



**ncc** | leisure vehicles  
holiday & park homes  
holiday & residential parks

leading & promoting the industry

## **THE CARAVAN AND TOWING GUIDE**

Learn more about buying, towing, maintaining –  
and enjoying your caravan

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leading & promoting the industry

## ABOUT US

The NCC (National Caravan Council) is a not-for-profit trade association that champions the leisure vehicle and parks industry. It was founded in 1939 and is now the leading organisation representing a wide range of members including holiday and residential parks, manufacturers, dealerships, service providers and suppliers in an industry that contributes billions of pounds to the UK economy every year.

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## OUR THANKS

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## Congratulations – it looks like you're ready for an exciting step into a world of travel and adventure!

Owning a touring caravan means having the freedom to go where you want, when you want - whether that's taking in the sites on a lengthy trek across the country or a short break to recharge the batteries - and it's a wonderful way to explore and enjoy the great outdoors.

Better still, caravan trips and holidays are a great - and great value - way to take a family away, escape as a couple, reconnect with friends, or enjoy some peace and quiet on your own. And you can even bring your pets along too!

This guide has been put together by experts and contains all the information you need whether you are new to the pastime or an experienced caravanner.

We consider how to choose a caravan that's right for you, and offer

tips and advice on everything from buying and towing to hitching and pitching - in fact all you need to make the most of this fabulous way to have a holiday. You'll be ready for the road when you first hitch-up to enjoy the many adventures ahead of you.

### Why a caravan?

Whether you want to travel alone, as a couple, a family with children or grandchildren - and not forgetting the pets - a touring caravan is the perfect companion.

Caravans come in a multitude of layout options, whether you want extra sleeping or living space, fixed beds, a toilet at the end of the 'van, full shower facilities or mid-placed kitchens. There is a wide variety of styles and specifications too.

# DEFINITIONS

## THE BENEFITS OF A TOURING CARAVAN

- ✔ There's room for all the family (or the grandkids).
- ✔ You can take your home comforts.
- ✔ It's great value for money compared to a hotel.
- ✔ You're self-contained with your own kitchen and washroom.
- ✔ Once pitched up on site you can unhook the car to head off and explore.

## TYPES OF CARAVANS

There's a range of caravan types to consider when buying for the first time or if you're changing your unit.

### Traditional touring caravan

The majority of caravans have a single axle and are between 3 and 6.5 metres long inside. Depending on layout, they can sleep between two and six people. They normally have a washroom with a toilet, basin and shower, and a kitchen area equipped with a sink, hob, work surfaces and other necessities.

### Twin axle caravan

Larger and heavier caravans may be fitted with twin axles. This makes them more stable and easier to tow on the road, but more difficult to manoeuvre when you're pitching on site or returning them to storage. You'll probably also need a large tow car.

### Teardrop trailer

These eye-catching little trailers are popular with people who want to tow with a small vehicle. Classic cars and sports cars can typically tow them.

Accommodation is normally basic with a double bed covering the entire floor. Some have simple cooking facilities and room to carry kit and equipment. Enjoying outdoor living is a key part of these compact units.

### Pop-top caravan

Pop-tops use a lifting roof to give standing headroom in an otherwise small caravan. This means the caravan has less frontal area when towing and is better for the fuel consumption of your tow car compared to a larger caravan. They can also be stored undercover in a conventional height garage at home.

### Folding caravan

Small folding caravans unfold from a low trailer into a full height, fully-equipped caravan. They are easier to store and tow, and are erected on site every time you pitch up.



## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A CARAVAN

- ✔ If you aren't planning to change your car, check what size caravan you are legally and safely able to tow, using the NCC Tow Check service: [www.towcheck.co.uk](http://www.towcheck.co.uk).
- ✔ If you're planning to change your car, check out the Tow Car Awards ([www.thetowcarawards.com](http://www.thetowcarawards.com)) or the Tow Car of the Year Awards ([www.caravanclub.co.uk/whats-on/awards/towcar-of-the-year](http://www.caravanclub.co.uk/whats-on/awards/towcar-of-the-year)) to find the latest models that have been put through their paces by experts.
- ✔ How many people will typically be travelling?
- ✔ How much space do you need? Bear in mind you can greatly expand the space with an awning or pup tent.
- ✔ Do you prefer a fixed bed or one that folds away?
- ✔ What facilities do you need onboard? Remember, you might be staying at holiday parks with full facilities or at small campsites that only offer drinking water and waste disposal.

## WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN BUYING A CARAVAN

- ✔ Decide if you want to buy new or second-hand.
- ✔ Think about lay-out (there are many) and how you plan to use your new 'van.
- ✔ Pick up a copy of a caravan magazine - there are a number on the market - to get the latest reviews, advice and inspiration.

- ✔ Compare prices from reliable sources and set a price range.
- ✔ Visit [www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk](http://www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk) which is powered by the NCC for a complete directory of caravans. The advanced filter allows you to compare vehicles with the features that are most suited to you.
- ✔ Buy from a reputable dealer - look out for dealerships that are NCC members, which follow best practice guidance.
- ✔ Make sure it has the EN 1645 badge of approval for caravans. The NCC Approved badge is the sign that when a vehicle was built, it complied with all relevant European and UK health and safety standards, industry codes of practice and UK regulations. Some of these are not required in countries outside the UK, so you need to be sure that your vehicle is safe - look for the badge.
- ✔ Look out for consumer shows, which are held around the UK and offer the chance to compare different models and layouts in one place. NCC Events runs two national shows at the NEC Birmingham - the Caravan, Camping and Motorhome Show in February ([www.ccmshow.co.uk](http://www.ccmshow.co.uk)) and the Motorhome and Caravan Show in October ([www.mcshow.co.uk](http://www.mcshow.co.uk)). They are also great places to pick up show deals and buy accessories. Visit their websites for dates and details.



## TOP TIPS WHEN GETTING STARTED

Towing isn't a difficult skill to acquire but you'll learn, and become confident, faster by taking a manoeuvring course such as those offered by the Caravan and Motorhome Club or the Camping and Caravanning Club.

- ✔ Make sure you know the weight limit and payload (the maximum weight of items that can be safely carried in your caravan) and don't overload it.
- ✔ Be aware that different speed limits apply on certain roads when towing a caravan.
- ✔ Don't go too far on your first trip. Make it a trial run to familiarise yourself and you can easily pop home if you forget anything! Some dealerships even offer you the chance to pitch overnight on their premises in small campsite areas so you have help and advice on your own doorstep.

- See facing page where our technical section starts to ensure you have all the information you need to be safe, legal and ready for the road when setting off.

## MAINTENANCE BASICS

We'll discuss the more technical aspects of owning and using your caravan later in this guide, but remember it's crucial to:

- ✔ Make sure to get your unit serviced annually by a reputable dealer from the Approved Workshop Scheme ([www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk)).
- ✔ Prepare your unit for winter when it's less likely to be in use.
- ✔ Choose recommended products for cleaning.
- ✔ Ensure you store your unit in a safe place, and take appropriate security measures.

## OTHER TOP TIPS

It's a great idea to join a touring or camping organisation as you'll be in the company of fellow caravanners. There are a number of organisations such as the Caravan and Motorhome Club or the Camping and Caravanning Club. Both offer high-quality campsites across the UK, as well as access to smaller member-only sites, and a range of benefits such as technical help, access to social events, and product discounts plus inspiration for your camping trips through their magazines and websites.

When selecting your holiday park or campsite, consider what facilities you want on site. This could be a club house for entertainment plus a bar, and a shop or restaurant. What's the quality of the facilities blocks like (online reviews can help here)? Do you want a family-friendly site or a tucked out of the way location to get back to nature on a site with minimal facilities? If you enjoy pastimes like mountain biking, does the holiday park or campsite have a bike cleaning station? Some sites will even have dog-cleaning facilities so your pet can be mud-free when heading back to your 'van.

And remember to plan your journey to the site because access roads can get narrow in places and you are towing a caravan after all. Holiday parks and campsites will often recommend the best route to the site when towing, available on its website.

## THE TECHNICAL ADVICE SECTION

Our guide applies to all trailer caravans:

- With a maximum laden weight not exceeding 3,500kg.
- Overall width not exceeding 2.55m.
- Overall body length not exceeding 7m, excluding drawbar and coupling.

This is the maximum size of caravan that can be legally towed by a motor vehicle whose maximum gross vehicle weight is no more than 3,500kg.

Although there are caravans in use whose length is greater than 7m, these can only be towed by vehicles with a weight greater than 3,500kg, typically commercial vehicles.

Find out more about touring caravan payloads and other helpful information at [www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk/get-started](http://www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk/get-started).

Please note for the purposes of this guide, mass and weight are interchangeable terms.

In our technical section, we provide straightforward advice on:

- The safe matching of caravans to cars.
- The calculation of the ratio of caravan weight to car weight for safe towing.
- What you need to take into account before towing a caravan.
- Good driving techniques so you can tow with confidence.
- The legal aspects to towing a caravan.

# THE CARAVAN

The masses defined below are in accordance with European Regulations for masses and dimensions of vehicles and will generally be stated in a caravan's owner's manual

(alternative/previous names of terms are shown in italics).



## Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM)

(*Maximum Authorised Mass*)

This is stated by the caravan manufacturer on the caravan weight plate (normally mounted close to the entrance door but can be mounted anywhere on the external skin though some manufacturers are now mounting them inside the gas locker). This is the absolute maximum weight the caravan must not exceed to be legal on the road and it includes allowances for the user payload, all fluids such as water and personal belongings that you may wish to carry, like clothes and food.

## Mass in Running Order (MRO)

(*Unladen weight*)

This is the mass of the caravan equipped to the manufacturer's standard specification and is stated on the caravan weight plate. From 2011 an NCC Approved caravan will have an allowance in the MRO for basic equipment such as gas bottles and

the electrical hook-up cable. In older caravans, the equipment included in the MRO will be different, so check your handbook for what is included.

The weight of the leisure battery is only included in the caravan's MRO if it was supplied by the caravan manufacturer. Where the leisure battery is supplied by the retailer, the weight of the battery must be taken into account within your payload allowance.

From 2015 the rules changed so that manufacturers can specify how much fresh water they have included in their MRO calculation. This applies not just to storage tanks but to water heaters and associated pipework too. Most manufacturers have elected to choose zero water to be included in their MRO.

The caravan's handbook may explain how the MRO has been calculated.

## User payload

(*Caravan Allowable Payload*)

Payload relates to the weights of all items carried in a caravan and is the allowance you have for:

- Equipment, including any equipment fitted by the dealer - see optional equipment below and personal effects.
- The total of the allowances represents the difference between the **MTPLM** and the **MRO**.

### Optional equipment

These are items made available by the manufacturer over and above the standard specification of the caravan, for example spare wheel, air-conditioning and motor-movers.

### Personal effects

Those items you carry in a caravan and which are not included in the MRO or optional equipment such as leisure battery, clothes, crockery, cooking utensils, bedding, portable TV, portable radio, footwear, books, awning and food. In the UK, the minimum personal effects payload for NCC Approved caravans is calculated from the following formula: **10L + 10N + 50**.

**L** is the body length of the caravan in metres

**N** is the number of berths

The **+ 50** is to take account of items such as cooking equipment, plates and the leisure battery.

**Note:** *Non NCC Approved caravans may not have the additional + 50kgs added to their payload.*

### Actual laden weight

This is the actual weight of the caravan when in use including its optional equipment and personal effects. You need to know this weight because it will determine whether you are legally towing and within your caravan towing experience. Later in this guide we explain how to calculate or otherwise determine the actual weight of the caravan.

### Hitch limit

The maximum vertical static load the towing coupling can bear, stamped on a plate on the coupling. See also the caravan drawbar limit, sometimes printed in the owner's manual.

### Hitch height

The height of the centre of the coupling hitch should lie in the range of 385mm to 455mm above ground level with the caravan laden and floor level front to back.

### Noseweight

This is the downforce the caravan's coupling head imposes on a car's towball, measured by a noseweight gauge - when stationary it should never be greater than the towbar/towball or hitch limit values, whichever is the lower.



# THE CAR

The towing vehicle in this guide is assumed to be a car. The masses defined below will generally be stated in a car owner's manual.

## VIN plate

This is a plate fitted by the car manufacturer to identify the vehicle and stating the vehicle's masses.

## Kerb Weight (KW)

Car manufacturers' definitions vary but in general terms it is the weight of the car in working order (with fuel and fluids). Depending upon the exact definition used by the car manufacturer, this may include a 68kg allowance for the weight of a driver and a 7kg allowance for his luggage, but will not include a weight allowance for passengers or their luggage. Most car manufacturers now include the driver in their KW.

## Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)

*Maximum Permissible Weight (MPW) or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)*

The maximum allowable weight of the car when fully loaded, when towing, which will include the noseweight of the caravan as stated on the car's VIN plate.

## Maximum Towing limit (MTL)

*Maximum Permissible Towing Mass (MPTM), Manufacturer's Braked Towing Limit*

This is the maximum weight of a braked trailer the car is allowed to tow.



## Gross Train Weight (GTW)

The maximum permitted combined mass of the car and trailer as specified by the car manufacturer, which is stated on the car's VIN plate. Usually this is the sum of the Gross Vehicle Weight and Maximum Towing Limit. However, the car manufacturer sometimes restricts the car's capability to carry payload within it (for example seven occupants) while simultaneously towing a heavy trailer or caravan. In such cases, the GTW may be less than the sum of GVW and MTL. The GTW must not be exceeded.



### **Noseweight Limit**

*S-value, Tongue Weight, Tongue Load, Nose Load or Towbar load Limit*

The maximum vertical static load the towbar can support through the towball, which is published by the towbar manufacturer and shown on a plate on the towbar. This may also be known just as the noseweight.

The car manufacturer will also define a limit for maximum vertical static load the car can tolerate, which is usually quoted in the owner's manual. This figure can differ from that marked on the towbar, in which case the lowest value is the limit that must be observed.

### **Towball height**

The height of the centre of the towball should lie in the range of 350mm to 420mm above ground level when the car is on level ground and laden. Most manufacturers define this height with the car at full load, which can mean the towball will sit above this height range at more normal loading conditions.

Note that for cars with dynamic ride height adjustment, the suspension must be at the normal running level before taking a measurement of towball height. Some 4x4 vehicles can be exempt from this requirement and so in these cases you are advised to check with the vehicle manufacturer.

# CALCULATING PAYLOAD

## Calculating payload and actual laden weight

It is recommended you:

- a) Weigh each item before it is placed in the caravan and add the total to the MRO, or
  - b) Take the fully loaded caravan to a public weighbridge, or
  - c) Use a portable weighing scale designed for use with trailers.
- These typically weigh one wheel at a time and then add up the weights.

**Remember:** The weight of the battery, gas cylinders and any manufacturer or dealer options must always be considered. Note an allowance for gas, fluids and the hook up cable is included

in the MRO for caravans manufactured after 2011. For caravans manufactured before then, these items need to be included within your payload. From the 2015 model year, the allowance for water may be set at zero.

Weighbridge information can be found here: [www.gov.uk/find-weighbridge](http://www.gov.uk/find-weighbridge).

**Note:** *Although regularly checked, weighbridges may give varying results as they are calibrated for much heavier vehicles. A public weighbridge operator will give you a written or printed record for each weighing.*

## Calculating the caravan/car weight ratio

$$\frac{\text{The MTPLM of the caravan}}{\text{KW of the car}} \times 100\%$$

### Why is this ratio important?

Because it is used to ensure your fully loaded caravan is appropriate for your towing experience as it has a major influence on towing stability.

### The caravan industry recommends:

For a novice caravanner, ideally, this ratio should not exceed 85%.

For an experienced caravanner the maximum recommended ratio is 100%.

**Remember:** Keep the caravan as light as possible – the lower the weight the better the match – and provided items are stowed properly, the safer it is to tow.

Care must always be taken not to exceed the car's loading and towing limits including the combined MAM, which takes preference over the weight ratios as mentioned above.

# SAFELY MATCHING THE CARAVAN WITH THE CAR

Check your driving licence is suitable for your car and caravan combination (see page 31), and stay safe and legal.

To ensure the combination of car and caravan is legal for use on the public highway you must ensure that:

- Your car's GVW is not exceeded.
- Your caravan's MTPLM is not exceeded.
- The combined laden weight of your car and caravan does not exceed the car's GTW. This figure should also be within the limit specified by your driving licence.

When determining the noseweight ensure the lowest load limit of these three elements is not exceeded:

- The car's towbar and ball, and the car's own noseweight limit.
- The caravan's drawbar limit.
- The caravan hitch coupling.

These limits can usually be found stamped on the towbar and hitch themselves.

Then make sure the caravan noseweight is within the 5% to 7% range of the caravan's laden weight or MTPLM. If the laden weight is not known see pages 8 and 9.

Information on car and caravan limits may be found in the manufacturer's handbook.

## Car and caravan matching

When buying or replacing a caravan or a car, ask yourself: "Can my car tow this caravan safely and legally?"

The NCC's online tool, TowCheck, is an easy-to-use online service that checks your car and caravan combination is safe and that while towing you remain lawful.

Each car and caravan match are produced by a weight calculation that takes into consideration relevant driving licence restrictions and is based on towing expertise.

Visit [www.towcheck.co.uk](http://www.towcheck.co.uk) to do just that.

Dealerships and touring/camping organisations have their own matching systems and can assist with the matching process if help is needed.

# ncc Tow-Check

Match a car and caravan safely & legally

# LOADING A CARAVAN

## Important guidelines

### Never exceed the MTPLM.

Remember the weight of any optional extras that you may have added will need to be considered in your overall weight calculations such as a caravan mover.

Experience shows noseweight in the region of 5% to 7% of the actual laden weight of the caravan is safe and normally achievable. More noseweight is safer still but only if the characteristics of your outfit permit it. Adequate noseweight is essential to ensure good stability for the combination at speeds especially above 50mph.

The way in which the caravan is loaded is critical and will affect your caravan's noseweight. The positioning of items within your caravan may affect its stability and the noseweight applied to the towing vehicle - heavy items placed at the front and rear or stored at height could destabilise the caravan under tow. The safest course is to place heavy items directly on the floor, close to the caravan axle, which will allow



you to achieve the correct noseweight. All loads should be restrained, as loose items within a caravan can move and create an unstable condition.

When loading a twin axle caravan, consideration should be given to the load carried by each axle.

Stability enhancement devices such as a mechanical stabiliser or electronic stability control system should never be used as a remedial measure when a caravan/car combination has poor stability. However, such aids can make a well-balanced caravan/car combination easier to handle on poor roads and in windy conditions.



Mechanical stabiliser



Electronic stabiliser



## Follow these simple steps before each trip

1. Ensure the handbrake of your caravan is fully engaged, the wheels are chocked, and the corner steadies are down.
2. Weigh items before loading to ensure you remain within your payload allowance.
3. Load location:
  - Heavy items (such as your awning) go on the floor directly over the axle/s.
  - Medium weight items, like external furniture, barbecue and water carrier, should be placed on the floor, close to the axle.
  - Only light items should be stored in the overhead lockers.
4. Remember:
  - Fixed beds – if your caravan has a rear fixed bed, do not fill the base with heavy items.
  - Fluids – empty water tanks or containers and the toilet cassette before moving off.
5. Ensure all items are secured to prevent them moving about in transit.
6. When all items are loaded safely, raise the corner steadies, remove any chocks from the wheels and check the noseweight. Use a proprietary noseweight gauge, follow the maker's instruction and ensure the measurement is made at the tow hitch connection point.

7. If the noseweight is not correct then adjust the position of the items within the caravan until you achieve the correct value (you might need to take out some items). Avoid moving heavy items to the front or rear of the caravan to achieve this. Concentrate the load above the axle/s.



Finally, be mindful the weight is distributed evenly in the caravan to ensure each wheel carries approximately the same load.

You are now ready to connect to the car.

# THE TOWBALL ASSEMBLY

Care must be taken when matching the towball type to the coupling head. Generally, it is best to use the towball supplied with the towbar (if the ball is not integrated into the design, as in the case of a swan neck or detachable bar).



However, some caravan coupling heads, like those fitted with AL-KO AKS stabilisers, **MUST** be used with a compatible towball. These are a special AL-KO bolt-on towball that are available from AL-KO or reputable towbar fitters, or with a fixed or removable swan neck-type towbar.

This ensures these relatively large coupling heads can articulate freely without interfering with the neck of the towball. Failure to use the correct towball in these circumstances can lead to towball and coupling damage and potentially cause inadvertent detachment.

## Important information for detachable towballs

If your car is fitted with a detachable towball and you have removed the towball from the connecting socket, you should ensure it is fully engaged, and the lock mechanism has worked

correctly, when you replace it. Ensure the lock is 'set' and key removed.

Ensure any road dirt or debris is cleaned thoroughly from the engagement receptacle prior to refitting and always follow the manufacturer's assembly instructions precisely. Check the ball has fully locked home after refitting. Failure to follow the towball manufacturer's instructions could result in the towball disengaging unexpectedly.

## Hitching and unhitching a caravan

This becomes easier with practice and follow the same routine each time. Check the noseweight of the laden caravan every time you hitch it up and adjust the position of your personal effects if necessary. This may be done by a single person but for safety two people are recommended.

# WHEN HITCHING TO THE CAR

1. **Engage**  
the caravan handbrake.



2. **Chock**  
the caravan wheels  
(particularly if on a  
slope).



3. **Raise**  
the corner steadies.



4. **Lift**  
the caravan front on  
the jockey wheel if  
necessary and check  
the nose weight.



5. **Reverse**  
the car (with assistance)  
up to the caravan  
and engage the car's  
handbrake



**Note:** For your safety,  
you are strongly  
advised not to stand  
between the car and  
the caravan.

6. **Connect**  
the breakaway cable.  
Fix it to designated  
mounting point or loop  
to cable where no point  
is provided.



7. **Align**  
hitch head and lower  
on to ball.



8. **Check  
connection**  
Check the safety  
indicators on hitch.



# WHEN HITCHING TO THE CAR

## 9. Secure the stabiliser

## 10. Raise hitch assembly to check connection

Check the coupling engagement by raising the caravan coupling up using the jockey wheel. The hitch should stay firmly attached to the towball.

## 11. Wind up

Wind the handle upwards until the wheel assembly sits into the cut out of the shaft

## 12. Clamp

Raise the jockey wheel and lock with its clamp, and ensure it does not interfere with the braking system.

## 13. Check

Take the electrical connection cable and check that the plug is clean on the inside.

## 14. Connect

Connect the electrical lead to the tow car socket. This may require an adaptor if using the older 12N/12S standard cable connectors.





### 15. Check

Check all lights, indicators, reversing lights etc on the car and the caravan are working correctly. If necessary, seek assistance to confirm.



### 16. Re-check

Re-check the coupling, breakaway cable and electrical connection(s) before the caravan brake lever is released. If using the AL-KO ATC system, check the indicator light is showing green.



### 17. Collect up

Check the pitch and collect up any chocks and corner steady pads.

### 18. Fit your towing mirrors

Before going out on to the road fit your towing mirrors to both sides of the tow car. The law requires you to be able to see 20m to the rear and 4m width to the rear of the caravan.



### And – just before you leave – remember these additional checks

Walk all around the caravan to ensure all the doors, windows, lockers and roof lights are closed and locked, and the TV aerial mast is retracted. Check that any mains hook-up is disconnected and the gas supply is turned off at the cylinder shut-off valve. Return to the coupling and CHECK AGAIN that the hitch is fully secured, and the breakaway cable is correctly attached.

You can now release the caravan handbrake.



# WHEN UNHITCHING FROM THE CAR



**Note:** If the ground is uneven you may need to level the caravan from side to side using a spirit level or level indicator as a guide. The corner steadies are not intended to level the caravan, and any substantial cross slope may have to be countered using a ramped block under the wheel/s.

1. **Engage** the handbrake on the car and turn off the car's engine.
2. **Engage** the caravan's handbrake and disengage the stabiliser if fitted.
3. **Lower** the caravan jockey wheel.
4. **Clamp** the shaft of the jockey wheel.
5. **Chock** the caravan wheels, particularly if on a slope.
6. **Disconnect** the electrical system (make sure the cable is not left to trail on the ground).
7. **Raise** the front of the caravan on the jockey wheel while releasing the coupling clear of the hitch ball.
8. **Unclip** the breakaway cable and stow carefully (tripping hazard).
9. **Drive** the car away from the caravan (or move the caravan away from the towball).
10. **Use** the jockey wheel to level the caravan front to back.
11. **Lower** the corner steadies, using pads if the ground is not firm.
12. **Remove** the towing mirrors if the car is to be driven while not towing.

# CARAVAN ELECTRICAL CONNECTIONS

Caravans from 2009 are usually fitted with a single 13-pin plug. Earlier caravans may be fitted with two 7-pin plugs (12N and 12S) for attachment to the car.

The important difference with the 13-pin plug, when compared to the old 12N/S type, is the plug has an inner ring assembly that is independent from the outer body.

To remove the 13-pin plug, it is important to rotate the outer body a full 90 degrees anti-clockwise, again until a click is heard or felt before withdrawing the plug from the socket. This will ensure the inner and outer parts of the plug are returned to a locked condition.

## Adaptors

You may need an adaptor, depending on the electrical connectors fitted to your car and caravan. Ensure the cables at the front of the caravan are not so loose as to be able to catch or rub on the ground, nor so tight they become taut when the car and caravan are at an extreme angle to each other. If possible, align the cable/s so they are about 30cm longer than the front of the coupling head on the caravan before attachment.



## ADVICE ON USE OF THE BREAKAWAY CABLE

All trailers with an MTPLM greater than 750kg must be fitted with brakes. Above this limit and below 3,500kg MTPLM, all trailers must also be fitted with a safety device to provide protection in the event of the separation of the main coupling when in motion. A device referred to as a breakaway cable fulfils this requirement and, when fitted to a trailer, its use is mandatory.

The purpose of a breakaway cable is to apply the trailer's brakes on accidental disconnection of the trailer from the towing vehicle, and having done so, to break. This allows the trailer to come to a halt away from the towing vehicle.

**Important:** only use a breakaway cable that is manufactured to the original chassis maker's specification and purchased from a reputable dealer. It is generally constructed using a thin steel cable, normally plastic coated and fitted with a means of connection to the towing vehicle.

The cable and clip(s) should be regularly checked for damage and should be routed directly to the car without loops or kinks and through any guides in the caravan drawbar. Always replace any damaged cable with one of the correct designs to ensure correct function. It should then be determined whether the towbar has a designated attachment point (ie a part specifically designated by its manufacturer as a breakaway cable).

Caravans manufactured after the 1st of January 2018 will be fitted with a breakaway cable designed to be positively attached to the tow bar and not looped around the tow ball. Additionally, these cables can be looped around the tow ball and back on to itself when no attachment point is available.

# CABLE DESIGNED FOR DIRECT ATTACHMENT

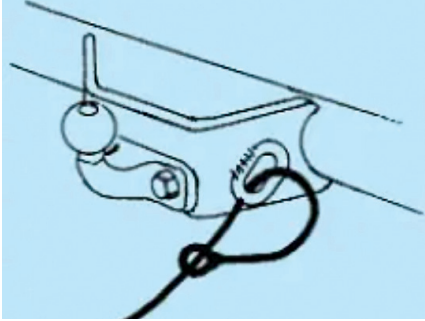


Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

Where a designated attachment point is provided, either pass the cable through the attachment point and clip it back on itself (figure 1) or if the clip is designed to be used in this way and this method is permitted by the trailer manufacturer, attach it directly to the designated point (figure 2). Only attach cables directly to the attachment point that are designed for this purpose.

Where no designated attachment point is provided, the cable should be looped back around the neck of the towball using a single loop only, as shown in figure 3.

In some instances, it may be possible to attach the cable assembly either to a permanent part of the towbar structure, as long as this meets the approval of the towbar manufacturer/supplier, or to an accessory sold for the specific purpose of breakaway cable attachment as shown in figure 4.

# CABLE NOT DESIGNED FOR DIRECT ATTACHMENT

This type of clip must not be directly attached to the tow bar.

When the breakaway cable is attached, it must not snag in use on the trailer coupling head, jockey wheel or any accessories, for example a stabiliser, bumper shield or cycle carrier. There should also be sufficient slack in the cable to allow the towing vehicle and trailer to articulate fully without applying tension to the cable, which could otherwise cause the trailer brakes to be inadvertently applied.

The cable must not be allowed to drag on the ground. If there is too much slack, the cable might then drag on the ground and be weakened to the point it has insufficient strength to apply the brakes in the event of the trailer becoming detached when in



motion. Excess slack may also lead to the cable being caught on an obstacle when in motion, leading to inadvertent application of the trailer brakes.

Care must also be taken to ensure the cable cannot be entangled with the electrical cable.

## Need a service for your tourer or motorhome?

The Approved Workshop Scheme (AWS) is a joint enterprise between the NCC, the Caravan and Motorhome Club and the Camping and Caravanning Club, and is:

✓  
the UK's largest group of independently assessed workshops

✓  
regarded as the benchmark for motorhome and touring caravan servicing

✓  
supported by major UK caravan and motorhome manufacturers for habitation servicing

You can expect a superior level of customer service, technical workmanship and professional judgement with an AWS service.



[approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://approvedworkshops.co.uk)



Find your nearest Approved Workshop today.





The law requires that a motor vehicle must have at least two functional rear-view mirrors. There must be one on the offside and one internally. The internal one must have a clear view as defined below through the caravan, and if not, a nearside mirror must be fitted.

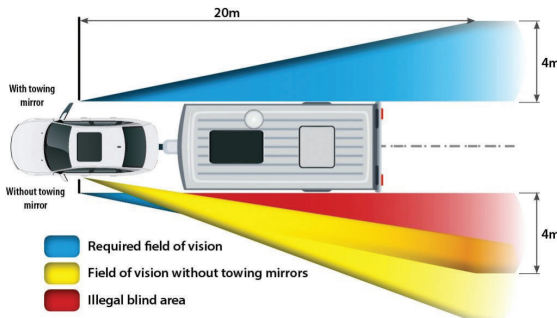
**Note:** When towing a caravan, the law requires the driver to have a clear view down both sides of the trailer and 4m either side at a distance of 20m behind the driver. This not only means a nearside mirror is necessary it also means that, when towing a caravan, towing extension mirrors are almost certainly necessary as most caravans are wider than the towing car.

Unless you are certain your vision meets the legal criteria, extension towing mirrors should always be used for legality and safety when your caravan is coupled up. Remember to remove them when not towing.

There will be some combinations of car and caravan that can satisfy this requirement without extension towing mirrors. However, these are likely to be the exception rather than the rule and most combinations will need extension towing mirrors. Ensure the extension

towing mirrors project no more than 250mm\* beyond the widest part of the caravan. It is preferable the offside extension towing mirror contains a plane flat mirror so you can judge speed and distance correctly. Also, ensure they have safety glass and/or are E-marked, if required. Towing mirrors fitted to cars registered from 26th January 2010 must carry 'E' markings showing compliance with European Directives 2003/97 or 2005/27 or ECE Regulation 46.02. Among other factors, this signifies the glass will not break into large pieces if shattered. Even when 'E' marked mirrors are not mandatory, they are the best choice, as the approval process should confirm many aspects of the quality of their design and performance. Other mirrors may well be a false economy.

\* For non 'E' marked mirrors this limit is 200mm.



# PRACTICAL TOWING GUIDANCE

Experience in towing is not essential for taking up caravanning. Any driver should soon find that towing a caravan is both rewarding and enjoyable. If you are at all unsure, the Caravan and Motorhome Club and the Camping and Caravanning Club offer towing and manoeuvring courses.

Caravans should always be towed either level or slightly nose down. You should always build up speed gradually to get used to the different handling and braking characteristics when towing. A caravan will alter the performance of the car and the driver will need to anticipate potential hazards much earlier. Experience will help the driver to minimise sudden changes in speed or direction, which might otherwise lead to a towing combination becoming unstable and help to create a calmer and safer driving environment.

The speed at which a caravan is towed is very important. The aerodynamic forces that act on the caravan at speed may tend to reduce the noseweight, especially as road speed increases. At a critical speed, any loss of noseweight can cause instability and this could occur at a lower speed when driving into a head wind. Gusting cross winds, exposed bridge sections, valleys and proximity to large goods vehicles may also initiate aerodynamic instability.

Slow down, but do not brake, to return to stability.

## Caravan refrigerator

If you wish to travel with food in the fridge, you must ensure the fridge has been brought down to its operating temperature using either the gas supply or main electrical supply before you depart. The 12V supply provided while towing will maintain the refrigerator at the operating temperature but will not cool the refrigerator down from an ambient temperature to its operating temperature.

If you are towing with a vehicle that has a start/stop feature, this should be turned off during towing to ensure the refrigerator receives a constant voltage when towing.

## UK speed limits mph (km/h)

Type of Vehicle	Built-up areas	Single carriageways	Dual carriageways
Cars, motorcycles, car-derived vans and dual purpose vehicles	30* (48)	60 (96)	70 (112)
Cars, motorcycles, car-derived vans and dual purpose vehicles when towing caravans or trailers	30* (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)

(\*Unless a 20mph speed limit is in place)

Additionally, caravans must not be towed in the outside lane of a three (or more) lane motorway, unless this is unavoidable due to roadworks, accident or obstruction. They may be towed in the outside lane of a dual carriageway with three or more lanes. A good reserve of power is necessary for towing up gradients at altitude. When going uphill, change gear in good time. If your car is running short of power or is behind a slower vehicle, keep well into the nearside and out of the way of other vehicles. Remember that some hills which can be ascended with relative ease often pose an unexpected challenge if you come to a standstill in traffic and then must re-start from scratch.

When going downhill, take extra care to ensure you do not gain speed. This can be avoided by changing down a gear and reducing speed as you approach the slope. Don't leave this gear change too late. Using low gears throughout the descent will reduce the strain on the car's brakes. For automatics, you may need to manually



change to a lower gear in anticipation of the effect caused by the gradient change.

**Note:** *If you plan to tow in countries where long, high-altitude climbs can be anticipated, you should seek expert advice on the suitability of your car for such journeys. Further experience and training should be gained before tackling some of the more difficult elements of towing such as mountain passes or difficult terrain.*

# PRACTICAL TOWING GUIDANCE

## Reversing

Reversing competently comes with practice. Watch for slopes, cambers, potholes and other irregularities that can cause the caravan to deviate.

As with all manoeuvres, the secret is to do things smoothly and at low speed. At night, additional lighting and/or a second pair of eyes may be needed.

Steering a caravan in reverse is counter-intuitive:

1. To cause the rear of the caravan to turn one way, the top of the steering wheel must be moved initially in the opposite direction from how you would normally steer the car.
2. One technique is to simply move the bottom of the steering wheel in the direction you wish the caravan to go.
3. Once the initial turn is established be prepared to ease the steering wheel back again to prevent 'jack-knifing'.



## Road lights

All the road lights fitted on a caravan (including reversing lights) must be clearly visible and in working order.

The car must also have an audible and/or visual warning device linked to the wiring leading to the caravan indicators.

The warning device will indicate whether the caravan direction indicators are working or not. On many modern cars, this function is integrated into the bulb failure warning system.

If you are towing with towing covers fitted you must ensure the road lights are not obstructed.

Attention should be paid when the caravan's road lights are LED to ensure they are compatible with the towing vehicle.

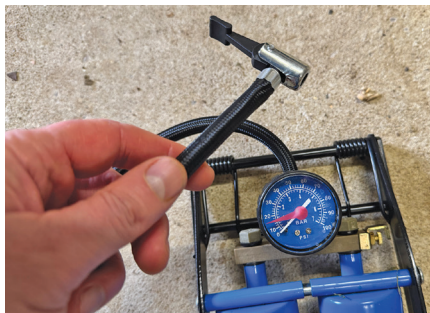
If you are going abroad remember to check the local motoring regulations and obtain headlight beam adaptors where necessary. Further information may be obtained from the car manufacturer.

## Carrying passengers

It is illegal to carry passengers in a caravan when it is being towed.

## Rear number plate requirement

It is a legal requirement to have an approved rear number plate attached to the caravan that matches the tow vehicle, and this must be in the space provided by the caravan manufacturer for such a plate.



## Wheels and tyres

The condition of a caravan's tyres is too often overlooked, particularly the spare. Caravan tyres rarely wear out though the same legal tread depth limit for cars of 1.6mm applies. You should check the tyre sidewalls and treads regularly for cracks, cuts and bulges.

Replace the tyres, including the spare, in accordance with the caravan industry's recommendation, which advises that caravan tyres should ideally be replaced at five years of age and should never be used beyond seven years. When the tyres are replaced ensure you also replace the valves.

**Note:** *It is advisable to cover the wheels with breathable material when the caravan is not in regular use. This will help to protect them from the harmful effects of sunlight.*

Tyres with higher inflation pressures (50 psi and above) may deteriorate faster therefore check them closely, looking for any bulges or signs of cracking.

Take care when replacing tyres. It is important to ensure the replacement tyres have at least the same load rating

as the originals. Tyres suitable for cars may not be suitable for all caravans.

Tyre pressures and wheel nuts or bolts on both the car and caravan should be checked regularly to comply with the manufacturer's recommendations.

Car manufacturers provide recommendations for increased tyre pressures when towing or under heavier loading. Incorrectly inflated car and caravan tyres can initiate instability and premature tyre failure.

**Note:** *To get an accurate reading, ONLY check pressure when a tyre is cold.*

## Tyre markings





## Tyre Pressure Monitoring Systems (TPMS)

TPMS was mandatory on cars from 2014 and it is worth considering such a system for a caravan as this could significantly reduce the risk of having a tyre-related incident on the road. They are able to give an early warning of a problem with either pressure or temperature related to a tyre before it becomes an issue, giving the driver time to stop safely.

They can give early warning of:

- Rapid tyre deflation including blow-outs.
- Tyre wall failure.
- Brake binding/bearing failure.
- ATC/IDC causing excessive dampening due to unstable unit and overloading, which leads to excessive heat being generated.

The sensor can be mounted internally as part of the valve or fitted externally. Some insurance providers will offer a discount for direct reading TPMS use.

Wheel nuts or bolts should be checked with a torque wrench. If under-tightened, a wheel fixing can shake loose, but if it is over-tightened it can deform the seating (ie recess) on the wheel itself, and again, it can shake loose.

A torque wrench ensures the correct tightness is achieved every time. Consult your owner's manual. Mark a line or use reusable indicators to aid detection of bolt movement.

When replacing a wheel, torque the

wheel nuts up in the correct sequence and re-torque after the recommended bedding in distance, typically 30 miles.

If the car suffers a puncture and you do not have a normal size spare, refer to the manufacturer's instructions for the suitability of towing with the compact size spare or run-flat tyre supplied - you may find speed and distance may have to be reduced.

If you must change a wheel at the roadside, position the car and caravan as clear of the carriageway as possible and ensure the hazard warning lights are operating. Do not put yourself at risk, especially if the deflated tyre is on the offside. In many European countries, it is also obligatory to wear a high-visibility safety jacket or waistcoat. This is strongly recommended even if it is not a legal requirement in the UK.





## Driving licence information

### What licence do I need to tow a caravan?

Rest assured there is a leisure vehicle that will suit your car and your own capabilities.

You need to consider whether your driving licence will allow you to tow or drive the leisure vehicle you want. After December 2021 the Government changed the Category B driving licence in Great Britain to allow an entitlement to drive any practical combination of car and caravan, by granting the B+E category licence without any further testing or training, subject only to a generous combined maximum allowable mass (MAM) of the combination of 7,500kg, covering most large cars or 4x4s towing caravans.

When the initial licence expires at

age 70, you must make sure you tick all of the categories that you are currently entitled to, and wish to continue with. If you don't the entitlement will be lost, and can only be re-instated by the holder taking a new test under current qualification rules.

On a Category B licence, you can drive a motor vehicle with a MAM of up to 3,500kg and tow a trailer with that vehicle up to a maximum combined mass of 7,500kg.

### How large a caravan can I tow legally in the UK?

A touring caravan with a maximum laden weight not exceeding 3,500kg, overall width not exceeding 2.55 metres and overall body length not exceeding 7 metres (excluding drawbar and coupling) is the maximum size that can be legally towed by a motor vehicle whose maximum gross vehicle weight is less than 3,500kg. This means most 4x4s and even small/medium sized commercial vans are not allowed to tow caravans that exceed the above dimensions. There are very few such large caravans in the UK, but it is best to be aware of this.

### What if I am towing in Northern Ireland?

The driving licence changes described above were not applied in Northern Ireland. However, there is more information about towing in NI at [www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/adding-higher-categories-driving-licence](http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/adding-higher-categories-driving-licence).



## Touring caravan weight ranges

There is a wide range of caravan models available into the UK and these will have a very varied maximum technical permissible laden mass (MTPLM). You are strongly advised to be aware of the exact weight data for any caravan when considering licence entitlement. This information should be available from your caravan dealer. It will also be found on a plate either next to the caravan entrance door or within the gas cylinder compartment. Please note it is the MTPLM that must be considered when matching a caravan to a towing vehicle.

In many cases, caravans towed by cars should be within the Category B threshold, however it is recommended you always check your eligibility for any given combination using the information from the manufacturer's VIN plate or handbook.

Please note when considering driving licence entitlement, you must also consider the caravan's MTPLM and the car's Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW).

## Caravan storage

When your caravan is not in use it will need to be stored securely. Many keepers are unable to store their caravans at home, so a number of storage providers have established facilities that offer a solution.

When considering the right storage solution it is important to consider the following questions:

- Does your insurance provider offer an insurance benefit for using the site

you are considering?

- What level of security does the site offer?
- How easy is it for you, as the legal keeper, to collect the caravan?
- Are there security systems in place such as CCTV recording good quality images?
- Is there robust boundary fencing system and an equally robust entry/exit gate system?
- Does the operator register you as a customer and keep records of your caravan and contact details?
- Do they check you are the registered keeper of the caravan?

It is also worth establishing whether the site has any history of thefts. Visit [www.police.uk](http://www.police.uk) which allows a check of the postcode area for any crimes that have been reported.

The storage site operator cannot check your caravan every day while it's in storage. If you have an after-theft recovery device/alarm system fitted, then make sure you do not remove the battery while in storage.

Regular checks to the storage site can reassure you that all is well and there have been no weather-related incidents which may affect the condition of your caravan.

## Caravan servicing

It is highly recommended you have your caravan serviced annually by a member of the Approved Workshop Scheme ([www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk)). This service will cover the caravan chassis, wheels, tyres, brakes

and road lights. For electrical and gas installation, the appliances are only tested for operation.

The regular servicing of your caravan will help to ensure it is always fit for the road and safe to tow.

The Electrical and gas safety checks will ensure these systems are still safe for you to use and that there is no gas leaking from the installation but remember this will only confirm that this is the case at the time of the service.

It is important to check all road lights wheels and tyres before every journey.

## Caravan security

Your caravan could be one of the biggest investments you make so it's essential you protect your purchase with security devices. This will provide reassurance you have secured the caravan to a good standard and that you have at least met the requirements of any insurance standard.

When your caravan is either parked at home or stored on a secure storage site, you should ensure security devices are in place to keep your investment safe.

Security experts recommend that a minimum of the following additional devices should be used to give your caravan greater protection:

- A good quality, proprietary brand, hitch lock at least complying with Sold Secure Gold Standard.
- Wheel clamp(s) complying with at least the Sold Secure Gold Standard or, for wheel immobilisers, the Sold Secure Diamond Standard.

- The fitting of a proactive inertia/movement sensor device, monitored by an approved monitoring provider (minimum 12-month subscription).

In addition, you may also consider:

- An after-theft recovery device, linked to the inertia/movement sensor alarm system. These systems communicate with an 'approved' monitoring station that will liaise with police or law enforcement agencies, and they can locate the position of the caravan using a variety of technologies.

Your insurer may advise you with regard to systems or devices that would qualify for an insurance benefit with them. Please note not all insurers recognise the same products for such a benefit.

For an up-to-date listing of Sold Secure approved products visit.

[www.soldsecure.com](http://www.soldsecure.com)



Many leisure vehicles lack clear identity markings, making theft recovery difficult. VIN CHIP enhances security with tamper-evident labels and advanced RFID technology, helping law enforcement verify vehicle identities, even if altered. This added layer of protection helps deter theft and increases recovery rates. Easy to use and highly effective, it's a smart way to safeguard your caravan. Learn more at [www.vinchip.co.uk](http://www.vinchip.co.uk).

# PRACTICAL TOWING GUIDANCE

## Caravan registration: What you need to know

The Central Registration and Identification Scheme (CRiS), accessible at [www.cris.co.uk](http://www.cris.co.uk), is the UK's national database for registering and identifying caravans. It provides a secure system for tracking the registered keeper, history, and status of caravans, including information on theft, outstanding finance and write-offs.

CRiS helps protect both buyers and sellers by offering peace of mind through a transparent record, ensuring that pre-owned caravans are free from legal or financial issues before purchase. The system is vital for recovery in case of theft, and it is highly recommended to check the CRiS database before buying a

second-hand caravan.

In the UK, there is no legal requirement for you to register as the keeper of a caravan (unlike with vehicles that need to be registered with the DVLA). However, some insurers may ask you to provide details about the ownership or keeper status of your caravan when applying for coverage.

CRiS and VIN CHIP have been trusted security and recovery solutions for the leisure vehicle industry since 1998.

Contact CRiS:

[www.cris.co.uk](http://www.cris.co.uk)

Tel: 0203 282 1000

Email: [info@cris.co.uk](mailto:info@cris.co.uk)

Unit 1, 1st Floor, Greenways Business Park,  
Bellinger Close, Chippenham SN15 1BN



# NCC Tow-Check

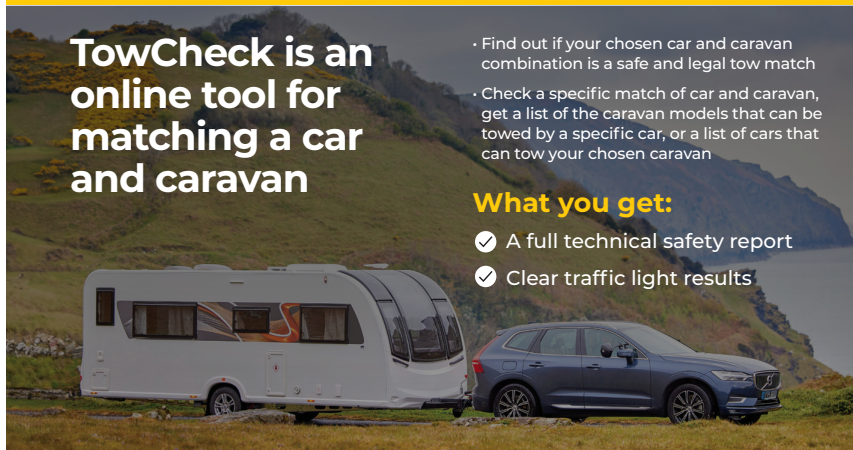
Match a car and caravan safely & legally

## TowCheck is an online tool for matching a car and caravan

- Find out if your chosen car and caravan combination is a safe and legal tow match
- Check a specific match of car and caravan, get a list of the caravan models that can be towed by a specific car, or a list of cars that can tow your chosen caravan

### What you get:

- ✓ A full technical safety report
- ✓ Clear traffic light results



Towcheck.co.uk is the official industry tow-matching service



## Buying a touring caravan?

Buy with confidence  
Look for the NCC badge...



The badge demonstrates the touring caravan is:

- **Safety checked** including gas and electrical installations, furnishings, cooking equipment, ventilation provision, and much more
- **Technically checked** and regularly inspected
- **Compliant** with British and European Standards

The approved manufacturer badge shows the manufacturer has been regularly assessed and accredited by the NCC.



Built with safety and compliance in mind...  
[www.thencc.org.uk](http://www.thencc.org.uk)



**ncc** leisure vehicles  
holiday & park homes  
holiday & residential parks  
leading & promoting the industry





[www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk)



[www.vinchip.co.uk](http://www.vinchip.co.uk)



[www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk](http://www.findmyleisurevehicle.co.uk)



[www.cris.co.uk](http://www.cris.co.uk)



[www.towcheck.co.uk](http://www.towcheck.co.uk)

While every effort has been made to ensure the advice is correct at the time of going to press (February 2025) none of the above accepts any responsibility for the accuracy of the contents of this publication.



leading & promoting the industry

[www.thencc.org.uk](http://www.thencc.org.uk)