

Hot Topic



Best practices when towing equipment and trailers



There were two fatalities in the UK involving trailers during one week in March 2017. We have had reports of other events, including vehicle contact with a towed chipper and other near misses. This advice article details best practice for towing, not only wood chippers, but other towed plant and trailers loaded with equipment or materials.

One fatality involved a tractor towing a trailer that came loose and struck a car. The other a Mercedes Sprinter towing a trailer with a mini-digger loaded onto it that hit a car.

Anyone driving and towing equipment or a trailer loaded with machinery or materials has clear responsibilities that are clearly set out in the Highway Code and Government advice.

General advice:

- Make sure you're towing within the limits of your driving licence. It is a criminal offence to tow work equipment and trailers if you do not meet the required standards

If you passed your car driving test on or after 1 January 1997 you can:

- drive a car or van up to 3,500kg maximum authorised mass (MAM) towing a trailer of up to 750kg MAM.
- tow a trailer over 750kg MAM as long as the combined MAM of the trailer and towing vehicle loaded is no more than 3,500kg. Above this a B+E Test is required.
- Never tow a chipper or other work equipment that weighs more than the vehicles recommended towing weight
- Always check the hitch maximum weight (nose load).
- The weights can be found in the vehicle handbook or specification sheet. They can also be found on the Vehicle Identification Plate (VIN plate) that can be found under the bonnet or on the inside of the driver's door.

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Preparation:

Every Trip - Check:

Towed wood chippers, plant or trailers

- Lights work and activate correctly – clean if required
- Correct Number plate displayed and number is visible – clean if required
- Tyre condition, tread condition of side walls and pressures
 - if you have a spare, check its condition and security
 - check wheel nut sentry pointers are aligned correctly if fitted
- Ensure nothing is hanging off the equipment and safety features are all present
- Check all movable components that can swing away from equipment are secured correctly
- All fasteners (i.e. doors, slides) are fasteners and working
- Correctly couple the tow vehicle and lock ensuring it won't come loose and there is no play
- Attach the breakaway brake activation cable – ensure it is attached to the correct location
 - following the vehicle manufacturers' instructions and not around the towball!
- Attach the secondary anchor chain if an un-braked trailer as directed in the vehicle manual
- Attach the light connection ensuring it is secure, and, secure the jockey wheel
- Ensure nothing will be dragged across the ground when in motion or wires over stretched.
- If a braked trailer, release the handbrake and do a slow speed brake test of trailer
- If towing equipment or plant, ensure the fuel cap is in place and there are no visible oil leaks
- Remove any chipping or loose debris/vegetation from the body of the chipper
- Wheel chocks may be used when a wood chipper or generator is in use
 - don't forget to remove these prior to pulling off.

In all cases check the general condition of equipment and/or machine.

Ensure all loads are secured on trailers and placed to give good balance and the required nose load. To avoid 'snaking' on single axle trailers place the load close to the axle.

Make sure all required maintenance checks and tasks have been completed in line with manufacturers' guidance e.g. bearings. Follow all manufacturers' operator instructions.

You must report any defects to your manager / owner and never tow an unsafe unit. If you hear unexpected noises when towing always pull over and check the unit.

Always ask for advice if you are unsure about any detail on any chipper / trailer.

It's always worth having a grease gun as well as a small socket set and oil spill kit.

When in use and on a road side, ensure all New Roads and Streetworks Regulations COP (the red book) and Chapter 8 practices are in place and the correct clearances are in place to protect the public.

Driving:

- Drive at a speed that is suitable for the load and conditions of traffic and weather.
- Regularly check the chipper in your mirrors to make sure it's tyres remain pressurised, the connection to the hitch is secure and it's not swaying.
- Slow down gently and brake softly which will help to avoid swerving, jack knifing.
- When reversing it is advisable to have a look out / banksman.
- If the chipper does start to sway or snake, slow down. Never brake hard. Ease off the accelerator and allow any snaking to stop. Gentle stop the vehicle if safe and required.
- Observe the speed limits for vehicles towing attachments which are 30mph in built up areas, 50mph on single carriageways and 60mph on dual carriageways and motorways. Always observe the length of your outfit and take this into account when cornering.