

Technical Notes

Trailer Talk by Paul Rydning

One of the most difficult decisions we need to make concerning a restoration project is how we will transport our newly finished pride and joy to the next Grand Classic or CARavan. Some of us plan to drive our car to all events. Others will ship their car by commercial auto transport. But, for most of us, the answer will be to buy a tow vehicle and trailer.

To make this an enjoyable and less stressful task we need to consider several factors. First, we need to ask if we intend to transport a Pebble Beach Concours level restored car—which will almost likely never be driven except from the trailer to the show field. If this is the case you will need a well built enclosed trailer tall enough at the ramp door (2" more than your actual car height), wide enough to allow you to enter and exit your car (102" wide), and four feet (4 ft.) longer on the floor than the actual measurement of your car from bumper to bumper. This added length will allow for a tie down area and storage of spare parts, etc. that need to travel with you.

You want to have a side door towards the front of the trailer, and a rear ramp door strong enough to support your car. Look for a trailer which does not use exposed cables to assist in lifting the rear door. These cables often are hooked in the front bumper when unloading and can cause serious damage to a car. You may also wish to have an electric winch system to load your car if it is not running, and you might want an electric jack to allow you to easily unhook your trailer even when it is loaded.

Finally, you need to specify the load capacity and type of construction of the axles. To do this properly you need to know the actual weight of your car. This is perhaps the most important aspect of selecting a trailer as the result of under specifying the weight can be dangerous to you and others on the road. I strongly

recommend that you have your car weighed on a truck scale to know this actual weight. I have found that the difference between the factory stated weight and the actual weight can be as much as 2,000 pounds on a large Full Classic[®]. Also include the total weight of spares, suitcases, trailer spare tire, and any other material you may plan to carry to arrive at an actual estimate of your load. I have found that in almost all cases the 7,000 pound axles are too small for my planned load. A 10,000 pound axle trailer is better.

The axles selected should always be of the Dexter or Tor-flex type. These provide better ride and control than the older leaf spring design. The 10,000 pound axle should be equipped with 16" truck type wheels with at least load range D trailer tires. I strongly recommend the tire inflation level be at the maximum recommended by the tire manufacturer as found on the tire. Using lower tire pressure has resulted in early tire failure and I think that the small penalty paid in rougher riding is worth the improved safety of the higher pressures.

If you are planning to go to CARavans only, you might want to consider an "open" trailer. These trailers do an excellent job, are easier to tow, and are much more economical to purchase and operate. The required wash job is perhaps a small price to pay for the benefits of the open trailer.

Just a word or two on the selection of your tow vehicle. First, do not under-purchase the capacity of the tow vehicle. Do not expect a half-ton truck or SUV to safely tow your heavy classic and trailer. While these smaller vehicles may seem to handle the load, the suspension systems are not designed for control in an emergency situation. You need stiffer springing, heavier shocks, larger brakes and better tires and wheels to handle emergency stops and turns.

Second, always use a load equalizing hitch system

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with your trailer. This system helps distribute the weight on your tow vehicle to maintain steering control and is necessary for safe trailering.

Third, select the vehicle make of your choice but be sure that you are working with a sales person who knows and understands trailering requirements. Always ask to see the manufacturer's trailering recommendations and if the salesperson is not following this guide, get a different salesperson. I would never buy less than the factory recommended vehicle for my towing.

Finally, what about dual rear wheels? Again, I would look to the factory information for my guide. In most cases I have found that unless I expected to tow in excess of 20,000 pounds, dual rear wheels are not recommended. Not only do these duals cost more to purchase and maintain, in some cases they will not fit into a standard garage and they do not fit into most parking spaces. If all of this is not bad enough, the dual rear tire systems can cause loss of control of the vehicle at low speeds due to the hydroplane effect which can be related to the lower contact patch weight of these rear tires. I would not select this option unless I expected to frequently tow very heavy loads.

The bottom line for towing: know your actual tow requirement; use the experts at the factory to help you select the tow vehicle; and of course, keep everything in top condition.

