

# Towing Tips

## Towing and Trailer Tips

By John Bengel, Shrimper 433 (*Grace of St Just*) (Spring 2002)

*Note:*

*These tips, which provide essential information for anyone intending taking their Shrimper on the road, were published in 2002. Although much is still relevant, towing regulations do change and it is suggested that you also read the other articles on towing, including the item on Tow Cars, elsewhere in this section. More detailed information on towing and the current regulations may also be found on the National Trailer and Towing Association website, [www.ntta.co.uk](http://www.ntta.co.uk).*

### Matching the boat trailer load with the towing vehicle

1. Check the vehicle manufacturer's towing limit, which must at least equal the gross weight of the trailer (as shown on the trailer identification plate). As a rule of thumb, for safety and stability, it is suggested that the gross trailer weight should not exceed 85% of the towing vehicle kerb weight. The vehicle kerb weight is defined as the net weight of the vehicle plus a full tank of fuel plus 75 kg for the driver and luggage.
2. Check that the engine power is adequate. Excessive clutch wear can take place if the vehicle's power is "marginal" for the trailer weight.
3. Check that the vehicle and trailer braking systems are adequate and in good order.
4. The load distribution on the trailer (and in the boat) is very important. Unless otherwise specified by the vehicle and/or trailer manufacturer's particular recommendations, nose weight on the trailer coupling should be between 50kg and 100kg. This can be checked with a set of bathroom scales.
5. Check all items are well secured, tyre pressures, including the spare, are correct and all fittings and lights are in good order. Before setting off ensure the jockey wheel is properly locked up.

### Launching and Recovery

It is recommended that hubs and brakes are not immersed in water, either fresh or salt, but particularly the latter. If it is unavoidable, then take heed of the following advice:

1. DO NOT immerse when the hub is hot (i.e. straight after a long journey), but wait until the assembly has cooled. Immersing a hot bearing creates a vacuum, which in sucks water and makes the ingress even worse.
2. Keep immersion times to the very minimum and DO NOT leave the trailer standing in the water after the boat has been launched.
3. After immersion in salt water the whole trailer, but particularly the hub assembly, should be thoroughly hosed down with fresh water.
4. Do not park the trailer for prolonged periods with the handbrake fully on,

particularly when the hub is wet, as this will cause the shoes to “freeze” onto the drums, making them difficult to release. Better to leave the brakes off and chock the wheels.

5. It is recommended that the trailer is serviced frequently and at least every 3 months irrespective of mileage. This must include a brake strip down and re-greasing of bearings.
6. Hubs with “unitized” bearings cannot be greased and, whilst they are more resistant to the ingress of water, particularly if allowed to cool before immersion, they are NOT waterproof. Repeated immersion in water will eventually lead to their failure.
7. Bowden cables generally are not provided with any means of lubrication (i.e. a grease nipple) as the introduction of grease will inhibit the movement of the inner cable within the specially designed and coated outer casing. There is also a very real danger of excess grease contaminating the brake linings, thus rendering them ineffective. Practical experience shows that a periodic soaking in thin oil e.g. WD 40, particularly over the winter months, goes a long way towards avoiding seizure problems.

Following the above advice and recommendations will do much to reduce the devastating effects of water, particularly salt water, but cannot guarantee that problems will not occur.

### **Weigh Bridges**

Want to find out exactly what weight you are towing behind your vehicle? There are a number of public weigh bridges throughout the country and for a few pounds they will provide you with this important information.

## **Towing Tips Update**

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- Never exceed any weight limits for the vehicle, trailer or combination.
- Ensure vehicle, trailer, brakes, wheel bearings are in good mechanical condition.
- Ensure you have good visibility - use towing mirrors.
- Secure loads well, with mast and spars preferably in purpose built cradles.
- Practice reversing manoeuvres.
- Check trailer lights before each trip.
- Balance vehicle and trailer correctly for nose weight.
- Use low ratio (if you have it) for difficult hill starts.
- Use engine braking on long descents.
- Plan well ahead and signal correctly.

- If trailer is immersed, wash down well with fresh water immediately afterwards, allow wheel hubs to cool before launching. Better to crane the boat in if possible.

**Useful websites:**

Detailed listings of slipways and marinas in and around the UK can be found on [www.boatlaunch.co.uk](http://www.boatlaunch.co.uk)

The AA route planning service is available on line at [www.theaa.com](http://www.theaa.com). They also have up to date information on toll charges on the European motorway network. General enquiries: 0870 600 0371