

Towing Advice

The principles behind safely towing a caravan or trailer are very simple. The size of what is being towed can affect acceleration and braking, and any manoeuvres that would normally be simple may require more care and attention when towing.

Here are some key safety checks to consider before towing.

The weight of the loaded caravan/trailer must be within the car's towing ability. Your car's towing capacity should be listed in the owner's manual, while a plaque on the towbar should specify its maximum weight.

You should check your vehicle before any trip. Before you tow, make sure that all tyres are inflated to the correct pressure. Make sure that you have a suitable jack and wheel brace in case you get a flat and check your oil and coolant levels.

Consider purchasing extensions for your side-view mirror that will allow you to see past your caravan or trailer.

Make sure that your caravan or trailer has operational taillights, brake lights and indicators.

Safety chains are vital. Anything weighing less than 2.5 tonnes requires one safety chain, while those weighing between 2.5 and 3.5 tonnes must have at least two chains. Ensure that the 'D' shackle that you attach the safety chain to the towbar with has the correct load rating.

Make sure that you are within the permitted dimensions for your vehicle. The law in South Australia states that a load cannot protrude more than 15cm from the side of your trailer and cannot exceed a total width of 2.5m. Lengthways, your vehicle and attachment cannot measure more than 19m. If any items stick out more than 1.2m from the back, you will need to fasten a brightly coloured flag that is highly visible during the day or night.

Try to keep the caravan or trailer as light as possible with heavier items low down and close to the axle.

Some manufacturers place a recommended towing speed in their owner's manual. Drivers should be aware of and comply with that recommendation.

When towing, remember that your vehicle may behave slightly different compared to normal.

When taking a corner, you will need to accommodate the extra length of what you are towing; so take a wider path

In South Australia vehicles that are towing are permitted to adhere to all speed limits. However, this may change when travelling interstate. For instance, the maximum speed allowed for a vehicle towing a trailer or caravan in Western Australia and Tasmania is 100km/h.

The extra weight that is placed upon a vehicle when towing makes it harder to accelerate and brake. Try to avoid braking sharply as this can cause instability

When being overtaken this can cause sway, especially if the vehicle that is doing the overtaking is a large heavy vehicle. Try to be aware of any vehicles that are going to overtake you and where possible give them as much room as you can. Use slow vehicle turnouts and other opportunities to let quicker vehicles pass.

If you are planning a long journey, ensure that you allocate enough time to take a break. You should aim to take at least a 20-minute break for every 2 hours of driving.

Drivers need to be aware that their Class C licence will only cover them if the total weight or GVM (Gross Vehicle Mass) of the tow vehicle is 4.5 tonnes or less. Larger 4WD vehicles that are over 4.5 tonnes GVM will require the driver to obtain an LR licence.