**Towing with a Light Commercial Vehicle Toolbox Talk**

**Introduction**

When driving at work activities involve towing a trailer when driving a Light Commercial Vehicle (LCV) there are key safety checks and legal compliance issues to follow.

The class of Light Commercial Vehicles (LCVs) refers to **vehicles that have a gross weight of 3,500kg or less**.

The ***main considerations*** when planning to tow a trailer when driving your LCV, whether empty or loaded, are as follows:

* Driver licensing
* Tachographs
* Vehicle towing weight limits
* Vehicle brakes
* Length of Trailer
* Speed limits

Driver Licensing

Even if you only occasionally tow a trailer, you must hold the correct category of licence. Failing to have the correct licence category introduces the risk of prosecution.

Due to European directives the legislation can be complex. Currently in 2022 the rules are under review due to the UK leaving the European Union.

Dependent on the date you passed your driving test your driving licence dictates what your towing capabilities are. The most important rule to remember relating to your licence is that:

* Licenses issued **before 1st January 1997** - you can legally drive LCVs with trailers up to a combined weight of 8,250kg **MAM or maximum authorised mass**. Your driving licence must include categories B, BE and C1.
* If you passed your test **after 1st January 1997,** you can
  + drive LCVs with trailers up to a combined weight of 4,250kg MAM. Your driving licence must include categories B and BE
  + tow heavier trailers if the total MAM of the vehicle and trailer is not more than 3,500kg
  + License dates of **before 19th January 2013** - youcan tow any size of trailer within the towing limits of the vehicle you are driving.
  + Licence dates **on or after 19th January 2013** – you are only permitted to tow trailers of up to 3,500kg within the towing limits of the vehicle. (You will need to pass a further test to be permitted to drive vehicles over 3.5 tonnes).

**Tachographs**

A tachograph is legally required to be fitted to a vehicle weighing over 3,500kg, so they are usually fitted to lorries and buses. However, some LCVs can easily tow 2,000 – 3,000kg so they may need a tachograph for towing.

For example, if your LCV plus its trailer has a gross combined weight of over 3,500kg then a tachograph needs to be fitted to your LCV.

*There are two exceptions to this rule*:

1. Tachographs are only required if you drive for hire and reward. Taking a large camper van and trailer away on holiday does not require a tachograph fitted to your vehicle.
2. If you do not travel over 33 miles / 50 km from you work location then a tachograph is not required.

**Vehicle Towing Weight Limits**

Remember the individual weights and combined weight of your vehicle and trailer, as exceeding the legal weight limits will break the law.

The Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW) or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) is the total permissible weight of your vehicle plus its trailer and the load being carried. These figures will be on your vehicle or trailer chassis plate, in the vehicle handbook and even sometimes on the V5C certificate.

The towing capacity of your LCV should not be more than 85% of your vehicle’s kerb weight. The Gross Train Weight (GTW) or Gross Combination Weight (GCW) is the total permitted weight of your vehicle, your trailer and trailer load.

**Vehicle Brakes**

Trailers with a Gross Vehicle Weight of 750 kg or less are not legally required to have independent brakes as the towing vehicle handles the braking function. Trailers with a GVW of 751kg or more do require independent brakes to be fitted.

These ‘braked trailers’ usually have ‘over run brakes’ which operate automatically via a mechanical linkage connected to the tow bar. Refer to your trailer’s handbook to find out the brake type details.

**Length of trailer**

Conventional LCVs with a Gross Vehicle Weight of up to 3,500kg can pull trailers up to seven metres long and 2.55 metres wide. An appropriate licence is needed for larger trailers. Trailers specifically designed for transporting long slender loads, are the exception to this rule and can be over seven metres long.

**Speed limits**

Speed limits for cars towing caravans or trailers:

* 30mph limit applies on all roads with street lighting unless signs show otherwise.
* 50mph applies on single carriageways unless signs show otherwise.
* 60mph applies on dual carriageways and motorways.
* You must not use the outside lane of any motorway with three lanes or more, when driving a vehicle towing a trailer.

Practical tips for safely towing a trailer:

* Always drive at a speed that is well within your capabilities, respect the road and weather conditions at the time.
* If your trailer begins to snake or swerve, ease off the accelerator, and reduce speed gently. (This can happen if you are driving too fast or if the load in the trailer is wrongly positioned).
* Never brake sharply on a bend, this could cause your trailer to jack-knife. Reduce your speed before any bends and change down gears for the speed you are doing. Then gently accelerate out of the bend.
* Before reversing, get out of your vehicle and check all around is clear before making the manoeuvre.
* Look out for children and pedestrians. If possible, get someone to watch while the manoeuvre is made.

**Key Points to Remember**

Towing when driving for work requires you to have the correct driving licence for the specific weights of trailer you are towing. Check the date of your driving licence to verify the category/weight of trailer you are allowed to tow or whether you need to take an additional test.

Keep appraised of any legal updates to the current rules due to the UK leaving the European Union.

**Driver’s Discussion Questions**

1. Were you aware that the date you passed your driving test directly affects what weight of trailer you are legally allowed to tow?
2. Do you know the combined weight of your LCV and fully loaded trailer?
3. Check you are following the maximum speed limits and ensure you do not use the outside lane on a three lane motorway when towing.

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**Attendees**

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