



# JUST TOW YOU KNOW

THE EVERYTHING-YOU-NEED-TO-KNOW  
GUIDE TO TOW AN RV

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# TOWING AN RV SHOULDN'T BE A DRAG

**Whether you're considering buying an RV or you just purchased a new rig, you'll soon learn all of the intricacies and routines of being a top-notch RV owner.**

Whether you're considering buying an RV or you just purchased a new rig, you'll soon learn all of the intricacies and routines of being a top-notch RV owner. It might seem like a lot to take in at first. From maintenance to learning the nuances of driving while hauling a one-ton box behind you (a beautiful box, that is), you'll get the hang of RV ownership pretty quickly. It might be a learning experience here and there, but there's one aspect of RV ownership that you can't take any chances getting wrong: towing.

We're not trying to freak you out or anything, because once you have all of the towing knowledge you need, you'll be able to take your RV anywhere you want with ease. Attaching your RV to your towing vehicle correctly is an important step that should be taken seriously. If done incorrectly, the safety of yourself and other drivers you share the road with could be at risk.

**After you read this guide, you will learn everything you need to know about weights, equipment and driving to ensure that you can roll down the road without a hitch! (Ok, actually a hitch is involved, technically).**



# STEP 1:

## GET THE RV OF YOUR DREAMS

### You know, something worth lugging around.

When it comes to towing, the first thing you need to think about is the RV itself. We're not trying to put the horse before the cart on this one, so hear us out. You should decide on the RV you want to own before you can truly understand all of the requirements of towing said "dream RV." Making the choice of which RV you'd like to tow is a big one, because each has a different weight and will require different towing capacities.

Obviously, you want an RV that fits within your price range, but it's important that you choose a model that is functional for you and your traveling needs. Do you have a family that will go on these camping endeavors? Then you might need to check out fifth wheel bunkhouse models. Or maybe it's just you and your spouse traveling in a travel trailer. Whatever your case is, take the time to make sure your RV meets your needs. Don't skimp out on this step, or else every time you pull up to the campsite, you'll wish you had a slightly different model or features to meet your needs better.

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Once you know the exact RV model you're going to buy, or already own, the next step is to take a look at the weight sticker found on the unit. This sticker will tell you how much the unit weighs. Once you know this information, you can take that number and estimate the amount of cargo weight you will be adding to your ride. This number is called the gross vehicle weight rating and is abbreviated as GVWR. Here are example items that would need to be accounted for:

- » Clothes
- » Food and drinks
- » Bikes
- » Boats

Rounding up your total weight never hurts, but try and be as accurate as possible with this number. The last thing you want is to underestimate weight specifications and put yourself in a harmful situation (not only for your safety but also the wear and tear on your towing vehicle).



# STEP 2:

## GET A VEHICLE THAT CAN HANDLE IT

### **You need power. We're not talking 50-watt amps.**

A lot of people tend to jump the gun and think of this tip before purchasing an RV. While it's good to be thinking ahead, you simply can't prepare for an RV you don't already own. Once you know the exact weight specifications of the RV you will be towing you will be in a much better position to make a knowledgeable towing decision.

**Obviously, that Corolla sitting in the garage doesn't have enough horsepower to tow your RV around.** And the family minivan? Chances are good that it's too much of a lightweight too. Just because it can haul your kids around doesn't mean it can haul your rig (both of which are very precious cargo)! To keep your precious cargo safe, you need a vehicle that is capable of towing your RV. In order to identify whether or not a vehicle is fit to tow your beauty, you will have to do a bit of number crunching.

Now that you have the weight of your RV figured out, it's time to think about the GVWR, which stands for Gross Vehicle Weight Rating. This is a very important number to know, as it specifies the maximum weight you can safely carry in your vehicle. This total number includes the weight of fuel and passengers, and even tongue or pin weight. As a general rule, tongue weight for any trailer is usually between 9 and 15 percent of the gross trailer weight. And, while you're loading up on terminology, it might be helpful to understand curb weight, too. Curb weight is the total weight of a vehicle while not loaded with either passengers or cargo.

Depending on the manufacturer of the vehicle, most of this information can be found on the vehicle's data plate, which is usually found on the inside of the driver's door frame, on the fuel door or in the glovebox. The numbers the manufacturer have provided are permanent and they should not be treated as suggestions! In fact, it's wise to leave a safety margin of 20% of the tow vehicle's maximum rating so that you don't exceed the weight limit.



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**Along with towing power, you should take a look at some physical specs of a truck too.** Many people use a three-quarter-ton truck because it is sure to get the job done. Think about the truck bed length too, especially if you're towing a fifth wheel. Getting a truck with an 8-foot bed length is best because it provides space in front and behind the fifth wheel hitch. But don't shy away from the box size you want because there are many hitching options available to accommodate almost any situation.



Another tip for your truck bed? Choose the option without the liner. If you're installing your fifth wheel hitch onto a bed that has a plastic liner, you'll have to cut around that material to attach your hitch which could leave you with a loose hitch connection.

Along with the big numbers of maximum tow rates and weights of both the vehicle and trailer (fully loaded up with cargo and passengers), you will need to know a few extra aspects. Towing capacity can quickly become complex when axle and tongue weights come into play.

**We've been throwing a lot of acronyms around, so here's a quick rundown of all the numbers you need to be aware of when determining whether or not your vehicle is fit to tow your RV:**

### **GVWR**

This stands for gross vehicle weight rating. In other words, it's the maximum weight your vehicle can tow.

### **GVW**

The actual maximum operating weight/mass of a vehicle as specified by the manufacturer including the vehicle's chassis, body, engine, engine fluids, fuel, accessories, driver, passengers and cargo but excluding that of any trailers.

### **GCWR**

This stands for gross combined weight rating. This number refers to the maximum combined mass of a vehicle, passengers and cargo within a tow vehicle, plus the entire mass of the trailer and cargo inside. You might see this number referred to as gross combination mass (**GCM**), gross train weight (**GTW**) or even maximum authorized mass (**MAM**).

### Tongue Weight

The downward force that is applied to a hitch. This is also referred to as **hitch weight**.

### Pin weight

The downward force applied to a fifth wheel hitch.

### RGAW

This describes the rear gross axle weight rating, which is provided by the two vehicle manufacturers.

Now that you've taken the time to understand all of these acronyms, you might be saying OMG (or something worse) to yourself. Trust us, we understand that it's a lot to take in!

Once you determine the numbers for each of these elements, you will be able to calculate whether or not a vehicle's axles and powertrain are capable of towing your RV.

If you're not feeling like crunching numbers, there are online calculators **like this one** that will find the answers for you. As a general rule, the GVWR of the towing vehicle must exceed the weight of the vehicle, trailer and tongue weight combined. It's ideal to have it exceed the total weight by at least 10%.

**Now that you've taken the time to understand all of these acronyms, you might be saying OMG (or something worse) to yourself.**



# STEP 3:

## INSTALL YOUR EQUIPMENT

### Get the gear to get in gear.

Alright! Now that you've got your dream RV and a vehicle that can tow it safely, it's time to hook it up and let the rubber meet the road!

In order to combine your RV and your vehicle into one harmonious road warrior's dream, you will need some equipment. With the right gear and a little experience, you will be able to slip your trailer on and off, and get rolling down the road or packing up camp in a snap!

The first step in finding the right hitch for you and your rig is to take a look at the details and class of each hitch. Don't throw out all of the numbers you have calculated and discovered in step two! You'll need them to understand the limits required when it comes to ball mounts and tongue weights.

**Now, while you look at the plethora of options, you'll quickly see that there are a ton of variations of hitches or "receivers" you can use. They are usually separated into the following classes:**

**Class 1 and 2:** Light duty, best used for tow trailers up to 2,000 pounds. These hitches do not increase the total weight given that a vehicle can tow, and usually feature a 1 ¼" square receiver that typically attaches to the bumper.

**Class 3:** A very common type of hitch that might come standard if your towing vehicle is equipped with a towing package. They can handle roughly 8,000 pounds and attach to the vehicle frame only.

**Class 4 & 5:** These heavy duty hitches can carry up to 10,000 pounds and 1,000 pounds of tongue weight. They usually have a 2" or 2 ½" square receiver. These hitches usually require a weight distribution system too.

These types of receivers are compatible with travel trailers. If you have a fifth wheel, you will have to install a fifth wheel hitch. These hitches are heavy duty and are mounted in the bed of your tow vehicle truck. A gooseneck hitch is designed to move the trailer's tongue weight forward and lift the truck's back axle. It's important to note that only trailers that are designed to connect to a gooseneck hitch can connect to this style. It is much more common to use a fifth wheel hitch rather than a gooseneck when it comes to towing RVs. Fifth wheel hitches are great because they have some pivoting capabilities and will make driving down the road a little smoother.



Class 4 Receiver



Fifth Wheel Hitch



Gooseneck Hitch

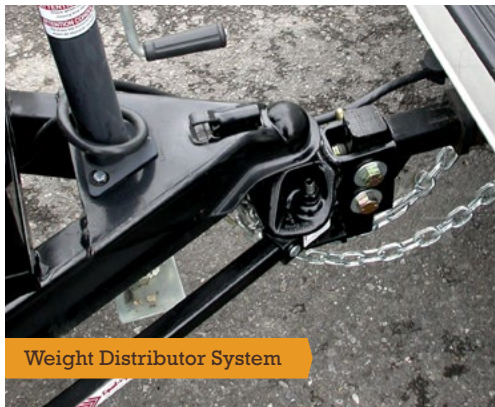


### **Don't forget to stay balanced!**

Weight distribution hitches are also something to consider when your RV is a travel trailer. They take some weight off the rear bumper hitch and move it to the front of the truck and rear of the camper. These tools brilliantly distribute the tongue weight of a trailer across all four tires. There are several kinds of weight distribution hitches you can use like drop chain, built-in sway, cam and drawbar hitches.

### **Get connected.**

Finally! It's time to quit talkin' and actually do something! Once you have the appropriate hitch and truck for your RV, you can connect them and hit the open road. There are a few things you should know before you roll out. For this part of the process, it's always good to have a co-pilot as an extra set of eyes to make sure you're all lined up and connected properly.



Weight Distributor System

### **For travel trailers:**

Get your trailer lined up with the ball bearing of your hitch. Then, you can slowly lower the trailer onto the ball. This is typically done with a hand crank. Lower the trailer onto the ball so that you are just putting a little bit of weight onto the hitch. Then, make sure that the lock is secured into place so that it doesn't go anywhere! Next, you

need to hook up your electrical plug, safety chains and breakaway cable. Once you've taken care of these steps, you just have to connect your weight distribution and sway control system of choice. After you have that connected, you can lower the rest of the weight onto the ball hitch, and you'll be ready to go!

### **For fifth wheelers:**

Connecting your truck bed hitch to your fifth wheeler is actually pretty simple. First, you should make sure your RV and truck are on the same level. If they aren't, you'll have to adjust the height of your RV to align it with the hitch pin. Next, open your tailgate, and look over your shoulder to slowly back the hitch into the RV jaw. Try and keep it as centered as possible. The great thing is that most fifth wheel hitches pivot slightly, so even if you're not lined up perfectly, it can still connect. Once they're in place, you simply lock the jaws shut with what's called a "cotter pin." Then, make sure you connect the emergency breakaway line to the hitch.

For travel trailers and fifth wheelers, it's important to connect and check the brake lights before you roll off on your adventure! This is a very important safety step, so take your time when checking that you are fully connected, from emergency lines to brake lights!



# STEP 4:

## HOOK ME UP WITH THE ROAD!

**Whew! Now that your connection is strong, it's time finally time to get connected with mother nature and take this baby for a spin!**

It's important to remember to take extra care as you drive with an RV of any kind attached to your vehicle. You're hauling a ton of weight down the road (literally), and it will affect the way your vehicle handles. We always suggest taking extra precautions like giving yourself extra room to brake and accelerate. Make sure you practice turning, and understand the way your camper moves behind you so you can avoid hitting curbs or crossing too far into different lanes of traffic.

You might be met with your toughest challenge right off the bat, which is backing up. Going in reverse with an RV attached to your backend can get tricky. It's usually a great idea to have a copilot help you back into spots or maneuver around campgrounds.

Along with extra driving care, you should avoid sudden stops as they could cause your RV to jackknife or skid. Always be aware of the sway of your RV, and activate trailer brakes to control it. Our last driving tip? Avoid parking on hills, if possible. Staying on a nice level surface will be much easier when hitching or unhitching your RV.

Remember, practice makes perfect when you're driving with an RV. It's never a bad idea to practice getting around in a big open parking lot, that way you can adjust your driving skills before you hit the road.

**Remember, practice makes perfect when you're driving with an RV.**



# | JUST TOW YOU KNOW: YOU'LL SOON BE A PRO!

## **There you have it, our four steps to towing an RV!**

Now that you've got all that taken care of, it's time to kick your feet up by the hot campfire and crack a cold beverage of choice, because you're a towing pro. You're probably so knowledgeable that now you could even help your fellow campers! Keep living the Good (and safely towed) Life!

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HAPPY RVING!

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