

ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION

Towing



Department for

Infrastructure

www.infrastructure-ni.gov.uk



What can you tow with your licence?

If you passed a car test before 1 January 1997, you are generally entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8.25 tonnes MAM OR a minibus with a trailer over 750kgs MAM.

If you passed your driving test on or after 1 January 1997 and have an ordinary category B (Car) licence, you are limited to vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes (3,500kg) MAM towing a trailer up to 750kgs, or a vehicle and trailer combination up to 3.5 tonnes MAM. For anything heavier you need to pass a category B+E driving test.

Towing the line

Whether you're planning to tour with your caravan, transport horses or move a trailer load, towing gives you the freedom to take what you want, where you want. However, to ensure vehicle stability and the safety of other road users, you need to know the laws that apply to towing.

Room to manoeuvre

The Highway Code NI (Rule 160) says if you are driving a long vehicle or towing a trailer give other vehicles, especially cycles and motorcycles, plenty of room.

Remember - the extra length will affect overtaking and manoeuvring and the extra weight will also affect the braking and acceleration.

Towing regulations

Towing regulations refer to the maximum authorised mass (MAM) of vehicles and trailers. This means the permissible maximum weight. You may not be planning to drive a vehicle, or a vehicle towing a trailer, at these maximum weights, but these are key factors that determine driver licensing requirements.

Pulling your weight

Most cars have a maximum weight they can tow. **The Highway Code NI (Rule 98)** says that you:

- **MUST NOT** tow more than your licence permits.

Towing limits are normally found in the vehicle handbook or specification sheet. Alternatively the vehicle's gross train weight may be listed on the manufacturer's plate.

Width and length

The maximum trailer width for any towing vehicle is 2.55 metres. The maximum length is 7 metres for a trailer towed by a vehicle weight up to 3.5 tonnes (3,500 kg).

Safety rules to take on board

When towing, the equipment you use must meet certain safety standards.

Towing bars

Towing bars need to be 'type approved'. A type approved tow bar will have a label with an approval number and details of the vehicles it is approved for. If your car was first used before 1 August 1998, your tow bar does not need to be type approved.



Towing mirrors

You **MUST** have an adequate view of the road behind you. If your caravan or trailer is wider than the rear of the towing vehicle, you may need to fit suitable towing mirrors. If you fail to do this you could receive 3 Penalty Points on your licence and a fine of up to £1,000.



Trailer brakes

Any trailer weighing over 750kgs must have a working brake system. Some smaller trailers also have brakes, although these are optional. The brakes on a trailer or caravan must be in good working order.

Tow bar towing stabiliser

A good stabiliser fitted to the tow bar can make the combination safer to handle. However, you are still responsible for loading the combination correctly. A good stabiliser will not cure instability caused by a poor towing vehicle/ trailer combination. The stabiliser does give added security in crosswinds, especially when large goods vehicles overtake on a motorway.

A-frames and dollies

If you attach an A-frame to a car in order to tow it with a larger vehicle, the car plus the A-frame count as a trailer. If you use a dolly to tow a broken-down vehicle, the dolly counts as a trailer. In both cases the usual safety regulations for trailers apply.

- Is correctly hitched up with the breakaway cable attached, or secondary coupling head fully engaged and locked.



Towing an American caravan or trailer

American trailers and caravans don't always meet European safety regulations. If you want to use an American caravan or trailer in the UK or the EU, you **MUST** first check that it's legal.

- Lights and indicators are connected and working correctly.



Safety checks

Before starting your journey, check that the caravan, horsebox or trailer:

- Is loaded correctly with the right nose weight on the tow bar.
- Jockey wheel and assembly is fully retracted and in the stowed position.





- Braking system is working correctly.



- Windows, roof light and door are closed.



- Tyre pressures are correct.

In addition The Highway Code NI (Rule 98) says as a driver:

- You **MUST** secure your load and it **MUST NOT** stick out dangerously. Make sure heavy or sharp objects and animals are secured safely. If there is a collision, they might hit someone inside the vehicle and cause serious injury.
- You should properly distribute the weight in your caravan or trailer, with heavy items mainly over the axle(s) and ensure a downward load on the tow ball. The manufacturer's recommended weight and tow ball load should not be exceeded. This should avoid the possibility of swerving or snaking and going out of control. If this does happen, ease off the accelerator and reduce speed gently to regain control.
- Carrying a load or pulling a trailer may require you to adjust the headlights. In the event of a breakdown, be aware that towing a vehicle on a tow rope is potentially dangerous. You should consider professional recovery.
- Check your caravan, horsebox or trailer tyres for tread depth, damage and cracking of the sidewalls. Even if the tread depth shows little wear or is above the legal minimum, the tyre may be suffering from the effects of ageing.
- Check that your caravan, horsebox or trailer is fitted with tyres of the specified rating (see the manufacturer's handbook).

Remember - NEVER allow anyone to travel in the caravan, horsebox or trailer.

How to tow at length

Always be aware of the increased weight, length and width of the combined vehicles.

You should:

- Allow more time and brake earlier when slowing down or stopping.
- Give yourself three times the normal distance and time to overtake safely.
- Take account of the extra length, particularly when turning or emerging at junctions.
- Check there are no vulnerable road users such as pedestrians (particularly children), motorcyclists and cyclists or obstructions in the road behind you.
- If possible, look mainly through the rear window.
- Check all around just before you start to turn and be aware that the front of your vehicle will swing out as you turn.



Reversing – the long and the short of it

(Rules 200 - 203)

- Choose an appropriate place to manoeuvre.
- If you need to turn your car and trailer around, wait until you find a safe place.
- **DO NOT** reverse or turn around in a busy road.
- **DO NOT** reverse from a side road into a main road. Look carefully before you start to reverse.
- Check the '**BLIND SPOT**' behind you.

- Get someone to guide you if you cannot see clearly.

Remember - You **MUST NOT** reverse your vehicle further than necessary.

Snaking

NEVER attempt to correct swerving or 'snaking' by increasing speed, steering sharply or braking hard. The best advice is to ease off the accelerator slowly, allow a certain amount of "twitch" in the steering, and reduce speed until the snaking has stopped.

High-sided vehicles

Take extra care when passing or being passed by high-sided vehicles. Allow as much space as possible to avoid the effects of turbulence or buffeting.

Speed limits

Some speed limits are lower than normal when you are towing. Unless road signs tell you otherwise you **MUST NOT** exceed:

- 30 mph in built-up areas.
- 50 mph on single carriageways.
- 60 mph on dual carriageways or motorways.

Reduce your speed in high or crosswinds, when travelling downhill and in poor visibility.

Motorway driving (Rules 263 & 265)

On a motorway you **MUST NOT** reverse, cross the central reservation or drive against the traffic flow. If you have missed your exit or have taken the wrong route, carry on to the next exit.

Caravans, horseboxes or trailers should not be towed in the outside lane of a motorway having more than two lanes, unless other lanes are closed.

Be considerate - other road users can often become frustrated by slow moving towing vehicles, which can lead to dangerous risks being taken. So check your mirrors frequently and if you are holding up a queue of traffic, be prepared to pull in where it is safe to let other faster traffic pass.

**Remember to tow the line,
follow the rules and before
you start any journey, make
sure you are fit to drive and
your vehicle is fit for the road.**

Protect yourself from death,
serious injury and breaking the law.
Download your **FREE** copy of
The Highway Code NI today -
www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/highway-code



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