



# Institute of Advanced Motorists

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## Fact Sheet 20/001

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### SUCCESSFUL TOWING TECHNIQUES

No matter what you are towing, be it a speedboat, a horsebox or a caravan, certain rules apply. Suddenly you have to think about controlling not just one vehicle but two. Driver awareness and good perception are therefore all important – but so too are directional stability, engine power and brakes. Follow these successful towing techniques from the Institute of Advanced Motorists and you should get there safely.

- **Do not overload.** The total weight of the unit you are towing should not exceed 85 per cent of the car's kerb weight. If it is, the towing vehicle will be dangerously unstable. The unit should always be "nose heavy" and run slightly down at the front, but with not too much downforce exerted on the towball. The noseweight can be measured using a gauge or spring balance.
- **Check the towed unit is secure** before pulling away, and **check again** after a short distance. Look for anything loose, disconnected, missing or inoperative. It's too easy to overlook the obvious the first time around, especially if you are keen to get away.
- **Check the extra rear lights are all connected and working properly.** Get somebody to check while you test the brakes and indicators. You will also need an illuminated number plate at the rear of the unit.
- **Take time for tyres.** You should have the correct pressure all round, not just on the trailer but especially the towing vehicle's tyres which will probably need more air given the greater load. Check the manufacturer's handbook.
- **While driving allow more road space and more time for everything:** starting off, stopping, overtaking, positioning yourself for turns, parking, pulling into traffic streams, changing lanes and joining and leaving motorways. Even earlier anticipation is the key – brake sooner, take that corner a little wider – and when negotiating a roundabout, remember it's too easy to clip the kerb because of your extra length.
- **Use your mirrors frequently.** The fact you have lost rear vision from the internal mirror makes extended door mirrors very attractive. Extended towing mirrors may not be a legal requirement, but you will have a better feel for overtaking and reversing, plus enhanced all round visibility. Adjust them so you have a good view down both sides of the extended load. Sign up for a manoeuvring course with the Camping and Caravanning Course, which now has a tie up with the IAM's own towing test.
- **Be aware that reduced speed limits usually apply** when towing vehicles and remember to extend courtesy to vehicles following you by allowing them to pass.