

Towing

QFleet driver safety fact sheet

Towing requires more knowledge and different skills than normal driving. A driver who is not experienced in towing needs to understand the general principles of driving with a trailer before attempting to tow in traffic or at highway speeds.

When towing, the driver should:

- Allow for the extra length and width of a trailer when entering traffic and allow for its tendency to 'cut in' on corners and curves.
- Apply the accelerator, brakes and steering smoothly and gently to avoid sway, especially in wet or slippery conditions.
- Allow for the increased effects of cross-winds, passing vehicles and uneven road surfaces on the vehicle and trailer combination.
- Avoid applying the towing vehicle's brakes if the trailer begins to sway or 'snake'. If the trailer is fitted with brakes that can be operated independently, apply then gently. Otherwise, continue at a steady speed or accelerate slightly until the sway stops.
- Leave a longer stopping distance to the vehicle ahead, increase the gap for longer, heavier trailers and allow even more distance in poor driving conditions.
- Engage a lower gear in both manual and automatic vehicles when travelling downhill to increase vehicle control and reduce strain on brakes.
- Allow more time and distance to overtake because of the reduced performance of the towing vehicle and avoid 'cutting off' the overtaken vehicle when returning to the left lane.
- If possible, reverse with a person watching the rear of the trailer.
- Avoid holding up following traffic; pull off the road where safe to do so and allow faster vehicles to overtake.

The driver must abide by the laws governing the towing of trailers:

- The trailer must be registered, safe and roadworthy.
- The trailer must be fitted with a rear number plate.
- The trailer's braking system (if fitted) must be operational.
- The towing vehicle must be:
 - fitted with an appropriately rated and approved towbar, tow ball and coupling
 - properly equipped for towing with suitable mirrors, lights, electrical fittings, safety chains and load levelling equipment (if required).
- The loaded trailer weight must not exceed the towing capacity of the tow vehicle or the vehicle's tow bar.
- The load in the trailer must be loaded so that it will not overload the trailer, upset the balance or impede the safe operation of the tow vehicle.

- The trailer must be properly secured and/or covered so that it does not present a hazard to other road users.

Before embarking on a long trip

Towing places additional demands on the vehicle, therefore before starting each trip, the driver should check:

- all tyres carefully
- oil, water, brake fluid, battery
- that the coupling socket and ball are the matching size; if not a ball coupling, ensure that all parts fit and function properly
- the coupling is securely fastened and latched or screwed down when the trailer is connected to the towing vehicle
- that the trailer brake and light connections are secure and all lights are working
- that initial operating adjustment of electric or vacuum operated brakes fitted to the trailer are in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- that all doors, hatches, covers and any load or equipment are properly secured.

Tyre pressure

When towing heavily loaded trailers, vehicle tyre pressure should be increased to the level recommended in the owner's handbook or on the tyre placard (usually about 15 kPa above normal). Otherwise, ask a local tyre dealer.

Safety chains

Before heading off, check that safety chains are properly connected with attachments capable of withstanding the specified breaking load of each chain. Do not use padlocks.

If two chains are fitted, cross them under the drawbar before they are attached to the towing vehicle. This provides better directional control of the trailer and helps prevent the front of the drawbar hitting the road if the coupling disconnects.

During the trip

Soon after beginning each trip, stop in a safe location and make sure:

- couplings and safety chains are still fastened
- brakes and wheel-bearings are not overheating
- light connections are secure and lights are still working
- tyres are still inflated correctly and are not rubbing on the mudguards, suspension or trailer body
- loads, doors, hatches, covers, etc. are still properly secured.

On long trips, repeat these checks every two to three hours, when taking a rest stop.

When towing, ensure the trip is safer, better planned and more enjoyable by:

- scheduling more rest stops and shorter travelling days for long trips as towing is more stressful than normal driving and more likely to cause driver fatigue.
- taking care not to hold up following traffic unnecessarily
- looking further ahead than usual to anticipate appropriate driving actions for traffic and road conditions
- remembering that fuel consumption increases for most light vehicles towing large trailers, particularly at speeds above 90 km/h.

More information is available on the Department of Transport and Main Roads [Safe towing website](#).

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