

Rider Education Report

This month as promised, here are some tips for the safe use of a trailer. First, we need to make sure our equipment is correct.

TRAILER HOOKUP CHECKLIST

- ◇ Trailer ball matches coupler size
- ◇ Trailer ball properly torqued on the ball mount
- ◇ Ball mount secured in the receiver tube with a hitch pin or lock
- ◇ Trailer ball fully engaged in the coupler
- ◇ Trailer is level and inline with the tow vehicle
- ◇ Coupler latch in the locked position and secured with a safety pin or lock
- ◇ Trailer jack fully retracted
- ◇ Electrical plug firmly inserted in the vehicle socket
- ◇ Safety chains hooked up and crisscrossed underneath the coupler
- ◇ Running lights, brake lights and turn signals working on the vehicle and trailer

Second, loading and weight distribution is important. The simple rule to follow is to place 60% of the weight in front of the axle and 40% behind. An unbalanced trailer can lead to trailer sway and other dangers while driving. Plan to load from the center of the trailer towards both ends, with the heaviest items more towards the front. This will help to decrease the rotational inertia about the vertical axis and keep the trailer more stable. Don't get too worried about the distribution of weight but do be conscious of it. Even distribution of the load usually works just fine. Try to keep the load low and flat, with heavier items on the bottom, and lighter ones on top. A lower center of mass is always better. A tall load will need more care in corners, and slower speeds are recommended for trailers with a high center of mass. Keeping the load generally centered left to right in the trailer is also recommended. It may be necessary to use cargo dividers, straps, or empty containers to keep items from shifting during travel.

Once everything is loaded, recheck your tongue weight. Be sure that it does not exceed the rating of your hitch, and that it does not overload your tow vehicle. Then take it for a test ride, and if anything feels strange, stop and reposition things as necessary. Be aware of the effects of increased speed on the trailer handling. The increased momentum will require more effort to steer your rig down the road.

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