

WORDS TRAVIS GODFREYSON
 IMAGES JACK MURPHY, MICHAEL ELLEM, EASYTOW, TRANSTYLE, TRAILER REPAIR CENTRE

ROLLIN' BY THE RIVER

IS THAT SHOUT OF 'TRAILER TRASH' JUST TO INSULT SOME AMERICAN HILLBILLIES? OR IS SOMEONE TRYING TO WARN YOU THAT SOMETHING NASTY IS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO YOUR BOAT'S ROAD RIDE?

It's a dark, moonless night and you're cruising down the road en route to your secret fishing spot. The tunes are humming quietly while the wife and kids are in a deep slumber. Your tummy is well-satisfied with a Double Quarter Pounder soaked in a Chocolate Shake. You imagine the perfect sunrise in the morning; visions of the perfect cast to your favourite tree stump. Your imagination is rudely interrupted when the boat and trailer start snaking down the road behind you. You ease off the gas, clattering to a stop to review the carnage. The boat and trailer are leaning stubbornly to one side; springs collapsed under twisted metal. The tyres are rubbing hard up against the steel, leaving the acrid smell of mechanical failure in your nostrils. You're 100kms from nowhere, the missus wakes up, clears her eyes and is deeply unimpressed – and now the damn kids have just woken up. Then it occurs to you. Maybe you should have bought a better trailer...

HERE ARE THE COMMON TRAILER PROBLEMS - AND HOW TO AVOID THEM: THE WHEEL DEAL

Overheating bearings are the most common trailer problem. A bearing is designed to hold grease or oil, lubricating small rollers within a housing. Over time the grease will dissipate due to extreme heat and seepage. Without grease, water will enter the bearing and corrode the steel. Then, under load, the bearing will overheat and collapse and your wheel will either seize up or fall off.

The two indicators for bad bearings are noise and heat. Keep an ear out when towing, and also put your hand around the hub after stopping to check for excessive heat (don't worry, you'll know!). This is more likely to occur when touring – when the boat is loaded with gear placing more pressure on the bearings.

Bearing buddies are a nifty product, enabling you to pump grease into the bearing. Pump in just enough so the front spring pops out – not too much, or you'll pop the seal on the inside of the hub.

Change your bearings once a year (whether you have buddies or not) and consider keeping a full replacement kit in your car for emergencies. Just make sure you have the right parts and tools to do the job. A practice run may save you a world of time and pain.

UFO SIGHTINGS ON THE HUME HIGHWAY

Have you ever been cruising down the highway, been overtaken by a bounding wheel – and then realised it's yours? Or, perhaps you've had one come your way? Losing a wheel happens all too often. It's usually just the wheel nuts and is very easy to prevent.

Keep a wheel brace handy and nip them up every couple of trips and put a small amount of grease on the stud to make nut removal easier. Sadly, you can't always trust your mechanic to look after your nuts. I took my trailer to a reputable tyre supplier, only to watch my wheel bound down the road in excitement. The cause, as described by the fitter, was a faulty air compressor that didn't generate enough pressure to drive the operator gun. Bollocks.

PRESSURE ACTS

A patch of rubber no bigger than your hand separates your shiny new boat and trailer from the tarmac. If tyres run flat, there's a good chance you'll expose the weak sidewall to the road and damage them. Tyre walls can also be damaged when they rub against a curb. Over-inflating tyres can be just as wicked. We inadvertently ran truck tyres at the maximum load, and they lasted about 50kms before blowing to Kingdom Dumb.

Keep tyre pressure around 30 – 40psi and run 8-ply tyres rated for towing, if you can. And avoid low profile tyres, which may give you that Snoop Dog look, but won't offer the same cushioning effect of a taller tyre.

Tread is a critical component of tyres. Well "der", I hear you say, but it still surprises me how many people cruise down the highway in their 200 Series Landcruiser worth more than a small island, towing a trailer with tyres that ran bald some time before the Vietnam War.

The thing with tread is that it creates static friction and the more static friction at the contact point, the better the traction. Good tread assists this process. Jack-knifing is not caused by heavy winds or unbalanced trailers (though they don't help), it's caused when tyres lose their grip (or friction) on the road and slide sideways.

ALLOY VS STEEL: IRONING OUT THE ISSUE

Deciding between alloy or steel is the biggest consideration for trailer buyers.

Alloy is lighter, resulting in fuel cost savings under towing conditions. Lighter trailers can also (potentially) bring the total package weight within the required limits required for braked trailers (resulting in cost savings for brake components).

Alloy won't rust, which suits a saltwater environment and the I beam construction on alloy won't hold water, minimizing corrosion.

Sure, an alloy trailer may flex a bit, but that's a good thing as your boat won't absorb the impact.

On the down side, alloy trailers are generally more expensive – and early models suffered from quality issues. Designs from reputable Australian companies like Transtyle have largely overcome this stigma.

Steel has the benefit of strength and is generally regarded as more cost effective. Repairs are easier too, with a wider access to qualified steel repairers. On the down side, steel trailers should be inspected to prevent rust. Paint scratches should be touched up to prevent oxidation and repairs on galvanized trailers will need to be properly re-galvanized to prevent corrosion.

LOW PROFILE TYRES MIGHT GIVE YOU THAT SNOOP DOG LOOK, BUT TALLER TYRES WILL GIVE YOU A SOFTER RIDE



I-BEAM SECTIONS WON'T HOLD WATER LIKE SOME BOX SECTIONS CAN



SAY GOODBYE TO LEAF SPRINGS WITH RUBBER TORSION AXLES



IT'S ALL IT TAKES REALLY. PRESSURE, AND TIME.



DIRTY DOZEN
12 TRAILER FAILURES TO LOOK OUT FOR

Duncan Reid from Trailer Repair Centre is the doctor of broken trailers. He's successfully returned hundreds of wounded trailers back to the road, wiping up the tears of their despairing owners in the process.

- 1** Seized bearings due to a lack of lubrication. If you have bearing buddies stick to Duncan's 'two-every-two' rule. Two pumps of grease for every two trips. "And change bearings every 12 months, whether they are bearing buddies or not," he advises.
- 2** Poor quality lighting that swills salt water. "If it aint an ADR approved LED, don't bother," says Duncan. "Stick with local suppliers who can back up their products with parts and warranty."
- 3** Corroded trailer plugs. "Easily fixed by rubbing the points with fine sandpaper and treating the plug to a bath of CRC, WD40 or Innox." Duncan also advises an inspection of points and adjusting to make sure they're slotting into the allocated holes. If that doesn't work rewire the internals of the plug.
- 4** Perished Tyres. Duncan says "months rather than miles" are the killer of tyres. Rubber breaks down over time, leading to cracking and blow-outs. Quality tyres will decay slower than cheap imports, which have flooded the market.
- 5** Rusted-out or broken leaf springs. "When the leaves spread, or you see light between the layers it's time to change them. Some slipper springs have been around for 50 years, so might be time to check 'em," says Duncan.
- 6** Problems with the spare. Here's Duncan's 'flow-chart-of-flop' when it comes to spare wheels. "No spare wheel, a spare wheel that doesn't fit, or a spare wheel that fits with no tools to change it," says Duncan. He advises a tyre change in the back yard to see where you fit on the flop-ometer.
- 7** Bad rollers. Plastic rollers can shear, exposing your shiny new hull to hard steel. "Rubber rollers can also perish in the same way tyres can," Duncan warns. He also says alloy boats are particularly tough on polyethylene rollers – and should be inspected and replaced when damaged.
- 8** Poorly adjusted mechanical brakes. Mechanical override brakes are good things, when they work. But they need to be regularly adjusted. Cables should also be inspected for fraying.
- 9** Hydraulic brakes. In Duncan's experience, even the best quality brake components will corrode. "To avoid seized brakes, calipers should be changed every 2 years. Full changeover parts are now cheaper than reconditioning."
- 10** Rusted trailers. "Box sections rust from the inside out and can be hard to spot," says Duncan. "When you've launched the boat, check the trailer, particularly around joints and lower sections for rust."
- 11** Trailer parts hangin' loose. "Trailers cop a lot of vibration – but nobody likes crawling under their boat with a spanner". Duncan recommends changing spring washers and using nylocs nuts wherever possible.
- 12** Seized or broken jockey wheel. Jockey wheels have moving parts, too. "Tyres should be inspected for cracking and correct air pressure," he says. A tip from Duncan is to unwind the jockey wheel and apply some grease to the thread.

WORTH THE WEIGHT?

Weight is the serial killer of trailers. It creates excessive stress on frames, springs and bearings. Many trailer-boat owners work the margins, staying just within legal limits for braked trailers, however it all gets thrown out the door for the Christmas holidays when half-a-tonne of BCF product is loaded into the boat. Compounding the weight problem is that the load sits up above the axle, creating a higher centre of gravity and reducing stability.

Another problem is sending weight too far forward in the boat (and onto the trailer hitch), which compromises the ride. Your suspension is supposed to absorb impact through the wheels – not the weight of five Malvern Star bikes and a Swedish steel pram. Australian trailer manufacturers have compensated for our sins, building better quality trailers with a lower centre of gravity. Ride quality has also improved with independent suspension. ➔



TRANSTYLE RIM BLING



COMPANIES LIKE EASYTOW USE TIN WIRING AND ADR APPROVED LED LIGHTS

EAST COAST PILGRIMAGE

Jack Murphy reflects on his trip with a Transtyle Trailer.

The trip from Melbourne to Far North Queensland along the coast isn't an easy drive by any stretch of the imagination. Doubly so, if you've got to trek it back again at the end of your adventure. All up, you're looking at over 8,000km of hard wear and tear on you and your boat trailer. Along the way you'll also find treacherous road works, corrugated dirt roads, cattle grids and plenty of potholes, which all try and put the boot in. Call me crazy, but I've completed this fishing pilgrimage back and forth three times!

On my first two voyages, I experienced cooked wheel bearings, flat tyres and even a snapped winch post! However, on my last trip I got there and back without a single problem. Yep, I travelled 10,000km without any trailer niggles. With a single-axle Transtyle under the belly of my baby, Red Dog (a Stabicraft 1650), the crew and I travelled in safety and style.

Put simply; a good trailer is one that you forget about. That's why I loved the Transtyle trailer. The low centre of gravity meant it didn't dance, bounce or sway behind the car, nor did it flex too little or too much. The oil bearings were an initial concern, only because of the rumours I'd heard. However, they ended up being really simple to use and only needed to be filled up twice in 10,000kms. When it came to launching, the three-roller/skid combination worked a treat. The boat wouldn't instantly slide off the trailer when the straps were removed. A touch of reverse from the outboard would get it off easily, which is ideal for those solo missions.



WHEEL BEARING ASSEMBLY, MINUS THE WHEEL

TOP 5 TOWING QUESTIONS ANSWERED

With so much regulation on our roads, it's hard to know where you stand when towing large boats on Victorian roads. Here are five frequently asked questions from boat owners:

- 1** **Q:** When does your boat trailer need brakes?
A: Under 750kg, you're not required to have a braked trailer. Between 750kg and 2000kg you're required to have mechanical/hydraulic brakes and over 2000kg breakaway brakes are compulsory.
- 2** **Q:** How wide can your boat/trailer be when towing on Victorian roads?
A: Up to 2.5m.
- 3** **Q:** Can you still tow your boat/trailer on Victorian roads if it's over these dimensions?
A: Yes, but it will be deemed a light oversize vehicle (also known as Class O). Provided the boat/trailer isn't over 3.5m you don't need a permit. However, you will need to carry the Victoria Government Gazette, which includes the regulations of where and when Class O vehicles may be used.
- 4** **Q:** Can you park an over-width boat/trailer on public/residential roads?
A: Yes, however it will need to meet the same obligations as if it were being towed.
- 5** **Q:** Can you be fined for not meeting Class O obligations?
A: Yes. The penalties would be under the Road Safety (Victoria) Regulations. On the spot fines of \$148 to \$295 could be issued. Courts may issue heavier penalties. Your boat may also be grounded.

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