

NABO GUIDANCE NOTES

TRAILING

Introduction

Trailing your boat to new destinations and unconnected waterways can be an enjoyable way to do your boating. A trailboat gives you the opportunity to take your boat to the coast on your holidays, visit lakes and remote sections of canals or rivers and avoid the cost of a permanent mooring by keeping the boat at your home.

The prerequisite for successful trailing is a vehicle of adequate power and weight to handle the considerable load that it will be required to pull, not forgetting that launching and recovery from a slipway imposes greater strain on the towing vehicle. Always seek advice from vehicle suppliers, caravan dealers, magazines, etc before deciding to become a trailboater.

Towing vehicle

Check in the manufacturer's handbook and on the VIN Plate on your vehicle to ascertain the kerbside weight of the car and the maximum permissible trailable load. Generally, the maximum towing weight will equate to 85% of the car's kerb weight but this may vary from model to model, or in some cases a car may not be suitable for towing any weight.

When towing, an extended towing mirror must be fitted to the offside mirror of the car.

If you have never trailed a boat or caravan before you may wish to consider taking a training course to familiarise yourself with towing and handling a trailer. Ask at a local caravan dealer for details. You will need to understand how the trailer's braking system and hand brake operate, how to use the coupling, fit a breakaway cable, and use the jockey wheel. Obtain advice on how to care for your trailer after it has been immersed in water – lubrication of wheel bearings, etc.

Noseweight

This is the weight at the front of the trailer which is applied to the towball of your car. Typical noseweight limits are between 50kg and 75kg. Any lesser or greater weight can seriously affect the stability of the towing outfit and/or damage the towing vehicle.

Connecting cables

You will need to have a special electrical coupling fitted to the car to connect to the trailer lights. A connector called a 12N enables you car's warning systems including brakes and indicators to operate the lights on the trailer. Some caravans also have a 12S connector to allow power from the car to feed a fridge and re-charge the caravan's own leisure battery. Always check that the car and trailer electrics are working properly before setting off. A vehicle electrical specialist can fit the couplings and any necessary additional components to make the system work properly without damaging your vehicle wiring.

Number plates

You will need a number plate to match the towing vehicle on the trailer. This is usually mounted on a trailer lighting board carrying the required lights and reflectors.

As from 1 January 2003 new regulations governing the supply of number plates have been in force. This means that you will have to present an original identification and entitlement document when you purchase a number plate.

Valid identity documents include a current photocard driving licence or a current paper driving licence, passport, credit card or debit card with a photograph, travel pass card with a photograph or a foreign nationality identity card.

Valid entitlement documents include a registration document (V5), a certificate of entitlement to a mark (V750) a cherished transfer retention document (V778), vehicle licence renewal (V11), an authorisation slip from a DVLA office bearing an official stamp, a letter of authority from fleet operators on headed paper with vehicle details, a vehicle registration certificate (V379) or a vehicle export certificate.

The purchaser of a number plate does not have to be the registered keeper. You are permitted to purchase a number plate for someone else providing you have the necessary documents with you.

Further information on number plate requirements can be obtained from DVLA on 0870 240 6424 or www.dvla.gov.uk/vehicles

Trailer requirements

In addition to a number plate, you must have stop lights, tail lights, indicator and number plate lights. Also, all trailers must have two reflective triangles at the rear. Trailers over 1.3m wide also require a rear fog lamp. Side marker

lamps and reflectors may be desirable or necessary – check with the trailer manufacturer.

The maximum gross weight of a trailer that is not fitted with brakes must not exceed 750kg or half the towing vehicle's kerb-weight. There are exceptions for agricultural trailers.

If the trailer must have brakes and was manufactured after October 1982 the braking system must comply with EC directives. Braked trailers manufactured after 1988 must only be fitted with auto reversing brakes.

A breakaway cable is a legal requirement and will activate the brakes if the trailer becomes detached in transit. It is illegal to wrap the cable around the towball. It has to be fitted on to an independent mounting point on the car.

All trailers and caravans travelling on UK roads must have a suspension system. Again, there are exemptions for agricultural trailers. If the trailer body does not adequately cover the trailer wheels and tyres the trailer must have mudguards.

Boats on trailers

Make sure the boat is properly positioned and secured to the trailer. If outboard motor or outdrive propellers are projecting from the rear they must be covered with a brightly coloured propeller bag.

Remove all loose objects from the deck – fenders, masts, ropes, etc. and stow them safely inside the boat. Make sure that nothing can move or get damaged inside the boat whilst it is being trailed. Turn off all fuel, gas and electrical systems on the boat.

Towbars

It is advisable to go to a specialist fitter to obtain a towbar that is suitable for your car. The regulations governing mechanical coupling devices are very complex and detailed – in the interests of safety.

In general terms, if your car was registered on or after 1 August 1998 the towbar and towball must comply with EC Directive 94/20. If your car was registered before the above date the regulations do not apply and any towbar may be fitted to the vehicle.

EC approved towbars will have an identification label showing "D" and "S" values. The towball must also have a label with D and S values equal to or greater than those of the towbar.

There are two basic types of towbar. A flanged towbar has the towball permanently bolted to it. It is also possible to have a detachable coupling with a swan-necked towball, which can be removed to enhance the appearance of the vehicle.

Insurance

Always check that your car insurance and your boat insurance adequately covers you for trailing and that the boat is insured when on the trailer, and that the trailer is insured when parked away from the vehicle.

Use a proprietary locking device on the coupling or on the trailer wheels to deter thieves.

Further information

Further information and guidance is available from the River Users' Co-ordinator exclusively to NABO members.

Legal Note

Although the greatest care and diligence has been taken in the compilation of these guidance notes the National Association of Boat Owners accepts no responsibility for any errors, omissions, or alterations in this publication, or for any consequences ensuing upon the use of, or reliance upon, any information given. It must be emphasised that these notes give only general advice and that the driver of a vehicle with a trailer must comply with the law of the appropriate country at all times.

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