

# KEVO'S BOATING

## TIPS

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### Trailer

**W**ith summer just around the corner many boaters will be taking to the roads headed for new adventures on the many lakes and waterways of Northern California with their beloved boats in tow. I loved trailering my last boat to different destinations. It was a big sucker, too! Heck, sometimes I'd just hook it up and tow it around the neighborhood. Not that I was going boating BUT I COULD BE! Woof Woof!

Seriously, trailering a boat is serious business and can be very challenging and potentially dangerous. The keys to making trailering as safe as possible lie in preparation, maintenance and compatibility.

**TIRES:** Choosing the right tires for your boat trailer is critical. There are tires specifically made for towing. Two companies that come to mind are Carlial and Tow Master. Radial tires are not compatible with boat trailers. What you need is a good old-fashion, 6-ply tire with a heavy load capacity.

Never mind looking for wear on the tread of a trailer tire. Trust me, they will wear out long before the tread does. Look for the "spider cracks" in the sidewalls of the tires. If they are present, chances are the tire is shot. The reason for this is that the tire "flexes" just before and after coming into contact with the road, creating heat and the cracks.

The vast majority of tire failures on boat trailers are attributed to sidewall blowout. The main culprit in this scenario is the tire pressure. The lower the tire pressure in relation to the proper pounds per square inch (PSI), the more flexing before and after the tire meets the road, increasing the heat on the tire's sidewalls, thus making sidewall blowouts the most common cause of (trailer) tire failure. Because trailer tires usually have a relatively high PSI rating,

they lose pressure faster than regular automobile tires. They could lose 10 PSI in a week. Check the tire pressure often.

**BEARINGS:** These are the next culprits. Your boat trailer is being submersed in water every time you launch or retrieve. These days, most boat trailers have Bearing Buddies® already installed on the axles. Many boaters have a misconception regarding Bearing Buddies. They do not keep the bearings on the trailer waterproof. What they do is provide pressure to the grease, thereby injecting it into the outside race. They also include an easily accessible nipple to inject the bearing grease. The grease in the outside race heats up, turning into a liquid and then flows to the inside race, bathing it with grease.

The key to managing how much grease to inject has to do with the spring mechanism on the Bearing Buddies. When first installed, grease should be injected until the spring mechanism reaches the outside rim of the Bearing Buddy housing. This fills the reservoir. After this you need to check the position of the spring mechanism to determine if more grease is required.

The mistake most people make is to pump in the amount of grease needed to make the spring mechanism expand to the outside of the housing like it was when originally filled. If you do this two (bad) things will happen. First, the grease will ooze out of the edges of the spring mechanism and fly all over your wheels and tires as you drive, making a greasy mess. (This can be avoided by purchasing rubber caps for the Bearing Buddies.) Next, the inner bearing seal will rupture and the grease will blow out on the inside of the wheel. I don't think I have to tell you what will happen next.

The key to properly greasing bearings with Bearing Buddies is to pump just enough grease into the nipple to make the spring mechanism start to move. That's it; you're done. The bearings now have enough grease in the reservoir. Checking bearing grease often is an easy way to avoid a catastrophic failure of the trailer bearings. When I say catastrophic, I mean you're not going anywhere if the bearings fail. You'll be extremely lucky if you find a repair shop that has the bearings you'll need in stock. Your trip will most likely be scrubbed.

So, what to do? Find out what size bearings

are on your trailer and buy an extra set and keep it onboard just in case they fail. They are inexpensive and it could save your trip.

**SALT WATER:** This is the most challenging area as far as maintaining your boat trailer's integrity. If you are going to use the trailer in salt water, you may as well spring for the extra \$\$\$ for a galvanized trailer. Painted trailers start pretty, and get ugly (rust). Galvanized trailers start ugly and stay ugly. (But they stay forever!) You can also get brake wash-downs, which will rinse out the insides of all trailer drum brakes with fresh water.

### Load Balancing

Balancing the load (boat) on a trailer and balancing the trailer in relation to the tow vehicle are critical to safely towing a boat.

**THE BOAT:** These days, trailers are custom made for the specific boat they will carry. Trailer manufacturers have computerized access to the contours of every trailerable boat keel on the market. Consequently, the trailer bunks are made to perfectly match the keel of the boat they are intended to carry. Most trailers are designed so the boat is in the right place on the trailer when the bow eye comes into contact with the rubber bow roller on the trailer. (This is not true of all trailers. Check with the dealer to determine the proper placement of the boat on your trailer.)

If the boat is not secured to the trailer properly, it may have a dramatic (negative) effect on the road handling characteristics of the tow vehicle.


**THE TOW VEHICLE:** The next issue is balancing the boat and trailer in relation to the tow vehicle. Tongue weight refers to the weight resting on the trailer ball from the combined weight of the boat and trailer. The trailer manufacturer takes this into account when designing the trailer for the boat. The benchmark is between 5% and 10% of the total weight of the load. So as long as the boat is positioned properly on the trailer, the tongue weight should be acceptable.

Then there is the dropdown on the shaft of the trailer hitch. There are many different dropdown distances to choose from. (Sometimes these need to be turned 180 degrees so the dropdown actually goes up from the shaft of the hitch.) Determining the proper dropdown for your trailer/vehicle can easily be calculated.

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On level ground with trailer (with boat) attached to tow vehicle, measure the distance from the bottom of the trailer rail to the ground. The trailer rails are the two pieces that start together in the front and spread out to either side. The taillights are usually attached to the back end. The trailer rail should be a parallel line. If the distance from the ground to the bottom of the rail in the back is, say 20 inches, this means the same distance in the front should be 20 inches (or a little less, but not more). This is especially important when dealing with a tandem and triple axle trailer. If the trailer sits (significantly) lower in the front than the back, the load will be concentrated on the front axle, wheels and tires, which could cause a premature blowout of one of the tires of the front axle and/or bearing failure on the front axle.

As always, feedback is important and appreciated. Please feel free to contact me at 925/890-8428 or e-mail at [KevosBoatingTips@YachtsmanMagazine.com](mailto:KevosBoatingTips@YachtsmanMagazine.com) with your comments, suggestions and opinions.

***Be safe and have fun boating!*** 

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