

# TRAILER TIPS

## GROSS COMBO WEIGHT RATING: HOW MUCH CAN YOU SAFELY TOW WITH YOUR VEHICLE?



brought to you by **Twister Trailer**/article by **Robyn Volkening**

**A** serious question that often goes overlooked is: how much can I safely tow with my vehicle? Or the reverse: I want this new trailer, can I tow it with my existing truck? This month, we go into some of the variables and components to help answer that question. If you exceed your towing weight, you, your horses, and other motorists are not only in danger, but you will cause strain to your vehicle's engine, transmission, brakes, and more. Towing ability and braking ability are different things, meaning you may be able to pull it, but can you safely stop it, loaded? You should also take into consideration if you do a lot of heavy freeway/city driving (where you need short braking and quick increases in speed to merge) or if you travel in mountainous or very windy conditions. In these cases, having much more towing capacity than the numbers suggest may come in handy.

First, we look at some important terms and some pesky numbers.

In order to find these numbers, you will want to look at your vehicle's owner's

above: Carri-Lite™ standalone collapsible corral  
left: Extra tall Carri-Lite™ corral - Images courtesy of Carri-Lite Corrals

manual (download if you can't find it), and the vehicle compliance certification label which is usually located in the driver's door sill on your vehicle. Then you will find these numbers:

### Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW)

*This is the vehicle's actual weight at any given time, which includes standard curb weight (empty vehicle), plus an allowance for a standard amount of luggage, gas and passengers, as predicted by the manufacturer. This is an estimate based on your amount of gear, so if you're a heavy packer, make sure you adjust this number. Heavier vehicles are generally able to handle trailer sway easier than lighter ones.*

### Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR)

*This is the maximum safe actual operating weight of your vehicle including anything loaded on the vehicle. If you exceed this weight, the vehicle's engine, transmission, and brakes will be stressed beyond their design limits.*

### Gross Combination Weight Rating (GCWR)

*This is the maximum safe weight of your combined vehicle and trailer. This weight includes all people, horses, feed, water, gas, luggage, etc.*

Sometimes, vehicles have "towing packages" installed. Engine and transmission coolers and heavier suspension can help with towing, but doesn't necessarily mean you can tow more. In addition, a hitch on your vehicle doesn't mean it's automatically able to tow even a small horse trailer (next month's *Trailer Tips* will cover hitches). Some "towing packages," especially on lighter trucks or SUV's, are meant to tow boats or small utility trailers, not live weight of a horse moving around, or high profile and high wind resistance horse trailers.

After finding out about your tow vehicle's weight and limits, you will want to find your trailer's weight. Sometimes manufacturers can give you the weight of a trailer, but often heavy add-on options like mats, air conditioners, generators, fuel tanks, etc. are not included. Sometimes the manufacturer weight doesn't include the living quarters, which are very heavy! The trailer VIN tag may just suggest the weight limit for the trailer's axles, which is also important but is not the actual weight of the trailer.

You then need to estimate how much your trailer weighs loaded. First, figure out how much you horses weigh (average horses are between 1,000-1,200 pounds each) using a weight tape, or weigh the trailer loaded. Add on any hay, water (water weighs 8.34 pounds per gallon), feed, saddles, clothing, food, gas, etc. Trailers with slide outs or living quarters weigh significantly more than similar length trailers without those amenities. The best way to get trailer weight is to get it weighed when full, but when buying a new trailer that might not be possible. And while underestimating your own weight on your driver's license probably isn't a big deal, it's obviously safer to overestimate than under estimate the weight of your rig!

When you have the numbers off your vehicle and trailer, you can decide if are safely towing or if you have an unsafe mismatch between your truck and your trailer. Next month we will cover various hitch options. 📌

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