

Inspect trailers, caravans before holiday

Most caravans, boats and trailers don't see much action during the year. In fact, it's often only around holiday time that they are rolled off their patch of grass and hooked up to go - but after standing so long, chances are their wheels are no longer in good shape.

Lize Hayward, Goodyear Group PR manager recently issued a list of pre-trip tips that will help you avoid roadside frustration and enjoy a hassle-free, safe journey.

"When caravans and trailers stand in one place for an extended period, their tyres will probably develop a 'flat spot' from the prolonged slight pressure. Ideally, one should remove the wheel and tyre and put the caravans and trailers on stands while they're not being used. If it's too late now, I would strongly advise owners to have their tyres' condition checked at a reputable service centre," said Hayward.

"Wheel bearings, particularly those on boat trailers which are exposed to salt water, should be checked for corrosion. Tyres need to be checked for cracks and penetrations, and the technician will check that there is still sufficient tread depth on the tyres and don't forget to get the spare tyre checked too."

Make use of free 10-point safety check

Make sure your tyres' pressure is correct. This will save on fuel and ensure a safe, comfortable ride. All wheel elements should be tightened and make sure you have the relevant jack and wheel spanner for your trailer or caravan. They may require different tools to those of your car tyres. By law, all trailers require the correct chevron tape to be wrapped all the way around the body for better visibility. Make sure your lights are all working properly and that your licenses are up to date.

Hi-Q, which has an extensive national footprint in both big cities and small towns, offers a free 10-point safety check on vehicles and caravans. This entails checking all tyres plus the spares for tread depth and pressure, the front and rear shock absorbers, the brake pads, discs and fluid, as well as the battery, exhaust and wiper blades.

Tyres should be checked for minimum tread depth, flat spots, uneven wear, impact fractures as a result of perhaps hitting a pot hole and objects caught in the tread pattern. The tyres should be suited to the maximum weight of the caravan as well as the maximum permitted travelling speed. When buying new tyre look for C-rated (Commercial) or XL-rated (Extra Load) tyres, to add some reserve to its load capacity. Make sure to inflate the tyres according to recommendation of the caravan manufacturer. Properly inflated tyres not only provide best handling performance, they will also help you save fuel.

Packing the caravan correctly is crucial. Many of the problems associated with towing a caravan are a result of it being badly loaded and/or overloaded. Try to put all the heavy items as low as possible in the caravan preferably over the axle, and make sure they are secured to prevent any movement when turning corners or braking sharply. If possible, always put heavier items in the car and larger, lighter items in the caravan. Before setting off use a towing checklist to ensure the caravan is fit to travel and you haven't forgotten anything. Pay close attention to the lights, brakes, tyres, hitches and safety ropes.

Stay calm when towing a caravan

Setting off well prepared also helps minimising the stress of an unexpected and unpleasant emergency situation. Don't forget to invest in a well-equipped spares and tool kit. Spare bulbs, a warning triangle, a fire extinguisher and a first-aid kit are legal requirements in many first world countries. A spare tyre or quick repair kit is also essential. Nearside and offside extending mirrors are a must to see what is happening behind you.

Towing a caravan can be a daunting task at first. One of the most important towing tips: take it easy! Anyor towing a caravan should be calm and relaxed. Being aware of the surrounding traffic conditions, limiting yo cruising speed to 80km/h or 100 km/h, depending on what your caravan is legally limited to. Keeping a saf distance will give you enough time to react and stop if necessary and will help you stay calm and in control

If your caravan begins to sway, remain calm. Do not brake, but remove your foot from the accelerator to reduce speed. When the swaying has stopped, gradually increase the speed again. Remember, a swayin caravan is always caused by an unlucky combination of overloading, poor load distribution, excessive spee and strong winds.

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