Many of us use a variety of trailers to help move large items or remove rubbish etc. and with a growing amount of people enjoying ‘staycations’ there are more people using caravans which can provide an enjoyable way to explore and enjoy our country.

Whether you are preparing to tow for the first time or are already confident towing, it is important you are aware of how to do so safely and legally.

**Driving licence required (weights)**
Within the category B (car and small van) on your license it will vary depending on when you passed your test:

**After 1st Jan 1997**
- A car or van up to 3,500kg maximum authorised mass (MAM) towing a trailer of up to 750kg MAM
  - 3,500kg max
  - 750kg max
- A trailer over 750kg as long as the combined MAM of the trailer and towing vehicle is no more than 3,500kg in total.
  - 3,500kg max combined

**Before 1st Jan 1997**
- A vehicle and trailer combination up to a combined MAM of 8,250kg. (as you will have C1 on your DL for up to 7.5t)
  - 8,250kg max combined

**What is Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)?**
This is the maximum weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load (passengers and/or cargo) that can be carried safely and legally while used on the road. It is sometimes known as gross vehicle weight or maximum permissible weight. The MAM for your vehicle will be shown in your log book and also on a stamped plate or sticker within the vehicle along with the Vehicle Identity Number (VIN). This is usually under the bonnet or insider the drivers door, or on the A-frame near the tow hook for trailers.

This leaflet can’t cover all possible variations and vehicles - all of the above is guidance only and you must check your driving license for any exceptions or limitations (code 96 for an increased total of 4,250kg after Jan 2013 on some EU licences for example).

The Gross Combination Weight (total of a vehicle and its trailer, also known as ‘train weight’) will also be shown on the VIN plate/sticker. You can exceed the maximum GCW/train weight shown on the plate or sticker as long as the actual weights remain within the stated maximums.

If your vehicle doesn't show a GCW/train weight figure then you shouldn't use it for towing.

If you exceed the MAM weights above for your licence it is likely to be treated as driving a vehicle in a dangerous condition, an offence carrying at least 3 penalty points, a fine of up to £2,500 and potential driving ban.

**Maximum width and length for trailers**
The maximum trailer width for any towing vehicle is 2.55m (8'4”). The maximum length for a trailer towed by a vehicle weighing up to 3,500kg is 7m (22’11”) not including A-frame.

**Mandatory brakes**
Your trailer must have a working brake system if it weighs over 750kg when it’s loaded (you can of course have brakes on lighter trailers and some do but these are optional).

You must use a breakaway cable or secondary coupling in case the trailer or caravan becomes detached from your car (in the event it does this will engage the brakes and stop it).

**Speed limits and other relevant laws**
- You cannot drive in the outside lane of a motorway with 3 or more open lanes at any time (unless specifically directed by a Traffic officer or sign).
- You cannot exceed 50mph on a single carriageway or 60mph on dual carriageways and motorways with a trailer attached.
- You must display a standard legal number plate (this can be rectangular or square) on the rear of your trailer and it must be illuminated at night.
- You cannot have passengers within any trailer or caravan whilst moving.
- If your trailer is unbraked then the maximum weight you can tow is 750kg or half the kerbside weight of the towing vehicle, whichever is lower.

**Mirrors**
The laws in this area can be quite complex however in simple terms, you must have at least two independent views to the rear when driving on UK roads, one of which must be the drivers wing mirror.

For standard driving, this could be an offside wing mirror and a rear view mirror, however when towing a caravan the rear view mirror becomes redundant so you need both mirrors... continued on the back
to provide a safe and sufficient view to the rear and comply with the law.

When towing a caravan a blind spot is created (with the exception of very narrow ones) preventing you from seeing the required distance behind you whilst driving. This blind spot can (and often does) cause collisions with other vehicles when changing lanes and whilst manouevring. To overcome this you must fit extended mirrors which easily fit onto your existing mirrors and provide you with a full view required behind you, eliminating any blind areas. See the diagram below

This blind spot applies to all standard cars with even the widest of the commonly available non-commercial vehicles in the UK market (Landrover Discovery or Range Rover) providing an insufficient view without extended mirrors fitted. Other types of vehicle such as vans or utility trucks will often be wide enough to have sufficient view without use of such mirrors but you may still find them a useful addition.

If you are seen towing a standard caravan or equivalent sized trailer without extended mirrors then you can fined up to £1,000 and receive 3 penalty points, you could also be dealt with for using a vehicle in a dangerous condition and receive at least 3 penalty points, a fine of up to £2,500 and potential driving ban.

Forgetting for the moment the law in relation to this offence and the potential for quite serious consequences from a collision on a busy motorway or main road, you should also consider the potential to cause expensive damage to your caravan and/or towing vehicle as well as other vehicles and the expensive and stressful insurance claims which can accompany this.

There are a wide range of extended mirrors available from a variety of motor accessory stores and caravan suppliers and these start from as little as £15-£20 which is a very small price to pay to avoid damaging your pride and joy and delaying or cancelling your holiday or worse.

More advice and guidance

- When packing a trailer (caravans especially) you should aim to keep heavy items as low down and close to the axle as possible.
- If the trailer starts to ‘snake’ (swerve side to side whilst towing) then you should relax your grip on the steering -still hold firm but not so rigid as to have a fixed steering position then reduce your speed by lifting your feet off the pedals. Try and brake as little and lightly as possible.
- Allow more time and space for everything, especially corners which you will need to take more widely.

If you want more advice and guidance specific to caravans, including other safety tips and details of towing/reversing courses you can go on etc. carry out an internet search as many popular clubs and websites can be found with lots more help available.

For advice on motorway emergencies download the ‘Motorway Safety’ FAQ leaflet.