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Towing with a car

1. What you can tow

The rules on what you can tow are different depending on when you passed your driving test.

View your driving licence information (<https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence>) to see if you're allowed to tow.

Licences issued from 1 January 1997

If you passed your car driving test on or after 1 January 1997 you can:

- drive a car or van up to 3,500kg maximum authorised mass (MAM) towing a trailer of up to 750kg MAM
- tow a trailer over 750kg MAM as long as the combined MAM of the trailer and towing vehicle is no more than 3,500kg

MAM is the limit on how much the vehicle can weigh (<https://www.gov.uk/vehicle-weights-explained>) when it's loaded.

You have to pass the car and trailer driving test (<https://www.gov.uk/car-trailer-driving-test>) if you want to tow anything heavier.

Licences issued before 1 January 1997

If you passed your car test before 1 January 1997 you're usually allowed to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8,250kg MAM. View your driving licence information (<https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence>) to check.

You're also allowed to drive a minibus with a trailer over 750kg MAM.

Towing heavier combinations

Follow these steps if you want to tow heavier combinations.

1. Apply for provisional licence (<https://www.gov.uk/become-lorry-bus-driver/applying-for-a-bus-or-lorry-provisional-entitlement>) for a medium-sized lorry and trailer (category C1+E).
2. Pass the lorry theory test (<https://www.gov.uk/become-lorry-bus-driver/driver-cpc-part-1-theory-test>).
3. Pass the C1+E driving test (<https://www.gov.uk/become-lorry-bus-driver/driver-cpc-part-3-driving-test>).

You need to take extra Driver Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) tests (<https://www.gov.uk/become-lorry-bus-driver/getting-qualified>) if driving the medium-sized lorry is the main part of your job.

Once you've done this you can drive vehicles and trailers with a combined weight of up to 12,000kg MAM.

2. Towing weight and width limits

Most cars have a maximum weight they can tow. It's usually listed in the handbook or specification sheet.

Alternatively the vehicle's 'gross train weight' may be listed on the vehicle identification number (VIN) plate on the car. This is normally under the bonnet or inside the driver's door.

The gross train weight is the weight of the fully-loaded car plus fully-loaded trailer and must not be exceeded.

If your VIN plate doesn't list a train weight, you should not use your vehicle for towing.

Width and length

The maximum trailer width for any towing vehicle is 2.55 metres.

The maximum length for a trailer towed by a vehicle weighing up to 3,500kg is 7 metres. This length does not include the A-frame.

3. Trailers, caravans and towing equipment

The equipment you use with your trailer or caravan must:

- meet certain safety standards
- be used correctly

You can be fined up to £2,500, be banned from driving and get 3 penalty points for using a vehicle in a dangerous condition.

Carry out safety checks (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tow-a-trailer-with-a-car-safety-checks>) to make sure you're using the trailer and equipment legally.

Towing bars

If you get a tow bar for your car, it needs to be 'type approved'. This means it meets EU regulations and is designed for your car.

Type-approved tow bars have a label with:

- an approval number
- details of the vehicles it's approved for

If your car was first used before 1 August 1998, your tow bar doesn't need to be type-approved.

Towing mirrors

You must have an adequate view of the road behind you.

Fit suitable towing mirrors if your trailer or caravan is wider than the rear of your car.

You can be fined up to £1,000 and get 3 penalty points for towing without proper towing mirrors.

Trailer or caravan brakes

Your trailer must have a working brake system if it weighs over 750kg when it's loaded.

Some smaller trailers also have brakes, but these are optional.

Any brakes must be in good working order.

You must use a breakaway cable or secondary coupling (<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/tow-a-trailer-with-a-car-safety-checks>) in case the trailer becomes detached from your car.

Number plates

You must display the same number plate (<https://www.gov.uk/displaying-number-plates/getting-number-plates-made-up>) on your trailer as on your towing car.

If you tow more than one trailer at a time, fix the number plate to the trailer at the back.

4. Towing an American caravan or trailer

American trailers and caravans don't always meet European safety regulations.

If you want to use an American caravan or trailer in the UK or the EU, you must first check that it's legal.

Read more about brakes and couplings for American caravans and trailers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/american-caravans-and-trailers-brakes-and-couplings>).