
Transport for NSW

Caravan Safety



Introduction and overview

This brochure provides safety information for drivers towing a caravan. It includes information on safe loading, safe towing practices and a checklist that you should use each time you tow your caravan.

Road rules for caravans

- If you cannot see down the length of your caravan when sitting in the drivers seat, you must have extended mirrors
- It is illegal to ride in a caravan when it is being towed
- It is illegal for learner and provisional drivers or riders to tow a caravan
- Towing more than one trailer at a time is illegal
- It is illegal to exceed your vehicle's GVM, your caravan's ATM and the combined GCM.

Some laws vary in different states and territories. If you are travelling interstate with your caravan, check individual State or Territory regulations before you leave.

Safe loading

Loading your caravan correctly is vital to ensure a safe trip. An incorrectly loaded caravan can lead to snaking, swaying or loss of control of your caravan and vehicle.

When loading your caravan, make sure that the heaviest items are packed low and centred over the caravan's wheel axles and the lightest items are packed up high and distributed across the vehicle.

The loaded mass of your caravan must not exceed any of the following:

- Rated capacity of the towbar and tow coupling.
- Maximum towing capacity of the vehicle (GCM).
- Maximum fully loaded carrying capacity of the caravan (ATM).
- Maximum fully rated carrying capacity of the tyres.

It is both unsafe and illegal to overload your caravan, so it is important to know exactly how much you can pack and make sure that you do not exceed the least of the four carrying capacity criteria. See the Centre for Road Safety website for more details, roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au

Sensible loading

The image below shows how to distribute load weight to improve safety while towing your caravan.



Planning your journey

Make sure you plan your trip to include plenty of breaks to ensure that you are alert, share driving time with another driver, and learn to recognise the early warning signs of fatigue. You should never trust your tired self, and remember that sleep is the only cure for tiredness.

A list of rest stops can be found at roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au. These rest areas are not designated caravan sites. You can stop and have a short rest, but you cannot stay overnight in these areas.

Safe towing

Driving while towing a caravan is a different experience to normal driving. It requires a higher level of knowledge and skill compared to normal driving, a need for greater stopping distances, and consideration of environmental factors such as high winds, wet roads and uneven surfaces.

In the case of towing a single trailer, the driver driving a vehicle, with a gross vehicle mass (GVM) over 4.5 tonnes or a vehicle and trailer combination with a gross combination mass (GCM) over 4.5 tonnes, must not exceed 100 km/h, regardless of the signed posted speed limit. Always drive to the limits set by the manufacturer, as well as road, traffic and weather conditions.



Light
items

Medium
items

Heavy
items

Drive to the conditions

- Keep to hard road surfaces where possible. Wheels that enter a soft edge may cause the caravan to sway leading to possible loss of control
- When travelling downhill, use a lower gear in both manual and automatic vehicles to increase control and reduce brake strain
- If possible, reverse with a person outside the vehicle watching the rear of the caravan from a safe place, to avoid damaging your caravan and protect pedestrians.

Keep a safe speed and distance

- Slow down when travelling over bumpy or unsealed roads or across rail crossings
- Allow for longer stopping distances by always maintaining a greater distance between you and the vehicle in front than you usually would when driving without a caravan
- Allow longer distances for overtaking and joining traffic
- When you can, always stay in the left hand lane to allow following vehicles to overtake, or pull into a left hand lane when one becomes available.

Avoid caravan sway

- Accelerate, brake and steer smoothly and gradually to avoid caravan sway, particularly in wet or slippery conditions
- Gradually reduce speed if the caravan starts to snake or sway – do not slam on the brakes
- When larger vehicles pass you in either direction, slow down to reduce caravan sway caused by wind buffeting.

When you do take a break, take the time to check your caravan safety – check that:

- Couplings and chains are still correctly fastened
- Caravan brakes are operating correctly and wheel bearings are not overheating (high temperatures may indicate sticking brakes or wheel bearing failure)
- Caravan connections are secure and lights are working correctly
- Tyres are inflated to the correct pressure
- All items in the towing vehicle and caravan are securely fastened
- Any roll out awnings are properly locked in travel position
- Side mirrors are angled correctly and give a clear view of the road behind.



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The information in this brochure is intended as a guide only and is subject to change at any time without notice. It does not replace relevant legislation.

For more information visit roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au or contact us at towardszero@transport.nsw.gov.au