

Caravan Safety Tips

Caravans are safe. Statistics prove it. [Caravan](#) accidents are extremely rare and the number of accidents has gone down every year for the last ten years at least. Caravans provide enjoyment for thousands of families on millions of holidays and breaks every year. Campers and caravanners provide jobs and bring money to holiday destinations. Yet every year caravans come under attack from those who think they should be banned from the roads totally and those who believe that caravanners cannot be trusted to maintain their units properly. It is no accident that caravans are so safe. Whether you camp in a [caravan](#), trailer tent, or tent, if you tow any sort of trailer you must ensure that your combination is correctly matched.

Before you think about taking to the road you should ensure that your car and trailer combination are correctly matched and equipped. In order to continue safely, regular servicing is important. Some checks need carrying out every trip and a [caravan](#) certainly needs a main service once a year. Some simple checks you can do yourself but we believe unless you are sure you know what you are doing, most jobs are best left to a professional engineer. Below, we take you through some of the important things you should consider.

TOW BAR

A well fitted and maintained tow bar is vital for safety. It is the only connection between car and [motor home](#). Make sure that bolts are tightened to the recommended torque figure and that there is no cracking or rusting around the mounting points.

TYRES

The only contact your car and caravan or [motor home](#) has with the road is through the tyres. Look after them and you will improve the safety and behaviour of your unit. Never mix cross ply with radials on the same axle. Check the pressures and condition of tyres every trip. You will find correct pressures detailed in your handbook. Before setting out check that the [caravan](#) wheel nuts are tight. Ensure wheel trims are replaced securely.

BRAKES

Brakes are life and death components. Maintenance is best left to properly trained engineers. It's worth keeping an eye on your brake mechanism and cables, if you have any doubts have them checked. Always connect the breakaway cable or secondary coupling to a separate mounting point and not the tow ball. The purpose of this cable is not as you may think to keep the car and [caravan](#) together in the event of a tow bar failure. The cable pulls on the caravan brakes, snaps and allows the car to run free of the stopped caravan.

ELECTRICS

The road lights on your trailer are operated from the tow car through the 12N socket and plug. Check indicators and lights are working in unison with the car each time you set off. A dashboard display or warning bleeper must be fitted inside the tow vehicle to show that the trailer traffic indicators are working.

SUSPENSION

Check the condition of both car and trailer suspension. It's important for safety as well as comfort. When your [motor home](#) is attached to your vehicle it should tow level or slightly nose down but never nose up. If you find that the far rear sags you may need some form of suspension aid. Get specialist advice on the type required for your car from your car dealer.

MIRRORS

When towing you must have an adequate view of the road behind and along both sides of your [caravan](#). Generally this will mean you will need additional towing mirrors. In either case, make sure your mirrors are adjusted appropriately.

COUPLING

Before starting off ensure that the jockey wheel and all steadies are raised and secured. Make sure that the coupling head on the trailer has engaged properly on to the tow ball. Now you have ensured your outfit is properly maintained and equipped ready for the road, here is some advice on matching your car to your [Caravan](#).

TRAILER WEIGHT

Most information sources recommend that the loaded weight of your caravan should not exceed 85 per cent of the kerbweight of your car.

Experienced towers sometimes go a little higher but they should never exceed the kerbweight given in the car handbook.

NOSEWEIGHT

This is the weight that you put on the tow ball of your vehicle and is typically between 50 and 100kgs. For stability the noseweight should be as heavy as possible, which is generally around seven per cent of the actual laden weight of the [caravan](#). Adjust the loading around the axle to ensure that the caravan's noseweight does not exceed the caravan's coupling or the car's noseweight limit.

PAYLOAD

Payload is the weight of the items that you are allowed to carry in your caravan for personal use. You will find the figure in the handbook. Check the loading of your caravan periodically on a public weighbridge to make sure you aren't exceeding the total weight allowed. Manufacturers call this the gross weight or the maximum technically permissible mass. Your car and caravan, when weighed together must not exceed the towing vehicle's trainweight.

VEHICLE LENGTH

Towing a caravan or [motor home](#) is no more difficult than driving solo providing that you are aware of the length of your unit. There is no reason why your trailer should not dutifully follow your car but you will need to allow more time and space to stop safely, overtake and corner under control.

SPEED

Watch your speed. With a load on the back, acceleration will be slower. You will need more time and space for overtaking. Your combination is longer and wider than your car alone so you will need to take this into consideration before pulling out. Stopping distances will be longer so allow more space between the car in front as your speed increases.

HILL STARTS

Hill starts need more throttle than normal to get going and you will need delicate clutch control to avoid stalling.

BRAKING

When towing it will take you an average of 20 per cent more distance to stop. Antilock braking systems may improve on this a little. Always avoid violent braking.

INSTABILITY

Snaking is the most common form of instability and is often due to bad loading or excessive speed or incorrect tyre pressures. However, even with well matched units snaking can occur when air from passing lorries or coaches affects your unit. Vertical instability is called pitching and can occur if you hit a pothole.

In either case don't apply your brakes hard. Slow down gradually by easing off the accelerator. A stabiliser may help to avoid instability but must not be a replacement for good car and caravan matching or weight distribution.

Insurance

Theft continues to plague our caravan industry so it is important to get good [Caravan Insurance](#). Several insurers will not provide theft cover on caravans unless certain security measures or other conditions are met – Club Care will provide cover with merely a higher excess which is known at the outset of the policy. It is no wonder more people are looking to Club Care for their caravan insurance

About the Author

Ashley Gilmour has written this article on behalf of Club Care [Caravan Insurance](#)

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