

Tips for Long Distance Trailing

By Jon Davies (Shrimper *Merriwinds* 847) (September 2022)

In the last ten years we have towed our Shrimper several thousand miles. During those journeys I have learned that something to avoid is the stress of driving for hours with one eye constantly on the rear-view mirror as you worry about the boat while it reluctantly follows you, moving, banging and rattling with a life of its own. Small things that don't matter during the short trail home from the nearest slipway can become very annoying or even a serious problem over a long distance. The following is based on my experience with a Combi trailer as supplied with many Shrimpers.

Obviously, for safety and peace of mind, the trailer needs to be serviced and fitted with tyres of adequate load capacity. Trailers don't normally do many miles, so even very old and dangerous tyres can look almost new. (The caravan club recommends that trailer tyres should be replaced if more than seven years old regardless of how little use they may have had). Sidewall cracking is usually the first side of problems. The trailer nose weight should be within the limits for the towing vehicle (stated in the car handbook), and especially not too light, so that there is never an upward force on the tow ball. If you can easily lift the coupling off the tow ball with one hand then it is almost certainly not heavy enough. Photo A: **2** Shows the spare wheel near the front giving a nose weight of 89 kilos. The maximum for our van is 100 kilos. This can be measured using a block of wood under the coupling and some bathroom scales.



Photo A

If you have a tyre problem, you might have a spare wheel- but can you change it? Make sure you have a tool with a long enough bar to undo the very tight wheel nuts. Is the vehicle jack capable of lifting the trailer? Or is the shape wrong when the tyre is flat and the axle close to

the ground? We now take a small 2-ton bottle jack and some wooden blocks that can be fitted under the suspension units. No matter what you tow with, you will feel the trailer moving behind to some extent, but this can be reduced to a minimum. The trailer and trolley both flex a surprising amount when towing (look at their shadow on the road behind as you go over a bump), and the boat needs to be on as securely as possible to stiffen them. When recovering from the water the stem needs to be winched hard against the bow snubber (Photo B: **11**) and the winch strap left hooked to the boat, locked with the ratchet and with the winding handle removed (unlike as in photo A: **5**). An additional attachment between the bow-eye and the winch post is recommended. Don't just rely on the winch strap, the boat also needs to be tightly pulled down at the front to avoid it 'nodding' as you drive along (Photo A: **3**)



Photo B

The trolley bilge supports need to be pushed up tight against the underside of the hull so that the boat cannot rock from side to side (Photo C: **9**). (They should also have some sort of security bolt through them to stop them coming loose and accidentally dropping while driving). The trolley tyres are pneumatic, so at the rear there is no rigid attachment of the boat/trolley combination to the main trailer. This means it will always sway about to a certain extent. There doesn't seem much that can be done about this except keeping the tyres hard (or fitting solid wheels). The recommended pressure for the trolley wheels is 80 psi. For simply pushing the boat around they could be inflated to much less, but once on the ramps they become an integral part of the trailer and get compressed as the boat is strapped down (Photo C: **6**). If underinflated, the small wheels will bounce more when the trailer goes over bumps causing the straps, attached to the main trailer, to tighten then slacken and possibly undo (Photo C: **7**).



Photo C

I use at least three full-sized 50mm, 1000kg load ratchet tie-downs, one at the front and one each side. This is a minimum. At the sides they have to be angled slightly to pull the boat forward up against the bow snubber. On my boat they go around the cleats on each corner of the coach roof (Photo D: **13**). These straps need to be tight (you can see why the trolley tyres need to be hard as they will start to compress) and the woodwork and hull will need to be protected from chafing (and better than shown in the photo! (Photo D: **14**). One long strap up and across the whole boat will do nothing to stop it rolling on the trailer.



Photo D

On our Snipe trailer the brakes are applied by a rod, and this is not supported for about 2 metres, allowing it to flap about and rattle against the underside of the trailer when not

under tension. I supported it with some foam and a bungee (which didn't get in the way of the jockey wheel guide) and this made it much quieter and lasted surprisingly well (Photo A: 4). I carry an aluminium ladder strapped to the trailer and also make sure that this is well padded to stop it rattling



Photo E

Previously I've had a lighting board bracket carried by two tubes that slid out of the back of the trailer. Many trailers use this system as it allows the rudder to be left on the transom. The trouble is that, fully extended, the lighting board has very little support and the tubes are vulnerable and highly stressed. On mine the welds eventually broke after several hundred miles of flexing. Now the lighting board (Photo F: 10) is screwed to a piece of plywood and well up out of the way with a wooden plug at the rear which fits into the cut-out for the tiller, and with an angled block at each end covered in carpet to protect the hull from chafing (Photo E: 15). This doesn't move and gives no trouble. (The rudder fits inside the cabin packed neatly next to the centreplate case),

The electric cable was also replaced with a complete new length to avoid any joins which have caused bad contacts in the past. I also fitted additional reflective triangles to the mudguards (Photo C: 8).



Photo F

On the Road

Towing at over 60mph is illegal, and anyway, this is usually the speed when snaking can start. Our Shrimper trailer used to run quite happily up to 55mph and then would start to shake as if the wheels were unbalanced, but balancing the wheels made no difference. Eventually, looking in the mirror when the vibration started, I could see the mudguards (which were very securely attached at the bottom with large brackets and felt perfectly solid when not driving), violently shaking from side to side. This was causing a resonance which was making the whole trailer vibrate and which could clearly be felt in the car. Photo G shows the additional top braces that I have fitted. The mudguards are now completely secure and this has cured the problem with 60mph achieved and the trailer towing smoothly. Loose or flexing mudguards are apparently a frequent cause of vibration.



Photo G

One loud clanging associated with bumpy roads comes from the main trailer ramps for the launching trolley wheels. These are held up by the weight of the trolley wheels and drop down when there is no weight on them. They will move slightly and clang back into position as the weight on them changes going over bumps. This isn't dangerous but is very annoying on a long run. The ramps are normally equipped with some holes to bolt them into the 'up' position. It is worth attaching them up for a long journey, but make sure they are not overlooked when trying to roll back the trolley!

Finally, once you have travelled a couple of miles and the boat has settled on the trailer, it is very important to pull in to a safe place to check everything is still secure and then re-tighten the straps which will, almost certainly, have slackened.

The Shrimper isn't at all bad to tow. It is quite heavy and is clearly felt on hills, but because of its shape there is little wind resistance, so on the flat you barely know it is behind. (It is also quite easy to reverse, as the drawbar is a long way from the axle). You have to be a bit more patient, and follow the lorries on the motorway, but towing a properly prepared Shrimper on its trailer should hardly be more stressful than simply driving the car.