

Towing - Driver Responsibilities

Towing is very different from everyday driving - it requires additional driving skills and safety precautions. As a driver, you have a legal responsibility to other road users and yourself when towing. The towing vehicle, trailer and its load must meet all legal and safety requirements.

Queensland road rules are substantially uniform with road rules elsewhere in Australia. However, if travelling outside Queensland, check the relevant legislation.

Driver

Apart from the added legal responsibilities for drivers, towing requires more knowledge and skills than normal driving. Drivers not experienced in towing need to make sure they understand the general principles of driving with a trailer before attempting to tow in traffic or at highway speeds.

When towing, drivers should:

- allow for the extra length and width of a trailer when entering traffic
- 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 them 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
- reverse, if possible, with a person watching the rear of the trailer - reversing is difficult and takes practice
- pull off the road where suitable, to avoid a build-up of traffic unable to overtake



Before the trip

There are a number of safety checks you should make before each trip. These are:

- inspect all tyres carefully. When towing heavily loaded trailers, vehicle tyre pressures 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 your local tyre dealer
- carry out normal service checks of oil, water, brake fluid, battery and so on., remembering that towing places additional demands on your vehicle
- ensure the coupling socket and ball are the matching size. If not a ball coupling, check that all
- parts fit and function properly
- check the coupling is securely fastened and latched or screwed down when the trailer is connected to the towing vehicle
- check 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
- check trailer brake and light connections are secure and all lights work
- check the initial operating adjustments of electric or vacuum operated brakes fitted to the trailer are in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- disengage any reversing catch fitted to the trailer coupling (as used with over-run brakes)
- make one or two test stops from low speed to confirm the trailer brakes operate properly
- ensure all doors, hatches, covers and any load or equipment are properly secured
- limit the mass of the load carried in the boot or luggage space of the towing vehicle.

Before you drive off... a final safety checklist

Is the vehicle suited to the type and size of trailer being towed?

Are the vehicle and trailer in sound mechanical condition?

Are all tyres correctly inflated and lights working?

Are all fittings, couplings and safety chains correctly fastened?



Remember

You are driving under different, more difficult conditions when towing. Give yourself time to adjust to the effects of towing on your vehicle, even more so if weather conditions are bad.