

TRAILER CHECKLIST

This is a short checklist to make your first trip to the trailhead for the "Spring" ride, a safe and uneventful one. To begin, a couple of quick questions:

1. Is the trailer you're using big enough for the machine you're planning on taking? The one you used for a "one-up" machine may not be large enough or strong enough for that new side by side you bought this winter.
2. Are there sufficient numbers of tie-downs for the numbers and sizes of machines you'll be trailering?
3. Did you check the license plate to see if it needs to be registered for this year? Trying to talk that Trooper out of a ticket isn't going to work if the last year it was registered was when Bush was president.
4. Do you have enough tow vehicle for the load you're planning on towing? The general rule of thumb is that the tow vehicle should weigh at least as much as what you're towing, preferably half again as much more.
5. Does the tow vehicle have enough braking power to stop both itself and the trailer and load in a panic stop? If the trailer has electric brakes, does the tow vehicle have a brake control unit and does it work. If not, you stay way out in front of me when we go in convoy!!
6. Is this trailer made mostly of wood and nails? If it is, leave it at home and go buy a REAL trailer. It can have a plywood deck but should not be made mostly of 2x4's and an old door with you kid's wagon wheels nailed to the bottom.

So much for the formalities. On to the checklist.

1. Inspect the frame to cracks in the members, especially at the corners where flexing occurs.
2. If the deck is plywood, does it have soft spots or sagging areas. Replace it if it does.
3. If the deck is made of expanded steel (like open screen), are there broken strands that can puncture tires or trip or stick you?
4. Check the fenders (It has them, right?). Are they secure to the frame and are the areas where they attach to the frame free of cracks? If there are cracks either replace them, or make friends with someone who has a welder.
5. Is the hitch coupler firmly attached to the tongue of the trailer? How snugly does the coupler fit on the hitch ball on the tow vehicle? It is adjustable, usually by a nut that is up underneath. Is it the correct size for the ball on the tow vehicle? Too small a hitch ball for the coupler can let the trailer and tow vehicle part company on the road.

6. With the trailer attached to the tow vehicle, plug in the lights and check to see if they're all working properly. If not its time to replace burnt or damaged bulbs or to check for damaged wiring or bad connections. A hint: If replacing bulbs, put a little Vaseline on the contact areas of the bulbs and in the sockets. This will keep out moisture and prevent corrosion. The same can and should be done to the connector plugs.
7. If this has a plug for the electric brake, now is a good time to hook it up and check out the brakes to see if they are still working. A little Vaseline in the connector area of the plug won't hurt either.
8. How's the condition of the safety chain? Is it long enough to cross under the tongue of the trailer and attach to the tow vehicle with enough slack to allow a tight turn without binding up, or causing a strain on the chain. If you changed tow vehicles during the winter, this could be an issue.
9. A check of the wheels should be made looking for loose lug nuts, cracks, weather cracked tires. flat tires worn tires, or damaged tires.
10. Raise each wheel and check the free play in the bearings. A slight amount of movement in and out (1/16th inch or less) is normal. More than that means that they need to be adjusted. Which brings up the question of, when they were greased last? If the trailer is 5 years old or more, and has more than a few miles on it, it's probably due to be cleaned and re-packed. If you don't know how to do this, get someone who knows to help, or take it to a dealer, incorrect bearing adjustments can lead to one seizing up on the road which can cause the trailer to flip or break away from the tow vehicle.
11. If there are side rails on the trailer, are they secure, with no cracked welds or loose/ missing hardware?
12. If equipped with a loading ramp, are the hinges secure to the frame and the ramp?
13. Is the ramp sound enough to take the rigors of loading and unloading, or could it stand some repair?
14. How's the condition of your tie down straps or chains? If they're frayed or chaffed, now's the time to change them.
15. Finally, what's the condition of the hitch on the tow vehicle? Is it loose, bent, cracked, rusted out, or just plain broken? If so, please get it fixed or replaced. Having your trailer with your prized machine on it pass you on the road is both embarrassing as well as dangerous and expensive.