

## **Quick Guide To Towing Weights & The Law**

One of the most commonly asked questions in any caravan, camping or towing forum is always; “What caravan / trailer can I legally tow”?

That question will depend on two things; the physical capabilities of the car and the licence categories of the person towing (largely based on when they passed their driving test).

These figures are calculated very differently, and are often confused, so it's important to understand the differences.

### **Driving Licence Limits**

What we can tow on our own licence will depend on when we took our driving test.

#### **Before 1 January 1997**

Those with a pre 1997 licence are often referred to as having 'Grandad Rights'. This gives them a variety of categories, allowing them to tow up to a combined plated maximum gross weight (vehicle plus trailer) of 8,250kg

#### **After 1 January 1997**

What we can tow will depend on the weight of the trailer / caravan we are towing. If the trailer weighs up to 750kg, then we can tow it, provided the combined gross weight of car plus trailer does not exceed 4,250kg. If the trailer weighs over 750kg, then the combined weight we are allowed to tow is reduced to 3,500kg, which will apply to the vast majority of caravans. It is also worth noting that any trailer over 750kg must, by law, have its own braking system.

It's important to note that all weights quoted above relate to what is referred to as MAM (Maximum Authorised Mass). This is the maximum the car / trailer is ALLOWED to weigh when it is fully loaded. Many people get caught out because they think they need to use either kerb weight, or actual weight, but this is **not** the case. If the MAM of your car plus caravan exceeds 3,500kg, then you are driving illegally, even if the actual weight of the combination is under that limit. There is no leeway on this. Because it works off PLATED weights, these are absolute, with no margin for error. Driving a combination at just 3,501kg is committing the offence of 'driving not in accordance with a licence' which, also, invalidates your insurance, and there are increasing incidences of vehicles and caravans being seized at the road side, for this offence. In order to increase the amount you can tow, to a combined limit of 7,000kg, post 1997 licence holders will need to take a B+E towing test.

It's very easy to check if you are within the law. You can check the car's VIN plate and the weight plate on the trailer. The VIN plate is, usually, on one of the door posts, or under the bonnet. It contains four weights (see below). The top one of these is the MAM of the vehicle, and is the first number we need. The trailer / caravan will have a weight plate, also, which should state MTPLM (Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass). Again, this is the MAM of the trailer. Add the two MAMs together, to find the combined limit. If this is below 3,500kg (4,250kg if the trailer is 750kg or less) then you are legal. If not, you are not legal, regardless of the actual weight of the combination.

### **Vehicle Towing Limits**

In addition to our driving licence limit, we need to consider what the car, itself, is physically capable of towing. Every vehicle will have a specified towing limit for both braked trailers and unbraked trailers. The figure for unbraked trailers can never be more than 750kg (as, above this, they must have brakes) but it could be less. In many cases, the braked and unbraked towing capacities will be stated on the vehicle's V5 log book, in section O.1 and O.2, respectively. **MYTH: Many believe that the manufacturer's braked towing limit is based, purely, on what it can tow up a pre determined incline. This is totally incorrect. That is a small part of the test, however, we are talking about the manufacturer's recommended safe towing limit. It is ridiculous, in the extreme to suggest that this would be based, purely, on what it can tow up a hill, with no recourse to brakes, suspension, engine capacity etc.**

The manufacturer's recommended braked towing limit can, also, be worked out from the VIN plate (although this is not set in stone, legally).



This is a typical vehicle VIN plate. It contains four weights;

The first is the MAM of the vehicle, itself, and should be used when calculating licence limits. In this case, the holder of a standard, post 1997, B licence could tow a trailer with an MAM of just 995kg (3,500kg – 2,505kg).

The second weight is the Gross Combination Weight (also known as Gross Train Weight) of the car. This is the amount the car plus trailer is allowed to weigh. It is important to note that this is based on ACTUAL weights, not plated. **MYTH: Some people mistakenly believe that a B licence holder could not tow with this car, as the GCW is 4,200kg, and, therefore, over the 3,500kg limit. This is not true. We work on MAM of the car, plus MAM of the trailer, so, as stated above, a trailer of 995kg could be towed on a standard licence as 2,505kg + 995kg = 3,500kg.**

The last two weights are the maximum allowed weight on the front and rear axles, respectively.

OK, so I mentioned above that the VIN could, also, be used to calculate braked towing capacity, so how do we do that? Well, in simple terms, the top figure is the most the vehicle is allowed to weigh. The second figure is the maximum the car plus trailer is allowed to weigh. It's not a big leap, therefore, to work out that the difference between the two is the maximum the trailer is allowed to weigh. This is, indeed, correct, but there is a huge amount of confusion and misunderstanding around this, even today, so let's just have a look at this in more detail.

In this example, 4,200kg – 2,505kg gives us a manufacturer's RECOMMENDED braked towing capacity of 1,695kg. Many people believe this is the maximum LEGAL towing capacity. It isn't! (Indeed, the V5 will, often, show a higher figure, but, even that, is not law). This is the maximum the car is allowed to tow, **when the car, itself is fully loaded.**

The only figure enforceable in UK law is Gross Combination Weight. Everything else is a recommendation. So, in this example, if the car were only loaded to 2,405kg, then we could, legally, tow 1,795kg, and still be within the 4,200kg GCW. Likewise, if the car is loaded to 2,305kg, then it can, legally, tow 1,895kg, and so on (although, of course, common sense dictates that this can't go on ad infinitum, but it does give a degree of flexibility). It, also, goes without saying that we can't load the caravan / trailer to more than its own maximum allowed gross weight.

OK, so how does that apply in the real world? Well, provided we don't load the car and caravan to more than they are, legally, allowed to weigh, individually, then, within reason, we can, legally, tow any weight of caravan, provided the combined weight of the car plus trailer does not physically exceed GCW. **MYTH: It is commonly believed that the weight of the caravan or trailer cannot, legally, exceed the weight of the car. This is totally untrue. For a while, on a post 1997 licence, there was a stipulation that the MTPLM of the caravan could not exceed the kerb weight of the towing vehicle, however, this requirement was removed for anyone passing after 2013, so, more recently, in order to provide consistency across all licences, the requirement was completely removed, for all licence holders.** That is the law, however, this is not the only factor we need to consider. We have a duty to ensure that our combination is safe and legal. If we were to have an accident, which it could be argued was caused by poor loading, then we could be leaving ourselves open to prosecution. This is because, whilst fully legal, if we exceed the manufacturer's recommended towing limit, we could be deemed to be towing not in accordance with that recommendation, which would not go in our favour if it was held to be the underlying cause of the accident, so we do need to exercise caution and common sense, at all times.

The Department of Transport gives us guidance on all aspects of this, in their publication; 'Towing A Trailer With A Car Or Van. The Basics' (See links below). In section 7.3, they state; "if the towing vehicle is not fully laden, any spare weight capacity can be used by the trailer, so long as the GCW and trailer GVW are not exceeded". This confirms that we are able to shift some of the weight from car to caravan, provided we remain with GCW.

## Links

This is just an extremely quick guide to some of the basics of towing weights and legislation. For more information, it might be worth checking out the following:

The Layman's Guide To Towing In The UK (A complete guide to all aspects of UK towing legislation)

<https://blueskyrecreation.wordpress.com/2016/09/18/the-laymans-guide-to-towing-in-the-uk/>

85% of Kerb Weight. Law Guide Or Myth? (Looks at the validity of the Caravan & Motorhome Club guide)

<https://blueskyrecreation.wordpress.com/2017/06/27/85-of-kerb-weight-law-guide-or-myth/>

Towing A Trailer With A Car Or Van: The Basics

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towing-a-trailer-with-a-car-or-van/towing-a-trailer-with-a-car-or-van-the-basics#section-7>

Towing: Licence & Age Requirements (Government Calculator)

<https://www.gov.uk/towing-rules>

View Or Share Your Driving Licence Info. (Government resource allowing you to enter licence details to confirm exactly what you can tow).

<https://www.gov.uk/view-driving-licence>

Blue Sky General Information Page (General help & advice on towing, and camping / caravanning as a whole)

[http://www.blueskyholdings.co.uk/general\\_information.html](http://www.blueskyholdings.co.uk/general_information.html)

