

Trailers for Hauling Cars

By Gil Fuqua

The decision to buy a car trailer is not a simple one. There are a number of points to consider regarding size, weight, construction and towing vehicle that are important to safety and to the suitability for hauling your car. Safety should be the first consideration for you. Don't cut corners since you may have 10,000 pounds or more following you that you must safely control.

My seven points for trailer buying considerations are listed below:

1 – Towing Vehicle

Buy a towing vehicle that is rated for the weight you are planning to pull. A Ghost can weigh 5,000-6,000 pounds and an aluminum enclosed trailer can weigh 4,000 pounds or more. If you buy a steel framed trailer, you can easily add a few more thousand pounds. The towing vehicle and hitch must be rated for the weight you plan to pull. Some states require your towing vehicle to be rated for your combined gross vehicle and trailer weight. You can be fined if your towing vehicle is not properly rated.

The towing vehicle's engine should be able to pull the load without too much strain. A diesel engine is a good choice due to the high torque output. The brakes on the towing vehicle should be good enough to stop you and your loaded trailer. A heavy-duty 3/4 ton truck is probably the minimum based on the above weights with a 1 ton truck (dual rear wheel) being the preferred vehicle. The dual rear wheels provide more traction, better cross-wind stability and most importantly, an extra wheel on the ground if you have a rear tire blow out. The brake drums are also larger on the bigger trucks, providing more stopping power. I have a Ford diesel truck and have been pleased with its towing capabilities.

2 – Gooseneck or Bumper Pull

I believe a gooseneck rig is your best choice for a car trailer (my experience). A gooseneck tends to be more stable than a bumper pull since the connecting point is over the rear wheels rather than behind the vehicle. The gooseneck trailers seem to be more stable and less susceptible to cross-winds, etc. You can also park them in a tighter spot than a bumper pull due to the pivot point being over the rear wheels rather than behind them. This fact also means that a gooseneck trailer will cut the corners as you make turns rather than following the towing vehicle like a bumper pull trailer, so be careful. The gooseneck portion of the trailer also provides a lot of inside storage if the trailer is enclosed.

3 - Trailer Brakes and Controllers

A trailer that is used for hauling cars must have its own braking system that is operated by the towing vehicle. The braking system on the trailer is as important as the towing vehicle since it assists in stopping the heavy load. The trailer brakes should also be tested and checked periodically to be sure they are operational.

Brake controllers are installed in the towing vehicle and provide the voltage to the trailer that activates the brakes. In recent years, more sophisticated controllers have been introduced that are far superior to the older methods of providing braking control. The newer ones provide a 'boost' function for high speed stops and are more consistent at applying the brakes, regardless of speeds. Less expensive controllers need frequent adjustment to fine-tune the braking to the vehicle's speed. For example, if you set the brakes to come on properly for highway driving, the less sophisticated units tend to be 'grabby' in stop and go driving and the setting has to be turned down. I had a Drawtite ACTIVATOR brake controller that required it to be set dependent on towing speed. I replaced it with the latest generation Tekonsha PRODIGY (<http://www.tekonsha.com/prodig.html>) that features inertia-activated brake controls and a self-adjusting sensing device. This was the biggest bang for the buck that I spent on the truck, trailer or accessories. There was a substantial improvement in trailer braking with the new controller. The Tekonsha PRODIGY was recommended by many RV owners (big trailers) and seems to be the best one on the market.

4 – Aluminum or Steel Construction

The choice of build material is a consideration for both price and weight. Aluminum trailers have the advantage of lower weight, fewer problems with corrosion and are easier to keep than a steel trailer. Aluminum trailers are also more expensive than steel trailers. Some manufacturers make a hybrid trailer that is part steel (usually the subframe) with the top part and side panels made of aluminum. These can be a good compromise but you must be careful that the steel is properly insulated from the aluminum due to corrosion between the two. An all-steel trailer is strong and is usually the most affordable, but is susceptible to rust. Take a close look at used trailers like the one you are considering to see how they hold up over time.

5 – Open or Closed Trailer

An open trailer is less expensive but it subjects the car to the buffeting of wind while pulling it. It is particularly hard on open cars and I have seen tops ripped off due to the wind getting under them while being towed at interstate speeds. An open trailer provides no protection from the elements and no security for the car. If you get an open trailer, you might want to consider one with a skirt on the front that deflects the wind. This also helps to keep the car clean from spray coming up from the pulling vehicle.

A closed trailer provides security for the car when you are pulling it and when you have parked it. A closed trailer is also like a mobile garage that protects your car from the weather. It can be sized to provide additional room for storage as well. If the trailer is used as outside storage, you need to check for condensation that can be trapped inside. The addition of good ventilation is required to minimize this problem.

6 – Length, Width and Height of Trailer

Don't buy a trailer that is too short for your car. You will need room fore and aft to secure it. A Ghost is close to 20' in length and you should consider at least 24' on the floor to provide room for tie downs.

The trailer should be wide enough for the car and for the car door to open to get out of it. Some car/trailer combinations do not work. The car doors are too long and the trailer is too narrow, providing no room for egress from the car after you drive it in the trailer. Some enclosed trailers are equipped with 'escape doors' that are positioned mid-way along the trailer, providing an egress point from the car.

The trailer should be tall enough for the car you intend to haul. Many enclosed trailers have a roller mechanism near the rear door that assists in balancing the weight of the loading ramp door when opening and closing it. This reduces head space and may prevent taller cars from fitting. With very tall cars, you may have to buy a taller version of a trailer and/or one with a dovetail ramp that slopes at the rear.

7 – Car Tie Downs

Buy good (real good) tie downs. They should be rated at least 10,000 pounds per strap and you should use at least four of them, one at each corner. The straps need to be strong in order to restrain your car in panic stops. Be sure that every component of the tie down meets the same minimum specification. In other words, 10,000 pound straps are no good with 5,000 pound buckles or 7,500 pound tie down rings. Remember, the weakest link theory. Buy one extra strap to have as a spare in case you damage one.

I bought an all aluminum, gooseneck enclosed trailer. Mine is an Exiss (www.exiss.com) and I am very pleased with it. Other good trailers I considered in my trailer hunt were Featherlite, Tommy's Trailers (Oklahoma) and a number of other less known manufacturers that make custom car trailers. You can learn a lot in talking with a person who owns a trailer similar to the one you are considering. You might also take a trip to the local racetrack. You will see an amazing assortment of trailers at every price range.