

Preparing to Tow



Loading

- Be careful how you load the caravan. Remember, it already has a kitchen sink!
- Large and heavy items should be placed on the floor, and as near to the axle as possible. They can be moved forwards or backwards a little to adjust nose-weight.
- Overhead lockers should be used for lightweight things. It's surprising how much damage can be caused by a wayward tin of baked beans!
- Consider carrying things in the boot of the car to avoid over-loading the caravan. All the little things add up.
- Travel with water containers and toilets empty. Remember, they all add unwanted weight, and should there be a leak..... Take a bottle of water with you for the journey, which is easy to store and should be adequate to make "en-route" drinks, hot or cold.
- A couple of short pieces of domestic pipe-lagging on each end of the wardrobe rail will help keep the hangers in place whilst on the road.
- Don't be tempted to overload the caravan by filling the void under beds (especially in fixed-bed models – as these beds are generally behind the axle).
- Once everything's in the caravan, check the nose-weight by using a preparatory gauge (Milenco). The maximum permitted nose-weight for your car will be on a plate (a requirement for post-1998 models) and usually given as an 'S', or in the handbook. The caravan's limit will usually be 100kg, but do check first. If the car's limit is less than the caravan's, DO NOT exceed the lower limit. This also applies if the car's limit is higher than the caravans; DO NOT exceed the lower limit.

Vehicle Preparation

- Check the tyre pressures on the caravan, and don't forget the spare wheel too!
- Check the tyre pressures on the tow car. They often require higher pressures for towing duties, especially at the rear. Under-inflated tyres have much more of an effect on stability when towing than when solo.
- Check the various fluids (oil, water and fuel etc.) in the car, as it will be working much harder when towing than when it is solo, and any small issues will be magnified. Remember, the car's engine will be pulling an extra one to two tonnes (depending upon makes and models of course)!
- If the nose-weight of the caravan is within limits, when attached to the car, does the rear of the car drop significantly? If so, consider fitting spring assistors (Grayston) which are available in caravan accessory shops

Hitching up

- If fitted, ensure that the stabiliser handle is raised to its maximum. This will allow the hitch to be lowered onto the tow-ball correctly, and the friction pads can damage the tow ball if not allowed to fully retract.
- Once the hitch has been lowered onto the tow-ball and the hitch handle has "snapped" into place, raise the front of the caravan by winding the jockey wheel up. Do this just enough to see that the rear of the car is being lifted. This shows that the caravan is securely attached to the car.
- Always ensure that you check the road lights on the caravan once connected to the car. You'll need an assistant to help, especially with the brake lights. Don't forget the high side marker and front lights; they're all legal requirements. It's advisable to carry spare bulbs too.
- It is almost certain that you will be required by law to fit extended towing mirrors. As a rule of thumb, sit in the driver's seat in your "normal" driving position, with the car and caravan straight. If you can't see along the sides of the caravan all the way to the rear corners using the car's mirrors, you MUST fit towing mirrors. It's not only illegal not to have adequate rear view, but dangerous!

- Check that the fridge is operating on 12 volts (you'll probably need the car's engine to be running for this to work), and ensure that all cupboard doors, overhead lockers and drawers are fully closed, and that any items not in cupboards are secure.
- Have you got everything – gas, water containers (fresh and waste), electric hook-up cable, water pump and waste pipes?

Towing

- Good driving is based upon good observations and planning. That applies whether solo or towing. Be in the correct gear for any given situation, and try to avoid braking sharply or changing gears on corners.
- Try to "drive" around corners. Slow down in plenty of time on the approach, select the most appropriate gear, and then apply enough power to ensure that the car is pulling the caravan, rather than having the caravan pushing the car.
- Give yourself plenty of room when turning sharp corners. If turning left, keep out towards the centre of the road, leaving plenty of space to your nearside. That way, the caravan's not likely to hit the kerb.
- When passing stationary or parked vehicles, try to make sure that you run parallel to it, rather than in an arc, and make sure that you're well past before moving back to the nearside.
- Try to maintain a constant speed wherever possible, and avoid accelerating downhill as this may induce a "snake" and ultimately a loss of control. It may be safer to lift off the accelerator on steeper hills, and use a lower gear that you would when not towing.
- Remember, you're on holiday, so there's no need to rush! Be mindful of any traffic behind you, and if you do find that you have vehicles behind you, find a safe place to pull in and let them past. Frustration causes risk taking!
- Know your towing speed limits. Currently in the UK, they are;-
 - 50 mph on a single carriageway road.
 - 60 mph on dual-carriageway roads and motorways.
 (Unless of course, a lower speed limit applies to that section of road, i.e. 30 mph.)

- If new to towing, take your time and get used to how the outfit feels. It will feel very strange to begin with, and the car's handling characteristics will be totally different from when it is solo.
- Take comments like "I don't know that the caravan is on the back" and "I don't know it's there" with a large pinch of salt. Whatever the towcar, and whatever caravan it's towing, you'll ALWAYS be aware of its presence.
- Both of the major Clubs run towing courses at venues all over the Country. These are highly recommended for anyone, and the completion often gets you a discount on caravan insurance!

www.caravanclub.co.uk

www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk

Motorway Driving

- On a two-laned motorway you are allowed to use the outside lane when towing. On a three-laned (or more) section, you aren't. No trailer, whether single or twin axle, of whatever size is permitted to use the outside lane unless directed to do so! Any driver caught doing so is liable to a fine and penalty points.
- When joining a motorway, try to accelerate to speed matching that of the traffic in the nearside lane and pick a gap, adjusting your speed accordingly. Attempt to join the main carriageway as early as possible. That way you'll have a good length of the acceleration lane (slip road) left if you need it. Remember, it's a "Give Way" junction; you do not have a right to push your way in!
- Expect the unexpected! Try to maintain a constant speed. If you're catching up with a slower moving lorry near the crest of a hill, consider hanging back a little (unless it's very slow of course). It's almost a certainty that it will speed up once over the hill crest.
- When considering an overtake, check your mirrors well in advance. This is where towing mirrors are essential. If clear, indicate after double checking the mirrors. Keeping an eye in the mirrors, move out in plenty of time - don't leave it until the last moment. Make sure that you're well past before moving back to the nearside.

- Whether being overtaken by, or overtaking a large vehicle, try to create as much space as possible between your outfit and it. If you are being overtaken, move over to the left as far as you can, and vice versa. This will lessen the "bow wave" effect and the possible instability that might cause.
- When ascending hills, try to maintain a constant speed if possible. If that means using a lower gear, then do so.
- Look well ahead for any lorries that might be "bunched up". One is certain to pull out to overtake the other. With plenty of time to react you shouldn't be caught out when it happens. Anticipation!
- When descending downhill sections, once again, try to maintain a constant speed (possible lower than when travelling on the flat or even uphill). Using a lower gear might help. Be mindful of large vehicles that might overtake you, so as always, keep checking your mirrors.
- In roadworks, extra care needs to be taken, as the lanes are often narrower and can be uneven. Reduced speed limits are common and are generally mandatory for ALL vehicles. Leave plenty of room from the vehicle in front in case of sudden braking and keep an eye on your mirrors.

Reversing

- Reversing a caravan or trailer is not difficult; it's just different and takes a bit of practice. You have to think in "opposites", i.e. to make the caravan turn right, you need to steer the car to the left and vice versa. Remember, right hand down, caravan left. Left hand down, caravan right.
- Once the caravan has started turning in the direction you want, you'll need to steer the car to "follow" it, adjusting accordingly
- If at all possible try to reverse to the right. That way, you'll always be able to see the rear corner of the caravan.
- Have an assistant guide you back, but make sure that they are where you can see them and that their signals are clear.

- Keep steering input to a minimum. No more than a quarter of a turn at a time is all that's usually required. Should you need to turn more sharply, just add a little more, but there's no need to tie yourself in knots: they will have to be undone again! Above all, do it slowly!

Arrival on Site

- If you can drive onto your pitch forwards, great, but if you have to reverse, take your time.
- There might not be enough room to reverse easily, so if you have a mover fitted, consider un-hitching and using it to get the caravan into position. This can be quicker than getting into difficulties when trying to reverse.
- If you need to level the caravan side to side, use a levelling ramp. Good quality ones designed for the purpose are available and makes life much easier.
- If possible, drive forwards onto a levelling ramp. The caravan's handbrake will work immediately if you do this, whereas it probably won't if reversed. Using a chock will stop the caravan rolling off the ramp too.
- Never use the corner steadies to level the caravan. They are steadies, not jacks!
- If holidaying with children, get them involved in the setting up. It's surprising how much fun they find filling up water containers! Containers such as the "Aquaroll" are pricier than simple plastic items, but are much easier to handle and last.
- If relying on the caravan's facilities, (shower etc.) consider having a second fresh water container. You can guarantee that the water will run out mid-shower, so it's easier to swap the water container than having to go and fill one.
- Most sites have speed limits; very often 5 mph, which is walking pace. Whilst these are not likely to be enforceable, they're there for safety's sake. Any fool can drive quickly, but it takes time to react to a child who runs out! Could you live with the guilt of the consequences of your actions?
- Whether camping or caravanning, consider your neighbours. Whilst most people are friendly, a yapping dog or shouting children can soon become irritating. No-one is likely to object to others having a good time, but loud laughter and talking late at night will not go down well with families with young children.

- Consider pitches to be private areas. Would you like others taking a short-cut to the washblock by passing between your car and caravan/tent? It happens!
- Good on-site manners are likely to be met with friendly faces. Bad manners aren't!

Awnings

- The awning is often referred to as the "divorce in a bag", and with good reason.
- Prior to buying an awning, consider what you will be using one for. If you are a family and crave a lot of extra space, then a full sized one would probably be the best bet. If you just want somewhere to hang coats or put a couple of camping chairs, then a porch awning might suffice.
- Buy an awning that not only suits your use, but also your budget. The most expensive ones are that for a reason, and you do get what you pay for. It might be worth thinking about a second-hand awning. Many will be little used, but will offer a significant saving over a new one. Most Dealers have a good selection.
- The first time that you put up an awning, you WILL be the centre of attention on site, and it will probably take you an age! Remember though, everyone's been there and much of the attention you get will be sympathy. Just take your time.
- If you're putting up a full awning, remove the front and side panels if you can. The roof section is heavy enough on its own, so removing these will make handling much easier.
- If possible, lay out the awning frame a few metres from the caravan. You can also mark the joints with coloured "insulating tape", which makes assembly easier for subsequent times.
- When attaching the awning to the caravan, try to keep any zips away from the caravan sides, especially if it's a bit breezy. It's surprising how much damage these can cause to the caravan if they're just left to flap around.
- Once the awning's up and erected on the frame, there are useful tools (Isabella Hercules for instance) available for tensioning the poles. A properly tensioned awning will last a lot better than one that's haphazardly erected.

- It's probably worth investing in some heavy-duty steel awning pegs. The plastic ones are fine on softer ground, but can break easily on harder, drier ground, and are almost impossible to use on hard-standing or rocky/stony ground.
- There's a vast array of chairs and loungers available for camping and awning use. Again, consider what you want them for (a lounge won't be much use if you want to sit at a table!), and have a good look before you buy. Dealers usually carry a good stock and often have a good display.
- If you buy a new caravan, there's a good chance that your "old" awning won't fit. However, if the size difference is not huge all is not lost, as in many cases alterations can be made.
- Get quotes to see how much the alterations will cost. There are a number of specialist companies who have expertise in awning/tear repairs and alterations. However, don't discount the original manufacturers who might be just as cost-effective, and will ensure a perfect material match.
- YC Leisure recommends the following Manufacturers and repairers:-

Isabella - www.isabella.net/uk Tel.01844 202099

Ventura - www.ventura-camping.com/uk Tel.01844 202099

Kampa - www.kampa.co.uk Tel.01376 500111

Suncamp - www.suncamp.co.uk Tel.01245 329933

Dorema - www.dorema.co.uk Tel.01977 555215

Bradcot - www.bradcot-awnings.co.uk Tel.01274 306811

Trio Pair (for general repairs and alterations) - www.triopair.com Tel.01977 708688

Clubs

- If you and your family are new to camping/caravanning, and/or enjoy the company of others, consider joining one of the many Clubs with the prospect of joining like-minded people on Rallies and holidays.

- The main two Clubs are:-

The Caravan Club (www.caravanclub.co.uk)

The Camping and Caravanning Club (www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

- Most marques of caravan have Owners' Clubs too. These include:-

Adria – www.clubadria.co.uk (includes motorhomes)

Bailey – www.baileyownersclub.org (includes motorhomes)

Bessacarr – www.bessacarr-owners-club.com

Buccaneer – www.buccaneerownersclub.org.uk

Coachman – www.coachmanclub.co.uk

Elddis – www.elddisowners.co.uk (includes Explore, Compass and motorhomes)

Lunar – www.lunarownersclub.net (includes Venus)

Swift – www.swift-owners-club.com (includes Abbey, Ace, Bessacarr, Sprite and Sterling caravans, and Autocruise, Bessacarr, Escape and Mondial motorhomes)

- Owners' Clubs are also a mine of information. If you have a question about your particular make, someone in that Club is likely to be able to answer!

Travelling Abroad

- If you've never driven abroad before, the thought can be daunting. In reality, the thought is usually much worse than the doing.
- Generally speaking, the roads on the Continent are much less crowded than ours, and are much better surfaced.
- There are several specialist companies (including the two main Clubs) who offer a booking service. This includes everything from ferries/tunnel, and sites, to insurance.
- When making a ferry booking, you'll need to know the length and height of your outfit, together with the registration number and all occupants' details.
- If travelling out of season, there's often no need to pre-book campsites. Camping Cheques (www.campingcheque.co.uk) and ACSI (www.webshop.acsi.eu) offer significant savings on sites' list prices too at hundreds of sites (including some in the UK).
- Most sites have English speaking staff and can usually be booked via email.
- All drivers will need to be in possession of their driving licences. You'll also need your insurance certificate (ensuring that Continental cover is included) and the V5 Registration Document. If using a vehicle that's not registered in your name, you'll need a letter of authorisation from the owner.
- It's very wise to have breakdown cover. Check that your caravan/trailer is covered, and that it doesn't exceed any maximum dimensions for recovery.
- Arrive at the ferry port in plenty of time, and have your passports and any tickets/booking reference handy.
- You might need "beam benders" to attach to your vehicle's headlights. These stop your headlights dazzling opposing drivers as you'll be driving on the right. It's usually cheaper to buy these before you go, rather than getting them at the ferry port. Some vehicle headlights can be adjusted for Continental driving, so check your vehicle's handbook.
- When it's time to board the ferry/train, simply follow any instructions that you're given by staff. Remember, they're very experienced and know what they're doing.
- Such is the size of ferries that there's plenty of space on the car decks, so no manoeuvring will be needed.

- The thing that puts most people off Continental driving is being on the “wrong” side of the road. In fact, it’s very easy, but take your time until you get used to it.
- Speed limits vary from Country to Country, so check where you will be travelling before you go and do some research. Most motorway towing limits are lower than in the UK.
- France has two sets of speed limits; one for outfits with permitted Train Weight (car and any trailer/caravan) under 3.5 tonnes, and one for 3.5 tonnes and over. You will need to check the VIN plate on your vehicle to get this information. Remember, it is the plated weights that count, not the actual weights!
- Different Countries have different requirements for what equipment you need to carry. These are things like spare bulbs, reflective vests (which must be within reach of each occupant), first aid kit, fire extinguishers and warning triangles (some Countries require two of these!). All the information that you need is on the two major Clubs’ websites.
- Service areas are generally much more frequent on motorways than in the UK. However, not all have full facilities. Don’t be tempted to stay overnight at these places though, as thefts and break-ins are not uncommon.
- On-site electricity supplies can vary. 6 amps is very common. Some sites have 10 amps, and even 16 amps on occasions, but others can be as low as 3 amps. Check what the supply is at your site, so that you don’t “trip” the feed. Sometimes you can up-grade the supply.
- Many Continental campsites have the common blue mains plug (as in the UK), but beware of reverse polarity. This is where the live and neutral connections are reversed, and potentially can be dangerous.
- Polarity testers are available at most UK caravan accessory shops, and are a simple plug-in device with three neon lights that indicates whether the wiring is correct or not.
- It’s worth making or buying a reverse polarity cable before you go. They are simple to make. You’ll need a short piece of caravan mains hook-up cable, and one each of a blue plug and socket. When wiring it up, connect one end correctly, but at the other connect the live cable to the neutral terminal and vice versa.
- If you do find that you have reverse polarity, with your “adapter”, it’s simply a case of inserting it rather than having to re-wire your mains cable on-site, only to have to re-wire it correctly for the next site!

- Some campsites have a two-pin electric hook-up. Adaptors are available at caravan accessory shops. Again, if you encounter this, don't forget to check the polarity.
- Make sure that you have enough gas for your trip as most UK supplied gas (including Calor) is not available on the Continent. If you are travelling in the summer, then one 6 kg propane or one 7 kg butane cylinder should be enough for at least three weeks holiday. Take two to be on the safe side.
- A holiday is to be enjoyed, and touring the Continent with your own equipment is a fantastic experience. However, for your first trip abroad, don't be too ambitious with the distances you intend to travel.

- **Useful links for Continental travel are:-**

The Camping and Caravanning Club (www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk)

The Caravan Club (www.caravanclub.co.uk)

Eurocamp Independent (www.eurocampindependent.co.uk)

Select Sites (www.select-sites.com)

Camping Cheques (www.campingcheque.co.uk)

ACSI (www.webshop.acsi.eu)



For aforementioned products and others with great prices, visit
www.yorkshirecaravans.com