

TOWING A TRAILER - THE BASICS

The weight and size of trailer that you can tow depends on at least 7 key factors. Any maximum weight specified under any of these **cannot** be exceeded - even if other criteria seem to permit a higher weight. Technical terms in ***bold italics*** are explained overleaf.

1. The capability of the towing vehicle

The ***chassis plate*** on the vehicle (see diagram overleaf) states the ***Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)*** and the ***Gross Combination Weight (GCW)***. The vehicle handbook will either repeat what is on the ***chassis plate***, or for convenience, might directly specify the maximum weight of trailer (e.g. 750kg) which is allowed. The V5C registration certificate often shows this too.

2. The weight capacity of the trailer

A trailer manufacturer must decide the ***Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)*** of the trailer and mark it on the trailer ***chassis plate***. This cannot be exceeded. If the unladen weight of a goods carrying trailer (including a horse box) is over 1020kg and the ***GVW*** is over 3500kg it must be submitted for ***VOSA*** to issue a ***Ministry Plate***.

3. The brakes on the trailer.

This is closely related to the weight capacity of the trailer.

A trailer with a ***GVW*** of 750kg or lower, is not required to have brakes, but if brakes are fitted they must be in full working order.

A trailer with a ***GVW*** from 751kg up to 3500kg is required to have brakes, normally over-run (inertia) brakes are fitted.

A trailer with a ***GVW*** of 3501kg or more, must have brakes which are controlled by the driver of the towing vehicle using the brake pedal. The brake system on the trailer must be connected to that on the towing vehicle via standardised connectors installed by the manufacturer or a qualified person.

4. Driving licence entitlement

You are not allowed to exceed the entitlement to tow trailers given on your driving licence, even if the vehicle you are driving has the capability. Your entitlement varies depending on when the licence was granted - if you passed a standard car test after 1 Jan 1997 your entitlement is more restricted than for persons taking a car test before that date. For more info refer to the Direct.gov.uk website, under the Motoring section.

5. Towing with a fifth wheel

If the towing vehicle has a 'fifth wheel' coupling (or similar device) then it is important to consider the load applied through the coupling to the towing vehicle, and whether the ***payload*** of the towing vehicle is sufficient to accept this. Also, the rear axle must not be overloaded. (See ***Chassis Plate*** below).

6. Size of trailer

A towing vehicle with ***GVW*** of 3500kg or lower is restricted as to the size of trailer it may tow. The trailer can be a maximum of 7m long by 2.55 m wide. A heavier vehicle can tow a trailer of maximum 12m long by 2.55m wide.

7. Drivers Hours/ Tachograph

The towing vehicle for combinations with a **GCW** above 3500kg may require a tachograph if used for commercial purposes and the driver must obey Drivers Hours regulations. For more information see

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?r.s=tl&r.l1=1081597476&r.lc=en&r.l2=1082103262&topicId=1082103469

Technical terms used above

Chassis plate - The plate affixed by the manufacturer which specifies maximum weights allowed on each axle, the **GVW** and the **GCW**. It is often found on a front door sill. For heavy vehicles, the weights that the vehicle is legally allowed to operate at will be specified on the **Ministry Plate**.

A typical chassis plate on a car:

Manufacturer	Ford
Type approval number	e11*2001/116*0045
VIN (vehicle identification number)	WAE123DEFGH123456
Gross Vehicle Weight - GVW	2235
Gross Combination Weight - GCW	4235
Front axle - maximum load	1050
Rear axle - maximum load	1230

GVW - Gross Vehicle Weight. This is specified by the manufacturer and it means the maximum permitted weight of the vehicle or trailer when fully laden. It is the unladen weight of a vehicle plus the maximum permitted **payload**. Also known as MPW (Maximum Permitted Weight).

GCW - Gross Combination Weight. This is specified by the manufacturer of the towing vehicle and it means the maximum weight of the *combination* which can be towed (i.e. towing vehicle and trailer). Also known as Gross Train Weight (GTW). To find the maximum weight of trailer that can be towed, subtract the **GVW** of the towing vehicle from the **GCW**. (in this example a 2000kg trailer is permitted). However if the towing vehicle is not fully laden, any spare weight capacity can be used by the trailer, so long as the GCW and trailer GVW are not exceeded.

Payload - the maximum weight of the load that can be carried on a vehicle. (Can be calculated: **GVW** minus the unladen weight of a vehicle).

Ministry Plate - is not really a plate but is a piece of laminated paper, either kept in the cab (on trucks) or mounted in a holder attached to the bodywork (on trailers). The **Ministry plate** is issued by **VOSA** and states the maximum weights at which the vehicle or trailer can operate in Great Britain. A vehicle with a Ministry Plate must be tested annually at a VOSA test station. Generally a goods vehicle or goods-carrying trailer over 3500kg **GVW** will require a **Ministry Plate**.

VOSA - Vehicle Operator Services Agency, part of the Department for Transport. Responsible for enforcement of the law on goods vehicles and buses, it operates test stations around the country.