

HORSE 22

Trailer safety



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Trailer safety

If you betray a horse's trust in you by not ensuring your trailer is safe, the consequences can be devastating.

A horse will suffer terrible injuries if it goes through the floor or ramp, even if the trailer is parked, and faces risk of death if mechanical failure causes an accident.

In addition, an out of control car and trailer have the weight to do a lot of damage so this risks the lives of everyone in and around the car. Yet the UK has no trailer MOT test, so making sure a trailer is safe and legal is entirely down to the owner of the trailer. If you own a horse trailer, here is what you need to check:

Floors and Ramps

Every few months lift the rubber matting and check the floors from above and below for damage and rot, using a screwdriver to prod suspect areas. While the mats are out, disinfect the floor and let it dry before replacing them.

Aluminium floors, though likely to be more resistant to deterioration than wood, still need checking and cleaning because they can also be damaged by horses kicking and may eventually corrode.

Never use a trailer with a suspect floor. Get the floor professionally replaced; horses put immense stress on it, so the correct materials must be used. Do not

use a trailer without rubber matting because it helps spread the load and absorb impact.

Check ramps for damage and rot and if they start to flex more than they used to, have them replaced. Oil all hinges and latches.

Tyres

Correct tyre pressure on both car and trailer, are vital to outfit stability, so before every trip check them when cold with a pressure gauge. Car tyres should be the pressure recommended by the car manufacturer for towing or a full load. If neither is recommended, try inflating rear tyres to 3psi above normal as long as it is within the maximum shown on the tyre wall. An electric tyre pump plugged into the car's cigarette lighter makes it easier.

While doing that, check for wear and damage. Tyres must have a minimum of 1.6mm of tread over the central 75 per cent of the tread width for the whole circumference. However, trailer tyres often



perish long before tread wears out, so look for the telltale sidewall cracks. Bulges caused by air getting between layers of the damaged tyre, and cuts deep enough to show the reinforcing both indicate a potential blow out.

Never use an inner tube in a trailer wheel, because they deflate suddenly when punctured. Ensure replacement tyres have the correct weight rating.

Lights

Trailer rear lights are the same as a car's plus two triangular red reflectors, though there is normally no reversing light and older trailers do not have fog lamps. Trailers must have an illuminated rear numberplate, matching the towcar's, and show two white lights to the front. Regulations cover the power and position of lights, so do not make any changes without checking. Lights must be clean and undamaged.

When you hitch up, check all the lights work. Always check indicators separately because hazard lights are usually on a separate circuit, so they work when indicators might not, and faults can make opposite car and trailer indicators flash.

Every six months, remove lamp lenses to clean the insides, removing corrosion from bulb contacts, and clean the plug and car socket contacts using a Hella Kleenaplug (from caravan dealers) or fine emery paper. Protect contacts with WD40 spray.

Hitches and towballs

Towballs should be greased before use. Modern trailers have wear indicators in the hitches to warn of towball wear, so check that or get well used towballs measured by either a garage or a caravan or trailer dealer. Worn towballs increase hitch wear and can lead to trailers breaking free.

At least every three months clean dirty grease from the hitch cup with white spirit. When dry, smear clean grease in the cup and moving parts.

Every 3000 miles, use a grease gun to inject grease into the nipples in the drawbar housing behind each hitch. Some trailers also have a nipple underneath on the pivot of the lever that links the brake cables with the end of the drawbar.

Trailers are legally required to have breakaway cables

Brakes and wheel bearings

Trailer brakes need adjusting for wear after 500 miles with a new trailer or new brake shoes, then every 2500 to 3000 miles. You must also check brake shoe wear, usually through holes in the backs of the drums, plugged with plastic bungs. Shoes need replacing when the friction material is down to 1.5mm.

Many modern trailers have sealed for-life wheel bearings, but older ones need bearings regreased and adjusted every two years. The bearings are rings of rollers on which the wheels turn and may seize if not properly lubricated. To see which

bearings your trailer has, carefully remove the cap in the wheel centre and if the nut underneath is castellated, with a pin through the slots, the bearings are the regreasing type.

Your trailer handbook should explain these jobs, as does the Allen Guide to Trailer Maintenance (see Further reading) but if you doubt your ability to do it yourself, use a trailer or caravan dealer. Never work under a trailer supported on a jack or bricks.

Trailers are legally required to have breakaway cables, to apply the brakes if they become unhitched, which must be clipped to a purpose-made towbar ring or other substantial part of the car.

Breakdown cover

Make sure you have breakdown cover for your trailer. Ordinary car breakdown cover excludes recovery of a trailer with horses aboard, so you could be stranded at the side of the road. RAC members can add Horse Trailer Assistance to their

ordinary cover. Equestrian breakdown support is also offered by:

- Equine Rescue Services – 01300 348997, www.equinerescue.co.uk
- The Organisation of Horsebox and Trailer Owners – 01488 657651, www.horsebox-rescue.co.uk.

Further reading

- Your trailer's handbook
- Allen Guide to Trailer Maintenance and the Allen Guide to towing trailers by John Henderson – J A Allen (from bookshops and saddlers)
- The Glovebox guide to Transporting Horses by John Henderson – J A Allen
- Towing and the Law (Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders) by post from Suzanne Leonard, Publications, SMMT, Forbes House, Halkin Street, London SW1X 7DS, or 020 7235 7000
- National Trailer and Towing Association – Guide to Safe & Legal Towing www.ntta.co.uk

Checklist – Regular checks are essential

Every trip

- Tyre pressure and condition
- Lights and indicators working
- No loose or damaged fittings
- Breakaway cable clipped to car

Every three months

- Clean and regrease hitch cup
- Ramp condition
- Clean and examine wooden floor

Every six months

- Clean lights and electrical contacts
- Clean and examine aluminium floors

Every 2500 – 3000 miles

- Put grease in drawbar nipples
- Check brake shoe wear
- Adjust brakes

Every two years

- Grease wheel bearings

Happy, healthy pets

Blue Cross advice leaflets are packed full of top tips to help owners with their pet questions. They cover a wide range of topics, from training a puppy to caring for an older cat. So if you need some support to help you with a pet problem, whether it's about a dog or a degu, we're here for you.

You can read and download our leaflets online at www.bluecross.org.uk

Visit our website to take advantage of all its features, including:

- blog posts from Blue Cross experts
- latest news
- events near you
- pets needing new homes

Or you can join in the chat on our online communities. Find us on Twitter and Facebook – just search for Blue Cross.



Blue Cross

Blue Cross has been dedicated to the health and happiness of pets since 1897. Abandoned or unwanted, ill or injured – we do what's needed to give every pet a healthy life in a happy home. We're a charity, so the more help you give us, the more help we can give pets.

How you can help

Blue Cross doesn't receive any government funding, so we rely on the generosity of pet lovers like you. There are lots of ways you can help the sick, injured and abandoned pets in our care, like making a donation, fundraising for us or leaving us a legacy.

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