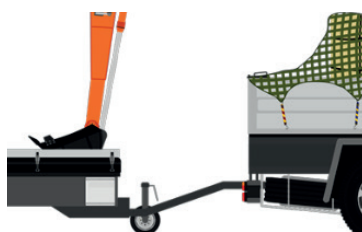


**Curb Weight of a vehicle** - this measurement refers to is the total mass of a vehicle with standard equipment and all necessary operating consumables while not loaded with either passengers or cargo.

**Payload** - this capacity refers to the amount of weight a vehicle can carry within the bounds of the vehicle itself and includes passengers and cargo. It provides no information about the amount of weight that can be towed by the vehicle.



**GAWR - Gross axle weight rating** - the maximum weight that the front and rear axles can withstand on a vehicle. This will be shown by two ratings, the FR rating indicates the weight for the front axles and the RR rating refers to the rear axles.



**Nose Load or Tongue Weight** - refers to the downward force exerted at a vehicle-trailer coupling point when your trailer is hooked up for towing. The tongue weight should be about 10-15% of the GTW.

**Tow-ball coupling** - the component that is fitted to the leading edge of the A-frame of your trailer, and which connects to the tow hitch on your tow vehicle. ●