

Ten Tips For Towing A Trailer

(NAPSA)—Towing a trailer may be one of driving's most stressful situations.

"It's not easy to maneuver around corners and change lanes with that extra length behind your vehicle," says Sue Elliott-Sink, director of content for enjoythedrive.com, the consumer Web site from SEMA, the Specialty Equipment Market Association. "Backing up also can be challenging. Plus, stopping—and towing up a steep hill—can be tough on your tow vehicle."

Whether you tow a boat, horses, a race car, snowmobiles, motorcycles, dirt bikes or personal watercraft, a variety of auto accessories can make towing less nerve-wracking. Here are 10 towing tips from www.enjoythedrive.com.

1. Don't tow too much weight.

Pulling too much weight can be dangerous. The owner's manual lists your vehicle's towing capacity, including the maximum gross trailer weight (GTW) and tongue weight (TW) it can handle. Take these figures seriously—and make sure your trailer hitch can accommodate your loaded trailer, too.

2. Run the right wheels and tires.

Most people don't realize that wheels and tires have a load rating. If you've changed wheels and tires or your tow vehicle or trailer, make sure the new equipment can handle the load.

3. Line up the hitch and trailer tongue.

If you drive a tall vehicle, you may need a "drop hitch" (or draw bar) to properly align your tow vehicle and trailer. If you drive a vehicle that's much lower than your trailer, you may need a "raised hitch." If you have more than one tow vehicle or more than one trailer, an adjustable hitch will raise or drop as needed.

4. Get some help hooking up.

It's not easy lining up your tow vehicle and trailer, especially without another person helping. Fortunately, some hitches swivel and telescope, so you only have to get close to the trailer's tongue to hook up. Plus, backup flood lights make hooking up easier at night.

5. Get rid of blind spots.

Your vehicle's outside mirrors



A variety of auto accessories can make towing less stressful, so you can relax and enjoy your leisure time.

may not be adequate for towing, since you need to see around and beside a much larger area. To supplement them, you can attach a set of towing mirrors—or you can replace the original mirrors with extendable towing mirrors. Heated towing mirrors also make it easier to see in inclement weather.

6. Make backing up easier.

Backing up with a trailer in tow takes some skill. Good mirrors make the job easier—and so does a backup warning system on your trailer. This system beeps or lights up a dashboard-mounted display as you get closer to an obstacle. (If you tow a boat trailer, be sure to get a system designed for marine use.)

7. Add more power.

If big-rig trucks pass you when you're towing uphill, you need more power. Accessories designed specifically to enhance the towing ability of a car, pickup, SUV or van range from a simple high-flow air filter or high-performance exhaust system to a complete supercharger kit.

8. Make stopping easier.

Your car or truck does most—if not all—of the stopping when you're towing. An upgrade to high-performance brakes will reduce stopping distances and reduce brake fade, so you don't have to "white-knuckle it" down a steep grade or a winding road.

If your trailer and its load weigh more than 3,500 pounds, you also need trailer brakes, and a wiring kit and brake controller. The controller allows you to set how much braking the trailer does

and how much the tow vehicle does, and it provides extra control when towing down a steep hill.

9. Avoid overheating.

Towing puts extra strain on an engine and transmission, which can cause overheating and permanent damage. A transmission cooler and an auxiliary engine cooler or fan are wise investments.

10. Keep your tow vehicle level.

When you're towing, do drivers coming from the other direction flash their brights? Do you sometimes have trouble steering? Does your tow vehicle sit nose high?

If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, you could be towing too heavy a load, or using the wrong hitch. But more likely, your tow vehicle's suspension is begging for help.

Most cars and trucks provide a pretty comfortable ride when you're not towing; however, their rear springs may not be stiff enough to handle a heavy trailer. A set of helper springs can solve the problem without affecting your non-towing ride quality. Adjustable shock absorbers also can be set for towing stability, then reset for tow-free comfort.

For more information on towing, including definitions of the terms used in this article, visit www.enjoythedrive.com. The Web site includes information on hundreds of the latest automotive accessories, as well as links to product manufacturers' and retailers' Web sites. If you don't have Internet access, write to SEMA, Towing, 1575 S. Valley Vista Dr., Diamond Bar, CA 91765-3914.