

U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla 95 – Trailering Your Boat Safely – PART THREE

By Keith Wohlman

MARCO ISLAND, FL – In the past two articles, we have tackled the art of trailering your boat to a boat launch ramp and successfully getting the boat into the water. This article we will help you recover your boat and get it back on the trailer for the return trip home. One word of caution here, you have been out on the water and in the sun, hopefully, all day, and that will impact you both physically and mentally. You need your wits about you during this process to ensure your boat gets onto the trailer safely and that you accomplish all your tasks before driving home.

The first step in retrieving your boat is actually docking the boat at the boat ramp area. This is important for several reasons, but most important since someone must be onshore to get the trailer. The second point might be less obvious. When pulling the boat out of the water, it is more difficult than you experienced just pulling the trailer up the ramp when you launched the boat. Everything you can remove from the boat at the dock is weight you are not pulling up the ramp. This can include bait and the water in live wells. Run the bilge pumps to make sure there is no water in the bilge. While you get the trailer, your helper and crew can begin the offloading process. You may place some of these items back in the boat AFTER it is out of the water and off the ramp.

You will need your spotter to help you align your vehicle correctly with the sides of the ramp so you can back straight down the ramp. Once you are ready, slowly back down until you reach a point where the trailer is submerged enough to bring the boat onto the trailer. It is very important to note that tide may have changed while you were out and that the retrieval point might be lower or higher on the ramp. Just as you did in the launch process, you need to have a good idea how far you have to drive on the ramp. When you reach that point, apply the brakes, put the transmission in park and set the emergency brake.

Your spotter should return to the boat and begin to maneuver it toward the ramp. Make sure they do not cut the angle too sharp from the dock. They want to head toward the trailer perfectly aligned as if they were going to drive right up to the back of your vehicle. You should disconnect the trailer power cord from the power port on your vehicle and be ready to direct the helper to bring the boat very slowly toward the trailer. You will also be ready to attach the bow strap. Depending on the type of trailer, your helper will bring the boat onto the rollers or over the trailer bunks. Once correctly positioned you can attach the bow strap. If the approach is not perfect, the helper can back off and try again.

When the bow strap is secure, and the winch is in gear to properly bring the boat forward, notify the helper to cut the engines and lift the stern drive or outboard motor. They should turn the battery switch to “off”. Then they can disembark to help pull the boat onto the trailer. Keep checking that the boat is positioned correctly over the rollers or trailer bunks. Once the boat is all the way forward, you should attach the bow safety chain. Now comes the hard part. Reconnect the trailer power cord to the power port and return to the vehicle. While pushing on the brake, put the vehicle in gear and releases the parking brake. Slowly move forward up the ramp. If the rear wheels of the vehicle spin, additional weight in the rear of the vehicle can be

added to help the traction. Once again, four-wheel drive is a big help getting the boat and trailer up the ramp.

Once off the ramp it is time to prepare the boat for the ride home. You will need to lower the antenna and bimini top or other equipment to the transportation height. Remove and secure the drain plugs. Secure the stern drive or outboard support. Secure the transom tie down straps. Check the trailer lights for proper operation. Double check all the live wells and the battery switch. Bring the boat to the wash down station and rinse the boat and trailer. Not only is this good for the boat and trailer but trailered boats are a leading cause of the spread of invasive species. Do a complete wash down of the boat and trailer when you get home.

Repack the boat with the items you carried onboard and make sure they are secure. Replace the boat cover or console cover if so equipped. Do a final walk around the boat to check all the tie-down straps and bow safety strap and stern strap if used. Check the brake safety cable and trailer safety chains. Look at the tires and axle bearings. When you are satisfied that all is secure, it is time to head home.

Spare part checklist. While not a complete list these items can be extremely important to have on hand when trailering a boat.

- An appropriately sized jack capable of lifting the trailer in the event of a flat tire.
- Lug wrench for trailer wheels
- Spare tire for trailer
- A fire extinguisher in the tow vehicle or mounted on the trailer post.
- Spare bulbs for all trailer lights.
- Spare drain plugs and O-rings.
- Wrench for drain plugs – preferably with float or length of cord to secure it from sinking.
- Safety road flares
- Bearing grease and tool to add grease to bearings
- Bungee cords or tie downs to secure items transported in the boat
- Flashlight
- Tire pressure gauge and portable 12-volt air station to inflate trailer tires if low
- Wheel chocks

I hope it gives you a little idea of what it is like to trailer a boat and launch/retrieve it. Perhaps you will have a greater appreciation for those people towing their boat on the highway.

For more information about safe boating courses Joe Riccio, (239)-384-7416 or CGAUXCOURSES@GMAIL.COM.

To schedule your **FREE** Vessel Safety Check, please call: John Moyer, (239)-248-7078 or Coast Guard Auxiliary Station – Flotilla 95, (239) 394-5911 or email John at jmoyer1528@aol.com.

For those interested in joining Flotilla 95, USCG Auxiliary, please call Bob Shmihluk at (215) – 694-3305

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