

# TOWING WITH A CAR



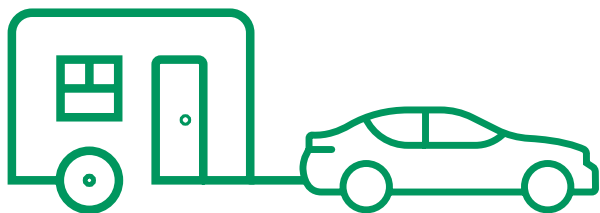
**ARVAL**  
BNP PARIBAS GROUP

For the many  
journeys in life.

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## Towing with a car - it doesn't have to be a drag

Towing a caravan or trailer with your car can be a daunting prospect, particularly if you're doing it for the first time. Even if you're experienced, there's a whole host of things you need to think about, and that's before you even set off.

But don't despair – we're here to help. We've put together this guide to point you (and your caravan or trailer!) in the right direction. From making sure you don't fall foul of the law and keeping up to speed on what equipment you'll need, right through to staying safe on the roads, we've got it covered.



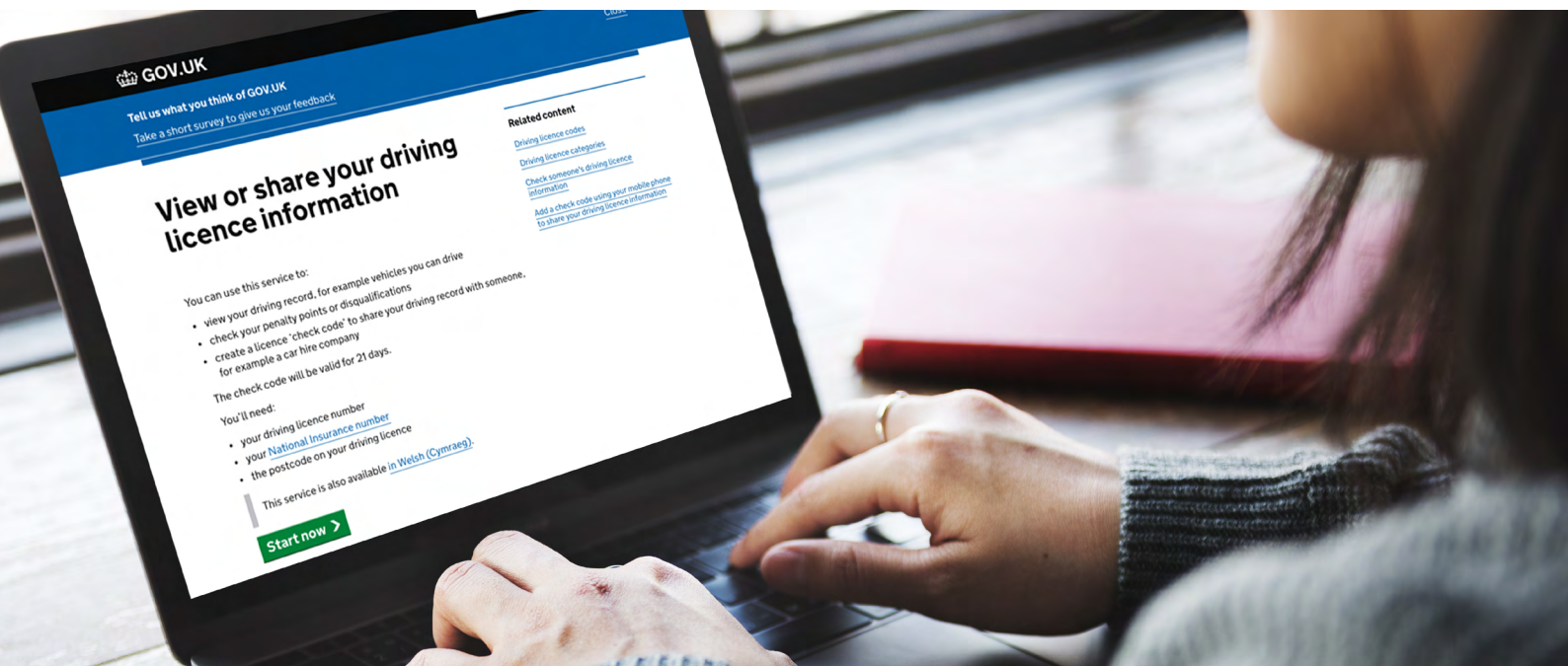
# What you're allowed to tow

First things first – before you head off on your travels, it's a good idea to find out what your driving licence allows you to tow. Like many things in life, the law is a bit complicated. But, in a nutshell, if you passed your driving test in the UK before 1 January 1997, then you're probably allowed to tow a caravan or trailer. If you ripped up your L-plates after this date then things get a bit more tricky and you may need to take an additional test.

## Check out the DVLA website

Your best bet is to check out the DVLA website where you can clearly see what you're allowed to tow. Simply go to [www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence](https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence) and put in your details.

Even if your licence means you don't need to jump through any more hoops before you get on the road, you might benefit from a refresher course on the dos and don'ts of towing – so, read on!



## Can I fit a towbar to my company car?

The short answer is – probably. The long answer is you need to check with Arval and then it depends on your Company Car Policy, so check with your fleet manager too. If you're given the go-ahead, we recommend using a franchised dealership to fit a towbar **as well as getting them to remove it at the end of the lease.**

# Weighing and measuring up

**OK, so it's not the most riveting of topics, but as every car is only able to tow a certain amount of weight safely it's important to make sure you're not going to be over the limit. You may also be restricted on the size and weight of what you can tow depending on when you passed your driving test,**



## Weight

Most cars have a maximum weight they can tow and it's usually found in the handbook. Sometimes this information is on the vehicle identification number (VIN) plate on the car – normally under the bonnet or inside the driver's door. Not all cars are able to tow, so if your VIN plate doesn't include this information, don't use it for towing.

For more information about what the weight limits mean in practice as well as a run down of what all the technical terms mean, take a look at the Government website -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towing-a-trailer-with-a-car-or-van/towing-a-trailer-with-a-car-or-van-the-basics>



## Width and length

This one's pretty straightforward. For vehicles weighing up to 3.5 tonnes, the maximum trailer width is 2.55 metres and the maximum length is 7 metres. If, like us you're not too sure how much your car weighs then as a guide a Range Rover Sport tips the scales at around 3.2 tonnes.

## Caravans

Statistically, towing a caravan is safe. But it's worth bearing in mind that overweight caravans and poor payload distribution are the main causes of accidents while towing. So, in order to stay safe and within the law, here's how to make sure your vital statistics are all above board before you head out onto the road. It's worth bearing in mind that these things also apply to other towed camping units such as folding campers and trailer tents.

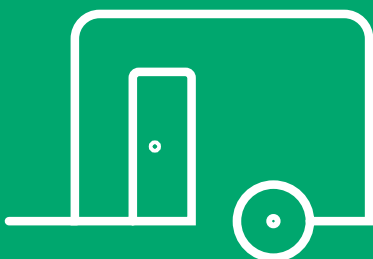
**Payload** - this is the weight of the items you're allowed to carry in the caravan including gas cylinders and batteries. The payload can be found in your handbook. You should check the loaded weight of your caravan on a public weighbridge to make sure you're not over the limit.

The payload should be kept evenly distributed between each side of the caravan, with heavier items positioned as close to the axle as possible.

**Noseweight** – as the name suggests, this is the weight of the caravan at the nose, or the front. It can be measured using a noseweight gauge or simply by using bathroom scales.

To make sure your caravan is stable, the noseweight should be between five and seven per cent of the laden weight of the caravan but shouldn't exceed the car towball limit or the caravan hitch limit (use the lower of these two figures).

Although you can adjust the noseweight by moving the amount of equipment stored to the front and rear of the axle, avoid trying to counteract a heavy noseweight with weights at the back end of the caravan, as this can cause instability.



# Equipping yourself with the right tools for the job

When it comes to getting the right towing equipment, it's handy to know what's required by law and which bits of kit fall into the 'nice to have' category. Either way, if you've got all the right equipment and know how to keep it in good condition, then you're already half way there!



A well-fitted **towbar** is vital for safety. Make sure it conforms to EU standards and is designed for your model of car. Inspect it regularly, checking for cracking or rusting and make sure the bolts are correctly tightened. If in doubt, have it checked by a towbar specialist.



Make sure you fit a **number plate** with the registration of your car to your trailer or caravan, as well as **red reflecting trailer triangles**.



You must be able to see the rear and along both sides of your trailer with your mirrors. If your caravan obscures the view in your rearview mirror, or it's wider than your car, you'll need to fit **external towing mirrors**.



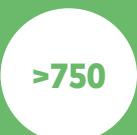
Don't forget about your **tyres** – runflat tyres are often not suitable for towing, so always make sure you carry a spare or a tyre sealant kit that's specifically designed for the job in hand. And keep an eye on the tyre pressures of both your car and trailer.



Caravans with brakes must have a **breakaway cable** fitted, so if the caravan becomes detached from the car, the brakes are applied. Make sure there's enough slack in the cable so the brakes aren't applied when turning.



For **caravan couplings**, make sure the coupling head is fully engaged on the car towball. It's worth winding down the jockey wheel until the back of the car's raised about 25 to 50mm to confirm a secure coupling, but often the head will have a coloured indicator to show when everything is OK.



Trailers up to 750kg without brakes are required to have **secondary couplings** – this is normally a chain to keep the trailer attached to the car if the main coupling fails. Trailers over 750kg, including its load, must have a braking system.



Last, but by no means least, always check that the lights on your caravan are working before you set off. By law you must have a visual or audible warning system in your car to show that the lights and indicators are working.

# Staying safe on the road

So, you've double checked your equipment, made sure all your paperwork is in order and weighed everything in sight. It's time to hit the road... Driving while towing a trailer or caravan shouldn't be that much different to driving a car on its own. And, of course, the usual rules of the road still apply. But there's a few extra things that you should bear in mind when towing, not least to remember to allow extra time to stop, overtake and manoeuvre...

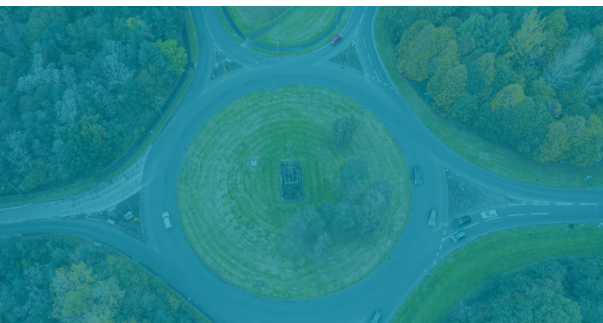
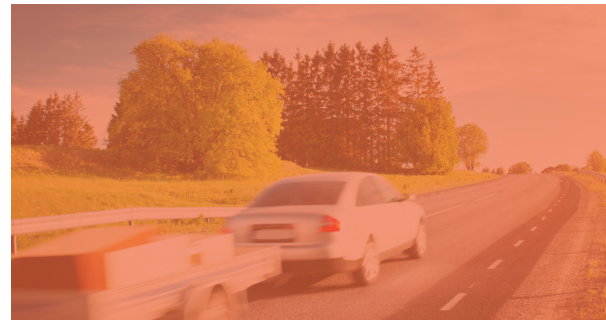


## Speed

Watch your speed. And, if in doubt, slow down, particularly on long downhill stretches. When towing, acceleration will be slower and you'll need more time and space for overtaking. And remember, when towing you're limited to 60mph on motorways and dual carriageways and a max of 50mph on other roads – although obviously if there's a lower speed limit in force, you must stick to that.

## Stopping

Generally speaking, if you're towing a trailer or caravan it will take you around 20 per cent further to stop. On top of that, keep in mind that you should avoid violent braking.



## Cornering

On roundabouts and corners your trailer won't follow the exact same path of your car. So, remember to take a wider path so you don't hit the kerb or mount the pavement.

## Instability

Snaking is the most common form of instability and is often down to bad loading, inadequate noseweight, excessive speed or incorrect tyre pressures. Take care when overtaking lorries or coaches as they can cause air turbulence, which can lead to snaking. Vertical instability can happen if you hit a pothole and it's also known as pitching. In either case, don't brake, but slow down gradually by easing off the accelerator.





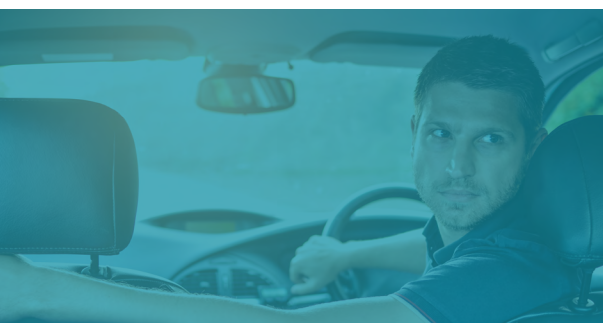


## Hill starts

They're inevitably going to be more tricky with a load behind you, so you'll need more throttle than normal and a delicate balance on the clutch.

## Keep in lane

If you're towing, you can't use the outside lane of a three or more lane motorway, even when overtaking, unless signs indicate otherwise or the nearside lanes are blocked.



## Reversing

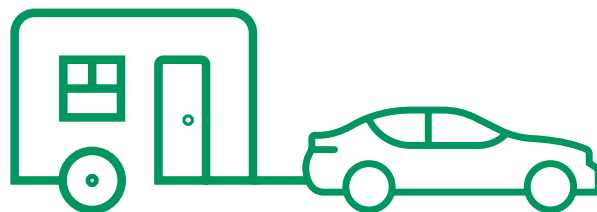
If you have to reverse, get someone to keep an eye on the back of your caravan and make sure you both know what hand signals you're using!

# Advise your insurer

Adding a towbar to a car is classed as a modification that must be declared to the car's insurance provider. Your car's insurance will typically cover any third party damage while you are towing, but it's not a bad idea to look into separate insurance to cover your caravan against damage, fire and theft.

# And finally, a few other things to think about...

- Stopping overnight in a lay-by with a trailer may be considered an obstruction and you could be asked to move on. And if you're towing a caravan in England and Wales, make sure you only stop for the night at campsites, as camping outside of these or camping in the wild is against the law.
- If you park your caravan in the street overnight, you can't park at parking meters and you must display lights all round.
- Don't leave your trailer on the road uncoupled from your car unless the brake is on or at least one wheel is effectively prevented from moving.
- It might sound like a no-brainer, but it's against the law to allow passengers to travel in a trailer or caravan while it's being towed.



## Information correct as at December 2019

### Sources:

[www.gov.uk/towing-with-car](http://www.gov.uk/towing-with-car)

[www.theaa.com/driving-advice/safety/how-to-tow-a-caravan](http://www.theaa.com/driving-advice/safety/how-to-tow-a-caravan)

<https://www.campingandcaravanningclub.co.uk/helpandadvice/gettingstarted/newtocaravans/confidenttowing/>

<https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence>



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