

## **Trailer Your Boat Safely – PART ONE**

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MARCO ISLAND, FL – Getting your boat into the water can be an adventure in and of itself, if you launch it from a trailer. Bringing the boat to the launch ramp, launching and retrieving your boat and returning home safely are the focus of this series of articles.

Boat owners who routinely trailer their boats know all too well the potential for disaster that can occur if you are careless at any point in the process. They take extra care to maintain their trailers and have developed a routine to ensure that the boat returns home in the same condition as when it left. For many boaters who either use a trailer infrequently or who are new to trailering the whole process can be stressful.

The internet is filled with images of failed boat launches and accidents on the highway. They should highlight the serious nature whenever you transport your boat. Let's look at what you can do to avoid a trailering mishap.

In part one of these trailering articles we will consider the trailer you will use. If your trailer is over two thousand pounds, it must have Florida state title and registration, just like any other vehicle. If it is less than two thousand pounds you must register it with the county tax collector, but without paying for a state title. If the trailer is over three thousand pounds it also must have brakes that will act on all the trailer wheels. Your trailer must be sized properly to handle the weight and length of your boat. A boat of twenty feet of length, or longer, will generally require a trailer with two axels.

In addition, Florida Law requires that your trailer include the following items: safety chains; brake lights; taillights; clearance lights; license light; turn signals; reflectors; tie downs. You must also have trailer insurance. The maximum speed for a trailer is seventy mph. Depending on the weight and dimensions of your trailer and boat, you might require a "Wide Trailer Permit." You can verify that requirement when you register your trailer.

Check the weight capacity of your trailer. You can find that on the capacity plate. Then check the towing capacity of your towing vehicle, which should be listed on a label inside the driver's door. Remember to include the weight of both the trailer and the boat, including everything inside the boat (like fuel, engines, equipment, coolers, etc.) Exceeding the towing capacity of your vehicle can cause transmission problems, at a minimum, and impact your control of the vehicle.

Be mindful of how you balance the load on the trailer. Approximately sixty percent of the boat's weight should be positioned on the front half of the trailer. Remember you have heavy engines to account for on the stern for outboard engines. Be sure to balance the boat from side to side as well. If you have fuel tanks on both sides, they should be filled equally, or balanced with other cargo. Making a turn with an unbalanced boat is a sure way to flip your trailer.

Keep in mind that your towing vehicle will be considered an integral part of your towing system. Towing long distances and heavy loads will put a strain on your transmission and cause

overheating. Including a transmission cooler, either as factory installed or an after-purchase installation will reduce the potential for overheating. Rear wheel powered vehicles will perform much better during the launch and retrieval process. The ball hitch on your towing vehicle should be a frame mounted hitch. If you use a bumper mounted hitch you must be certain that you do not exceed the weight rating of the bumper. The hitch ball and trailer coupler must be the same size.

Here is a checklist to ensure your trailer, boat, and towing vehicle are ready to go. Start from the ground up, then from the front of the trailer to the tail end.

- Check the trailer tire condition and pressure. Inspect all lugs and ensure they are tight.
- Check the bearings or bearing protectors and ensure that they are properly filled with grease.
- Check that the trailer coupler and hitch ball are firmly seated and locked.
- Check that the trailer and boat look level from trailer tongue to the end of the trailer. Correctly balanced load.
- Check the trailer safety chains. They should be crossed under the trailer tongue and secured to the hitch and not dragging on the ground. Adjust as necessary.
- Check the trailer brake system cable.
- If a tongue wheel or support is used, ensure that it is either removed or lifted into its travel position.
- Check that the trailer electrical plug is securely attached to the vehicle electrical port and verify operation of turn signals, brake lights and license light.
- Check the bow strap and bow safety chain.
- Check the transom straps for both condition and secure fit.
- Check that outboard or stern drive support is secure.
- Check inside the boat and make sure all gear is balanced and secured.
- Check the boat cover or console cover (if used) and make sure it is secured.
- Check towing vehicle side view mirrors and adjust to ensure you can see the trailer.

It is a good idea to include a stern safety strap to keep the boat from sliding forward in the event of a sudden stop.

In the next article, part two, we will discuss the proper handling of your trailer and how to safely launch your boat.

For more information about safe boating courses Joe Riccio, (239)-384-7416 or [CGAUXCOURSES@GMAIL.COM](mailto: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](mailto:jmoyer1528@aol.com).

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