

November 2018

## Pre-trip caravan checklist

Each year, travellers venture off to explore Australia in their camper trailers, campervans, caravans, fifth wheelers and other recreational vehicles (RVs). But before setting off to make joyful memories, it is important to ensure that the caravan and the tow vehicle are safe for use, well-maintained and have ongoing compliance with the standards for registration.

**To aid your travels, make sure to check off the list below before you leave, and stay safe on the roads.\***

### Things to check before your trip:

- Read your tow vehicle's instruction manual section for trailer towing and follow the manufacturer's instructions. Do the same for your trailer's instruction manual.
- Ensure that you are familiar with the different types of weight measurements (Tare Mass, Aggregate Trailer Mass, Gross Trailer Mass, Gross Vehicle Mass, Gross Combination Mass). Consult the instruction manuals of the tow vehicle and trailer and understand their individual weight limits and capacities.
- Ensure that the tow vehicle and trailer's weights are within the limits specified by the manufacturers. It is also important to consider the load carried as luggage in the tow vehicle and trailer as it adds to the weight.
- Ensure that your tow vehicle is roadworthy, suitable, and able to safely tow the weight of the trailer.
- Understand the dimensions of your tow vehicle and trailer, and ensure they are compliant with regulations. Remember that when adding items on the rear, such as bicycles, the combination's length must not exceed the length and rear overhang limits. Knowing the dimensions will also help you to negotiate low or narrow bridges and roadways. For more information, please see '*Trailer size*' on the VicRoads [website](#).
- Check the tow vehicle and trailer's service logbooks and ensure that they are not overdue for service. If you are heading on a long trip, it is best to ensure both are serviced prior to leaving.
- Perform basic maintenance checks to your tow vehicle such as engine oil and coolant, washer fluid, brake fluid, battery condition, lights etc. Consult the instruction manual for more information. Remember that towing places additional stress on the tow vehicle and more frequent maintenance checks are required.
- Drivers towing a vehicle remain responsible for ensuring that they have the appropriate licence, skills and experience to tow the vehicle.

- Inspect all tow vehicle's and trailer's tyres carefully. When towing heavily loaded trailers, the tow vehicle tyre pressures should be increased to the level recommended in the instruction manual or on the tyre placard. If in doubt, contact a tyre specialist.

Remember that tyres have a limited life:

- 6-year-old tyres—All tyres (including spare tyres) manufactured more than six (6) years ago should be inspected for signs of age and deterioration by a tyre specialist.
  - 10-year-old tyres— All tyres (including spare tyres) manufactured more than ten (10) years ago should be replaced with new tyres, even if they appear to be usable from their external appearance and if the tread depth has not reached the minimum wear depth.
- Check the tow vehicle's and trailer's wheel nuts. Use a torque wrench to ensure that they have been tightened to the torque specified by the manufacturer in the instruction manual.
  - Ensure that gas appliances and equipment are serviced according to the regular intervals detailed by the manufacturer. Refer to your product information booklets or an appropriate service and repair company. Remember that gas bottles have a 10-year life.
  - Check that smoke alarms, fire extinguishers, and fire blankets are in working order and are easily accessible. An escape route clear of obstructions should also be planned in the event of an emergency.
  - Ensure the coupling socket and ball match in size, have been tightened to ensure a proper fit, and that the connection is not loose. Also ensure that the locking mechanism is engaged.
  - Check that the safety chains are correctly connected to the drawbar attachment points.
  - Ensure that the safety chain size and minimum breaking load has been appropriately selected according to the aggregate trailer mass and that the drawbar attachment points can withstand the specified breaking loads of each chain.
  - In the instance that two chains are in use, ensure that they are crossed under the drawbar before being attached to the tow vehicle – this provides enhanced trailer directional control and prevents the front of the drawbar from hitting the road if the coupling disconnects.
  - Check the reflectors, left and right indicators, stop lights, tail lights, parking lights and all other light connections. If fitted, check front and rear end outline markers and side clearance lights. Ensure that they are all in working order. If possible, check if lights are working with a fellow traveller. Carry spare globes.

- Ensure that the trailer's lights, reflectors and number plate are clearly visible and not obstructed.
- When using over-run brake actuation, after reversing, ensure that the reversing catch is disengaged and that the trailer coupling is lubricated and set to 'travel' or 'in use' position.
- At the start of the trip, be cautious when first applying the brakes. Gradually increase the pressure applied to the brake pedal to check that the brakes are working properly. If necessary, use the electric brake control knob to adjust the braking force to suit the trailer's load. If you notice any unusual behaviour, ask a qualified mechanic to test them for you.
- Secure all loads properly and ensure that there are no loose items in the trailer, including internal equipment which may move during travel.
- Ensure that gas cylinders, spare wheels, bumper bars, stone shields and other items are properly secured.
- Stow away the roll-out awning and lock it in the travel position.
- Close and lock roof hatches, windows and doors.
- If towing a camper or pop-top trailer, ensure that the roof is locked securely.
- Ensure that the gas cylinders are turned off and that the refrigerator door is locked.
- Adjust the rear vision mirrors to have a clear view of the road to the rear of the vehicle combination.
- If you can't have an adequate view of the road using only the tow vehicle's side mirrors, use extension mirrors. Ensure that the extension mirrors are not wider than required and that they are removed when not towing.
- Remove the jockey wheel from its clamp and store it in the luggage compartment or in the trailer. If using a swivel mount jockey wheel, lock it in the travelling position.
- Check that the front and rear corner stabilisers ('steadies') are in the travel position.
- Ensure that the trailer handbrake has been correctly released.
- Check that the electrical cord has been disconnected and stored away.
- Check that the TV antenna is in the travel position. Inspect for loose fixtures.
- If fitted, ensure the breakaway device battery is charged and operating and that the connecting cable is attached to the chassis of the tow vehicle. The breakaway device will engage the brakes in case the trailer disconnects from the tow vehicle.

## During the trip

It is important to conduct frequent checks throughout the trip. Soon after heading back on the road, stop in a safe location to perform a quick safety check to make sure that:

- Couplings and safety chains are not loose, fastened and in good condition.
- Brakes and wheel bearings are not overheating and are still in safe working order.
- Light connections are secure, and all lights are still working.
- Tyres are still inflated to the correct pressures and are not contacting any parts of the vehicle such as the mudguards, suspension, trailer body etc.
- All loads are still secure and restrained correctly. This includes any doors, covers, hatches and any other items.

On long trips, repeat these checks every two to three hours when taking a rest stop.

## A final word of advice

Ensure a safer, better planned and more pleasant trip by remembering to:

- Stay within the manufacturer's payload guidelines that are suitable for your current configuration (tow vehicle and trailer). The tow vehicle or trailer must never be overloaded as this may create unexpected hazardous situations on the road. Public weighbridges can be used to verify the weights.
- Schedule more rest stops and shorter travelling days for long trips as towing is more stressful than normal driving, and more likely to cause earlier onset of fatigue
- Look further ahead than usual to anticipate appropriate driving actions for traffic and road conditions.
- Remember that the stopping distance is increased when towing a trailer and maintain a safe distance to the vehicle travelling in front of you.
- When overtaking, remember to consider the length of the trailer and make sure you have travelled an adequate distance before changing lanes.
- Be wary of encounters with trucks, road trains and other heavy vehicles. Be ready and take caution to the effects of wind buffeting as you pass them.
- Drive within the road speed limits. Remember that the risk of swaying is higher as the speed increases.
- Avoid sudden braking, acceleration and steering. Slow down when making turns and avoid making sharp turns if possible.



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- Pay attention to the engine temperature gauge in your instrument panel. Remember that towing places an additional stress to the vehicle and the engine is more likely to overheat on hot days.
- Consider the increased fuel consumption when towing caravans and large trailers.
- Plan your trip well, get plenty of rest and take regular breaks.

## Related documents and links

### Vehicle Standards Bulletin - Building Small Trailers (VSB 1)

Available online from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Cities  
[https://infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/vehicle\\_regulation/bulletin/vsb1/index.aspx](https://infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/vsb1/index.aspx)

### Vehicle Standards Bulletin - Rear Marking Plates (VSB 12)

Available online from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Cities  
[https://infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/vehicle\\_regulation/bulletin/index.aspx](https://infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/vehicle_regulation/bulletin/index.aspx)

### Australian Design Rules

Available online from the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development and Cities  
<https://infrastructure.gov.au/vehicles/design>

### Australian Standard AS 4177 Safety Chains

Available for purchase from Standards Australia  
[www.standards.org.au](http://www.standards.org.au)

### Load Restraint Guide

Available online from the National Transport Commission  
[www.ntc.gov.au/heavy-vehicles/safety/load-restraint-guide/](http://www.ntc.gov.au/heavy-vehicles/safety/load-restraint-guide/)

### Caravan Industry Victoria (CIV)

The CIV website contains useful information about caravans  
[www.gomakesomememories.com.au](http://www.gomakesomememories.com.au)