MAINTENANCE

Towing

By now you have seen many great articles in this magazine featuring, boats, ATVs, campers, snowmobiles, and more. These vehicles are all great and have something in common. They are pulled to get them where they will be used. Often we make the decision to purchase such a vehicle and overlook what we will be towing with choosing the correct rig will ensure the vehicle you are towing with has a long life, and that you and your family stay safe. All vehicles have tow ratings that should be followed, ignore them and the results could be costly.

Tow Ratings

The number one cause of towing problems is overloading. Tow ratings have been listed by all manufacturers since about 2006 and apply to all models. Your owner's manual should list the ratings for 2006 and newer vehicles. If you have an older vehicle there is a good chance the rating can be found on the internet. Vehicle tow ratings have greatly increased in the past few years with the demand for light trucks. Engine size, weight, axle, brake, and frame size all play a part in how much weight a vehicle can pull. The key is to not exceed your vehicles tow rating. Here is an example of how to calculate how much weight you can safely pull.

Vehicle max tow rating	10,000 lbs
Subtract 25%	2,500 lbs
Maximum weight recommended	7,500 lbs.

Why is the recommended towing weight 25% less than the manufactures specified weight?

If the tow vehicle is rated at 10,000 lbs, and you tow a trailer that is exactly 10,000 lbs on flat ground with no wind, you are at the maximum weight rating already.

Factor in the wind resistance as speed increases, pulling uphill, etc. and now you are exceeding the tow rating. Try to stop that 10,000 lb load and again you are exceeding the safe limits. When you use the 25% rule you will help assure you stay within safe limits. Part of the tow rating is determined by the tow vehicles total weight. A large heavy trailer will push a light vehicle around much easier than a heavy one.

Choosing the right tow vehicle

The first step in choosing a tow vehicle is to know what you are going to pull. Maybe you don't know exactly what you are going to pull but have a general idea such as a small boat or a pair of jet skis. For the everyday recreational weekend tower who will pull two snowmobiles, motorcycles, or jet skis, and the occasional load of junk to the dump, a half ton pickup truck or SUV should suffice. If you are thinking about using a full size car watch your load carefully. Most cars are rated at 1000 lbs maximum towing capacity so check your weight and follow the 75% rule. A full size Buick Park Avenue with a 1000 lb tow rating is not safe to pull a 4000 lb boat, even for short trips. The bodies have no frames and the power trains and braking systems were never designed for such a load.

If you already own a camper or other large heavy trailer and want to upgrade your tow rig start by actually weighing your trailer. Make sure it is fully loaded with all of the equipment you normally carry and if it is a camper remember to fill the water tanks if you travel with them full. Add 25% to the total weight and look for a vehicle that will get the job done.

There are many choices in engines when choosing a tow vehicle. The most popular choice for the everyday commuter who just pulls a couple times a month is a gasoline engine. A gasoline engine will pull the load the vehicle is rated for while providing reasonable unloaded fuel economy. If you tow very heavy loads or tow everyday then you will want the extra power that a diesel can provide. Diesels will get better fuel economy under the same conditions and loads when compared to its gasoline counterpart. Diesels are more expensive to maintain and at the initial purchase but can be well worth the investment if you tow frequently.

Whichever vehicle you choose make sure you follow the recommended maintenance intervals that the manufacturer sets to prevent costly break downs. Towing requires extra attention to fluid types and levels. Towing is one place where additives and special high performance fluids can make a huge difference in vehicle wear.

Hitches and brakes

Don't forget there is more to towing than just being able to pull that load. Consider how you are going to stop it and also keeping it attached to the tow vehicle.

Trailer hitches have maximum weight ratings on them. Do not exceed these limits or the vehicles. If the hitch is rated at 7500 lbs and the truck at 10,000 lbs then you must not exceed 75% of the hitches 7500 lb rating. A second thing to consider with a receiver hitch is the slide in receiver and ball rating. It is common to find a 10,000 lb hitch with a 6000 lb ball and receiver slid into it. The lighter receivers are found at many box stores and are always cheaper than the heavier recommended ones so they end up in places they should not be. Always match the ball and receiver rating to that of the hitch.

Many trailers under 1000 lbs do not have brakes of any kind so keep this in mind when stopping. Medium size trailers are required to have at least a passive surge brake or electric brakes. All large trailers need electric brakes on all axles to stop them. The vehicles brakes alone are not enough to stop the trailer safely without the added assist of the trailer brakes. When a trailer with electric brakes is pulled the tow vehicle will need a trailer brake control installed in the cab.

With a properly equipped tow rig, you will be able to get all of those toys to and from wherever you need to go safely.

For more information on towing see any of the recreational dealers that have been featured in The Motor Market. ™