

Trailer checks and towing in Europe

Contents by Page number

- 1 Introduction and European Law
- 2 European Law continued and useful phrases
- 3 Essential checks before leaving
- 4 Brake fault finding and checking your bearings
- 5 Hints and tips and our contact details

Introduction

At the request of Dr Cheney, I have compiled a brief summary of some of the laws, regarding trailers and towing, that you will encounter as you drive down to Italy. I have also included some checks that would be worth doing before the 'off', and some other useful information (I shall be doing myself out of business!) This is probably not an exhaustive list, and doubtless many of you will be able to add to it (I'm sure Dave would be pleased for any extra help on the matter), but I hope it helps. This is written with some personal experience, as I towed a big trailer to Banjaluka, in Bosnia, a couple of years ago. The only problems I encountered were with the former Yugoslavian states' dubious "taxes" and corrupt border and police officers - not something you will have to worry about! Towing abroad is not as daunting as you may think, and I hope this document is of some assistance.

European Law

I have been reliably informed of the countries that you will be travelling through (apart from any unexpected detours!), and so have limited the list to these.

Country Length	Speed Limits		Max. Comb.
	Road type	MPH	
France*	1	Variable	18 metres
	2	55	
	3	80 (min 49)	
Germany	1	31	18 metres
	2	49	
	3	49	
Switzerland	1	31	18 metres
	2	49	
	3	49	
Italy	1	31	12 metres
	2	49	
	3	62	

Road types: (1) = Built up areas (2) = Main roads (3) = Motorways

*** Driving on 'side lights only' is not permitted in France. Speed limits in wet weather and on dual carriageways will vary.**

1

European Law continued

- **Ensure that you have both parts of your driving licence with you and any insurance documents, necessary for the countries visited. (Due to the Directive 91/439/EC you must have passed your UK driving test prior to 31st December 1996 to retain your entitlement to tow a trailer).**
- **An identification plate for country of origin (GB) must be affixed to the back of the trailer.**
- **Useful spares to take are:**
 - a) **Emergency warning triangle (compulsory)**
 - b) **'Hi-vis' vest (compulsory)**
 - c) **Wheel brace and jack**
 - d) **A spare set of bearings**
 - e) **Spare bulbs**

Useful phrases

I have listed a few useful phrases for driving and towing abroad, some of which, hopefully, you won't need!

French

**We are going to.....
route?**

**Nous allons à
itinéraire?**

Which is the best

Quel est le meilleur

Can you show me on the map?

Pouvez-vous me montrer sur la carte?

How do I get to....?

Pour aller à?

I'm sorry, I didn't know

Je suis désolé, je ne savais pas

I have broken down

Je suis en panne

**Something is wrong with....
take?**

**Il y a un problème avec....
temps?**

How long will it

Ca va prendre combien de

Italian

Can you tell me....?

Potrebbe dirmi....?

I'm lost!

Mi sono perso/persa!

Trailer
Il rimorchio

How do I get to....?
Puo dirmi come andare a....?

There is something wrong with the.... take?

C'e qualcosa che non va nel....

How long will it

Quanto tempo ci vorra?

Where can I park? here?

Dove posso parcheggiare?
rimorchio qui?

Can we park the trailer

Possiamo parcheggiare il

2

Essential checks before leaving, and the correct method for bribing officers of the Gendarmes and La Polizia Italiana*

Things to check before leaving

1. Lighting board. Fit the 7 pin plug into the socket of your towing vehicle and test the function of each of the lights systematically. Check that all of the lenses are in the correct position and not damaged. You must have red, reflective triangles fitted to the lighting board. It's also worth giving the plug a squirt of WD40.
2. Wheels and tyres. Inspect the tyres for wear and damage. Inspect the wheel rims for damage due to 'kerbing'. Check the tyre pressures (65 psi). Ensure the wheel nuts are tight. SB3 trailers generally have four M12 bolts holding the wheel to the drum. These should be tightened to a torque setting of 88Nm.
3. Bearings. See Page 4 for bearing checks.
4. Brakes. Check the efficiency of your handbrake. It's highly enjoyable (on my part anyway) to watch people being dragged down a slipway, on their bottoms, whilst trying in vain to stop their entire trailer and sailing craft ending up in the drink. Anyone who uses Warsash slip will know that launching and recovering from there, especially on a weekend, has become a spectator sport. Don't be the one sitting in The Rising Sun (PH) with a wet seat and a grumpy face. See Page 4 for brake 'fault finding'.
5. Coupling. Check all the securing bolts are tight (there's usually four- one in each corner of the delta shape base that fits to the chassis). Check that your breakaway cable is in good condition, and free of any kinks or abrasions. Breakaway cables are a legal requirement on braked trailers. Lift the coupling head up and down, checking for any excessive movement. With the handbrake on, or the wheels chocked, push the coupling head in to the body, compressing the damper inside the drawbar. It may take some effort, but should compress evenly. When you release it the head and

shaft should return out of the body at a slow, but steady, rate. If it does not return, it may be possible that the damper will need replacing. If it doesn't move in the first instance, and seems solid, it's possible that the shaft has seized in the coupling. This only ever happens in two instances; 1) lack of maintenance; 2) the coupling shaft has been bent. This can end up being very expensive to rectify (please feel free to ask Mr. Cheney of his experience). If you don't own a grease gun – go and buy one. You can get them from Halfords, or an equivalent, and they cost approximately £15.00. A worthwhile investment. You will find two grease nipples on top of the coupling; give them half-a-dozen good squirts with the gun. There's also one hiding under the coupling, on the handbrake linkages, this is often overlooked – make sure you apply grease to this one too.

6. Chassis and mounted parts. Check the chassis is in good condition and does not have any holes in the box section, or cracks at any of the load-bearing points. Check that the mudguards are in good condition and that they are securely mounted to the trailer.
7. Load restraint. Finally, check that your boat is securely strapped to the trailer. Do not make the age-old mistake of relying on the winch strap to hold the bow of the boat on to the trailer. Tie it down independently. Check the winch strap is not frayed, and is up to the job of launching and recovering for you, if you are not craning in and out the water.

***Some of this subtitle may not be true.....**

3

Brake fault finding and checking your bearings

The bane of most trailer owners' lives is their brakes. This is a quick list of common faults and their possible reasons.

Fault Finding - Brakes

Fault

Possible Cause

Overheating

Shoes incorrectly adjusted

Handbrake not releasing properly or incorrectly adjusted
 Pull rods not returning freely
 Brake cables not returning freely
 Weak or broken carrier or pull-off spring
 Expander assembly binding or seized
 Bowden cables seized

Brakes not Working / Stuck on	Shoes incorrectly adjusted Glazed brake linings Scored or rusty brake drum surface caused through lack of use Bowden cables seized
Excessive handbrake travel	Shoes incorrectly adjusted Handbrake incorrectly adjusted Bowden cables incorrectly adjusted
Excessive brake shoe wear	Weak or broken carrier or pull-off spring Badly scored brake drum

Checking wheel bearings

It's useful to be able to check the state of your own bearings – something that you should do more often if the trailer is used for launching and recovering. This is a summary of what you should do and look for. However, if you're still uncertain as to the condition, after running through the below, then please call me and I'll be happy to help.

- a) With your hands 180 degrees apart on the tyre, try and rock the wheel back and forth. If there is excessive movement (end float on taper roller bearings is usually only 1mm [.004"]) then the bearings need adjusting.
- b) With the wheel raised off the ground (use an appropriate jack on a flat surface) spin the wheel in a forward rotation, if there is a loud rumbling noise from the bearings they will definitely need greasing, and possibly changing.
- c) Remove hub/dust cap to reveal castle nut
- d) If you have not encountered the problems detailed in 'a' and 'b' and the grease looks in good condition just apply a little more with a pressurised grease gun
- e) If the grease is dirty or emulsified then it would be appropriate to strip the bearing and re-pack with new grease
- f) Check each bearing in turn and ensure when finished that the hub/dust caps are properly replaced

Useful hints and tips

Some hubs have a grease nipple, which facilitates direct access to the rear bearing. If fitted pack with grease.

Always let bearings and hubs cool down before immersing in water. If you do not the bearings could be damaged, but also, the difference in temperature will form a vacuum inside the hub, sucking water in.

Try and rinse your hubs and braking system through with fresh water after every launch and recovery. 'Flush kits' are excellent for this. Alternatively, an easy way of gaining access to the brakes is by removing one wheel bolt and putting the hose up against the hole - it will flood the brakes with fresh water. Remember to put it back and torque it up afterwards!

'Copper slip' is an excellent barrier against salt water and helps prevent brake seizure. Apply it to all moving parts (including return springs) inside your hub, taking care not to get any on the brake linings.

An extra spring fitted between the brake compensator and anchor plate will greatly help the return of the Bowden cables.

A small pinhole drilled in the side of your hub/dust cap will help disperse the water that accumulates there. The centrifugal force that is generated by the rotation of the wheel will force the water up the sides of the dust cap and out of the hole. Be sure to keep it clear of any grease, as it will block the hole.

Before fitting new Bowden cables it can sometimes be worth pouring melted grease down the inside of the sleeve, as this will coat the steel cable inside - prolonging their life. An alternative to grease is WD40, or an equivalent.

When storing the trailer, do not leave the handbrake on, as this will cause, over time, the brakes to bind to the drums.

Compass Trailers

Compass Trailers offers a mobile trailer servicing facility. We service trailers on site (home, yard or work etc.). There is no requirement for the boat to be removed from the trailer, negating the need for you to arrange mooring / crane hire etc.

If you have any other questions, feel free to call me.

Tel. 07921 853190 e-mail:
mail@compasstrailers.com

