

Towing your Dragon

These days cars and trailers have become so reliable it's simple just to "jump in and go" but there are a few basic checks that are well worth making part of the routine when towing. This is particularly the case on short journeys when it is easy to depart with the Dragon behind, not having checked the trailer, trailer lights, documents, spares etc.

In the yard we do see the unfortunate Dragons that have become the victims of road accidents; it does make you think twice about safety.

We are lucky the UK is very much more relaxed than abroad that is not a legal requirement to carry car and trailer documents; you can produce them later if stopped by the police. In most of Europe when you are stopped without the correct papers and spares in the car it's not fun. I have seen recently more and more random roadside checks by the police as well as weigh bridge checks so it's well worth knowing if the car and trailer combination are legal.

What to check.

1. **Trailer service.** A Dragon on its trailer is a big load (over two tonnes) so it's well worth having a regular trailer service especially the brakes and bearings.
2. **Visual check.** Check for any loose bolts, cracks in any welds, bulges or cuts in the tyres. Stop a short distance after the start of your journey to ensure that everything is still tied on tightly.
3. **Tyre pressures.** Recommended on a four wheel trailer is for the back wheels to have different pressures than the front. Recommended: Back 42psi.Front 38psi.
4. **Spare wheel.** Do you have it, is it accessible, and is it useable?
5. **Changing the wheel.** Is a jack and wheel brace in the trailer box? Don't rely on the car jack and wheel brace they may not fit. Changing a blown tyre is not so easy but a top tip for a quick change is to carry a wooden wedge or lump of wood in the trailer box. On a four wheel trailer you can just drive onto the wood with the good wheel and it will lift the other wheel on that side.





6. Lights It is recommended that spare bulbs are carried for any lights that may be replaced by the driver easily and safely. On some cars with high intensity discharge headlamps, it is inadvisable or impossible for anyone other than a qualified technician to change a headlamp bulb. However, spare bulbs and the tools to change them are still a requirement for Spain.

Headlamp adjustment for older vehicles can be done by using simple adhesive masks on the headlamp glass. For newer vehicles with HID, Xenon or many Halogen headlamps it may not be so easy. Contact the dealer for your make of vehicle for advise. Without adjustment the dipped beam will dazzle oncoming drivers and this could result in a fine. In some countries it is compulsory to use dipped headlights at all times when driving during the day.

7. Insurance. Is insurance for the trailer OK and for the correct value of the Dragon? Make sure the certificate clearly shows that a towed trailer is covered.

8. Weight. Know the weight of the loaded trailer and know if the towing car is legal to pull it.

Following is a table of vehicle models you may consider using for towing, and their current legal status for this purpose. This information should be in your vehicles handbook, or, if in doubt speak to your local dealer.

Vehicle model	Gross vehicle weight kg	Max. towing weight kg
Audi Q7	Not available	3200
BMW X5	2815	2700
BMW 5 series		3500
Discovery 3	3230	3500
Range Rover Sport	3125	3500
Range Rover	3100	3500
Mercedes ML	3250	3500
Mercedes GL	2505	3500
Mercedes E	Not suitable for Dragon	1900
Porsche Cayenne	3080	3500
VW Touareg	2945	3500

9. Documentation. Most Dragon trailers are plated to carry 2500Kg. Make sure your GTW (gross train weight), car and trailer weight combined is legal for the car pulling the trailer. Especially in Europe I would always recommend carrying not only the insurance certificate but also the car registration papers showing the GTW

10. Warning triangle. The use of warning triangles and hazard warning lights is

compulsory in an accident/breakdown situation. Warning triangles should always be carried as hazard-warning lights may become damaged in an accident or have no effect at bends or rises in the road.

If driving in Spain, one warning triangle is compulsory for non-Spanish registered vehicles; two for Spanish registered vehicles. Note: Drivers of non-Spanish registered vehicles should consider carrying two triangles as, regardless of regulations, local officials may impose on-the-spot fine if only one is available.

11. Reflective vests European law now requires all vehicles to carry reflective vests, for drivers **AND** their passengers. Anybody providing roadside assistance, or leaving a stranded vehicle, should always wear a reflective vest to ensure their own safety. This is now a legal requirement in a number of European countries

12. Driving licence. The minimum age for driving in Europe is 18, with the exception of Norway, Portugal, Denmark and Italy, where it is 17.

As the Dragon and towing vehicle exceeds 3500kg you will be required to hold a C1+E license. If you passed your driving test before 1st January 1997 your licence will automatically include C1 + E category. If you have passed after this date you will be required to take an extra test and be over 21.

All valid UK licences should be accepted. UK driving licences which do not incorporate photograph are recognised, but drivers must be able to produce photographic proof of identity (e.g. passport). If you do not have the photo card licence it may be worth getting one.

13. GB sticker. I have been stopped for not having one on the trailer! GB Stickers are compulsory within the EU unless your UK registration plates display the GB Euro-symbol (Europlates). The Euro plate is only legally recognised in the EU; it is still a requirement to display a GB sticker when travelling outside the EU.

14. Keys. Do you have the keys for the hitch locks, trailer boxes and any lock on the spare wheel?

15. Fire Extinguisher and First Aid Kit. The European Good Samaritan Law requires every driver to stop and provide assistance when encountering an accident or incident, providing it is safe to do so. This may require a first aid kit and a fire extinguisher and it is therefore strongly advisable to carry these items when driving in Europe.

16. On the spot fines The moment these are demanded, they have to be paid in cash, in the local currency, to the arresting officer. Credit cards or travellers cheques are not accepted, and in some countries inability to pay, risks impounding the driver's vehicle until the fine is paid. Make sure you have sufficient local currency.

It is not easy to find the latest rules but I have attempted to summarise what I have found.

For more information on legal requirements for trailers visit the Department for Transport website <http://www.dft.gov.uk>

Requirements regarding trailers used on the road are given in the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986, as amended and the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989.

I am not an expert and this is only the understanding I have from the research I have carried out; I hope it helps.

Really the laws are designed to keep us and otherdrivers safe. It is well worth investing in safe towing practices.

Tim Tavinor

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