

**By Wilbur B. Scott**

## **TRAILERING PRECAUTIONS**

Every day as I travel around Citrus County I cannot help but notice the ever increasing numbers of People towing their boats to and from our local waters. Most drivers do a good job of preparing their boat and trailer for towing but a few I have noticed have become a little careless. Perhaps because they feel that since they are only going to be towing their boat a short distance to a local launch facility they really do not have to take the extra few moments to be certain their trailer is properly secured to the tow vehicle. Trailering your boat to your favorite waters can produce unforgettable and rewarding experiences, or it can produce a monumental headache! The difference lies in the precautions and common sense techniques that are used when towing your vessel. Every fishermen and pleasure boater thinks about exploring new waters either nearby or in some far off place. Homosassa Flotilla 15-4 of your U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary wishes to remind boaters that safety must always be considered when making plans for such trips and please remember too that towing safety begins in the driveway.

A trailer not properly secured to the tow vehicle is a formula for disaster! Not only can it ruin your trip should the trailer become dislodged from the hitch but serious injury or worse can be the end result. You might be surprised at the number of people who for one reason or another will fail to match the hitch to the proper size ball. You can quickly tell, of course, if the hitch is too small to fit over the ball. Some boaters, however, will attempt to tow a boat whose 2 inch hitch has been placed over a 1 5/8 inch ball. You can be sure it won't take long for that hitch to become dislodged from the ball and you now have a very serious problem on your hands, especially if you have failed to attach the required safety chains. Always be sure that you have a properly matched ball and hitch.

Speaking of hitches, (and most of you do this I am sure), once you have the trailer hitched to the tow vehicle please be sure to insert a reliable lock to the hitch. The main reason of course is to insure that the properly matched towing hitch remains secure. There is of course another reason that has little to do with safety. Perhaps because of the current state of the economy or whatever the cause I understand that the theft of aluminum boat trailers is on the rise around the country. Boaters returning to the launch area after a day of boating are shocked to find their boat trailer is missing. Locks are not expensive and may just save you a lot of grief. Florida unfortunately does not title boat trailers so the thief can just take it to another county and register it in his or her name. I am also told that many of these stolen trailers are being sold for the aluminum. Whether your trailer is at home or at a launch area the bottom line is lock that trailer hitch!

Many boaters, especially fishermen, begin their trip to the launch area well before sunrise. I count myself as one of those who enjoy observing the sun rise over the horizon while traveling to the fishing grounds. It is indeed a beautiful sight from the water to watch a new day dawning!

Unfortunately there is hardly a morning that I do not observe trailers being towed without lights or even, in some cases, without reflectors or reflector type material on the rear of their trailers. Please be sure to check your lights prior to leaving home. It could prevent a collision and save you a hefty fine.

If you are going to trailer your boat a long distance be sure all lines and tie-downs have been inspected. The winch line should be checked for tightness and the lock positively engaged and a secondary safety chain attached. Crossing the safety chains is also recommended. The boat should be properly balanced on the trailer, with most of the weight over the wheels, and a slight balance towards the towing vehicle with ten percent of the total weight on the trailer hitch. A weaving trailer is very dangerous and usually indicates the boat is not properly balanced on the trailer. The wise skipper lubricates all moving parts on the trailer before a lengthy trip. Wheel bearings can be a serious problem. They should be re-packed with grease anytime they are submerged in water. When launching, it is not always possible to keep the wheel bearings out of the water. Their life span can be extended however by not submerging them, especially in salt water.

Make certain fuel tanks are tightly closed and secured. On long trips transport the tanks empty and fill them upon arrival at your destination. Outboard motors should be raised and locked in a tilt position and when possible, with a support brace installed. Bumps and chuckholes can cause real damage and possibly even dislodge the engine from the transom.

Proper tire inflation may save a blow-out or excessive tire wear. Take a spare tire along, especially for extended trips. Trailer tires are almost impossible to find in a small town and certainly more so in the middle of the night. Canvas tops are less likely to be torn or damaged if lowered and secured. Towing covers are available that are designed for specific styles of boats and fit snugly over the boat protecting the inside from the elements as well as keeping items from flying out of the boat as you drive down the highway. If you do not have a boat cover then please be sure that all of your equipment in the boat is properly secured. Antennas on the boat should be in the down position while towing.

An excellent precaution is to periodically pull off the road in a safe location when towing a trailer and conduct an inspection. See that everything is riding correctly and check the wheel hubs for signs of overheating. Make sure once again that all trailer lights are still operating correctly, including directional signals, brake lights and emergency flasher signals. Making allowances for the extra space that is required when passing, stopping and turning are among the other things you should keep in mind while towing.

Okay, now that you made it safely to the launch area I want to remind you that before you actually launch your boat be sure the drain plugs are securely in place. This a common mistake made by not only novices but experienced boaters as well, (including yours truly). Another costly

mistake, is backing the trailer and vehicle down the launch ramp too far and beyond the end of the concrete ramp, often requiring a costly rescue tow from a local towing company. Once you have backed your boat into the water and feel that you must exit your vehicle to secure your boat to the dock or some other purpose please be sure to put the vehicle in park and set the parking brake! More than once I have watched a tow vehicle sink below the surface of the water!

By the way, the next article will deal with “Launch Ramp Etiquette” but before I close this article out I will offer one piece of advice from that article and that is, when transferring your fishing and or boating gear from the tow vehicle to the boat, to do so on the ramp is not a good way to make new friends! Please, transfer your gear in the parking area, not at the launch ramp! Until next time, enjoy the water and STAY SAFE!

Wilbur B. Scott may be contacted via email at [seacapt34447@yahoo.com](mailto:seacapt34447@yahoo.com).