

Average First Timer 5th Wheel Purchase

Mr. & Mrs. Gene Anybody, Gene age 56 and Mary 52. Gene an electrician engineer takes an early retirement offer. Mary owns a small business and maintains the household. Mary and Gene have raised two children and have 4 grandchildren. They decide to sell their home of 40 years to one of their grown children and proceed to go full time RVing in a 5th wheel with their existing pickup truck. A 2004- ¾ ton 4x4 Short Bed heavy duty rated to tow over 13,000 pound 5th wheel trailers.

They visit 5 different 5th wheel RV dealers and settle on a trailer based only on the couple's floor plans options. They take for granted or assume that the trailers are manufactured for safely towing for their floor plan. They also ended up with a local dealer of over 35 years in one location. Gene spends two days trying to lower the price of the 38' 2 axle 3 slide trailer with a 8" extended king pin for short bed trucks. The dealer states the trailer G.T.W. (Gross Trailer Weight) 11,225 pounds empty and Gene figures loaded 13,000 pounds G.T.W. leaving 1,775 for personnel contents. Gene double-checked with the truck manufactures recommendations less than 13,000 pounds.

Gene states to the RV sales man (Rob) that he wants to get the best 5th wheel hitch on the market as he knows he is close to overloading the truck. Asking Rob if he needs to buy a dually 3500 with an 8' bed as his existing 5th wheel towing uncle recommended. Rob states that the existing 3/4 ton truck was designed by the manufacturer to tow this trailer and he sells him a rigid standard double swivel 18K slider hitch for \$1,300.00 that the dealer installs.

Gene and Mary are outfitted and pick up the trailer totally hitched when they arrive to drive their new portable castle. Functions of the operations of trailer accessories are briefly demonstrated. So they go to the home of 40 years and load the portable castle with their personnel items. They live in Michigan and plan to tow to Arizona for the winter. They get on the interstate and drive the speed limit 65 mph. Because of road conditions and normal road issues, the truck and trailer are bouncing and jerking side-to-side, up-and-down, forward-to-back. Gene tries to maintain his speed while other vehicles, including many 18-wheelers, are passing him causing him to move all over the road. Mary is uneasy and feels a motion sick along with some white knuckles. Gene has been gripping the steering wheel with both hand and has tightened his grip and also has white knuckles. They tow 6 hours and pull off at a campground exit very tired. They pay the fee to camp and proceed to their camping space. Gene knows he was sold a slider hitch and decides to set it before he backs into the space. He reads the instructions for the slider and it takes him 5 times getting out of vehicle to operate the slider for the parking maneuver. Half an hour later they are backed into a camping spot and set up. Gene needs to go to the store and tries to disconnect the trailer/truck, but the coupler is jammed. He decides to leave it coupled and they spend the night.

The next morning he talks to a neighbor (Bill) about not uncoupling. Bill shows him the trick to uncouple and the truck and trailer are now uncoupled. They spend 1/2 day at campground, Gene backs the truck up to the trailer to couple after several attempts, and four times in and out of the truck, he thinks he is connected. Gene prepares the trailer jacks and contents. Gene and Mary gets into the truck and they go to pull off and they hear a **loud crash** and find out that the trailer did not couple. After Gene and Mary get out of the truck they find the trailer kingpin and slammed down on the truck bed. The trailer has come in contact with the truck bed sides and damaged the trailer and truck. Neighbor Bill heard the crash comes running over to help. After correctly hitching up, Bill states he has done the same thing 6 months ago and it cost him \$3,095 to fix his truck and trailer, which the insurance company paid for, but he had to wait on truck and trailer for 3 weeks. Gene also has to get in and out of truck to operate slider hitch and Bill tells him he has an extended king pin on his trailer and he does not need to use the slider. Gene tells Bill that the dealer said that he needed both the kingpin extension and slider if he had to back into a space and needed to get the truck and trailer at a 90-degree angle to get into the space. Bills tells Gene that he should never get his truck and trailer into that position because the trailer will be turning at a 90 degree and the tires could be forced off the rim.

Gene and Mary decide to head back home and get the trailer and truck fixed and then think what they want to do now that they have had their first real experience. They decide after the rough ride home to consider selling both truck and trailer and buy a motor home. They go back to RV trailer dealer and they have it estimated. For repairs to trailer it costs \$2,680.00 and 4 weeks to repair and \$1,400 for repairs to the truck. They look at motor homes to trade truck and trailer and discovered a \$150,000 difference! They go to their sons home disgusted. They then decide to get on the internet and check out some of the forums and other potential solutions to their problems.

What Went Wrong:

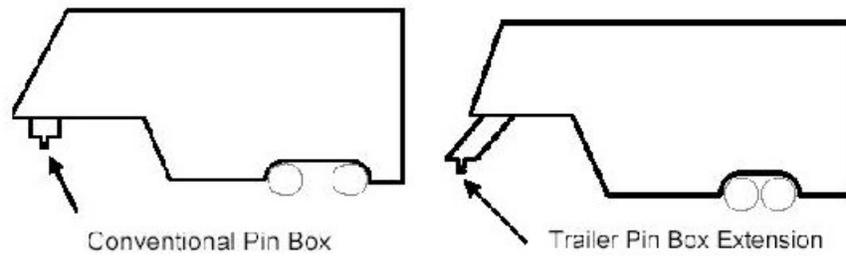
Now let's take a look at the different things that should have been done or mistakes that were made: *(The following articles have been published in back issues of our Newsletter. Use the link to review the newsletter with that article.) This document contains a copy of the articles noted below.*

- Before going to your RV dealer research information for the correct tow vehicle. (click ["Choosing the Correct Tow Vehicle"](#) found in the **May, 2004** Newsletter)
- Did not get basic 5th wheel information before going to dealers. (click ["Introduction to Fifth Wheel Trailers"](#) found in the **April, 2004** Newsletter)
- Paid \$1,300 for a slider hitch they did not need (click ["Common Fifth Wheel Questions"](#) found in the **February, 2004** Newsletter)
- Under estimated the weight of the contents of the trailer (click ["Can Your Vehicle Carry the Load?"](#) found in the **March, 2004** Newsletter)
- Did not research towing articles and forums to find out from other people what the real issues were (click ["Tips for Towing Vehicles – Tow Hitches for 4x4 Truck or SUV"](#), found in the **April, 2004** Newsletter)
- If you are considering full-time towing look into medium duty trucks and truck conversions (click ["Truck Conversions"](#) found in the **March, 2004** Newsletter)
- Internet search for Positive Locking 5th Wheel Hitches using Holland-Binkley head assemblies.
- To get a smoother and safer ride look for a omni-directional controlling 5th wheel. (click ["The AAH Advantage"](#) for more details)
- Check out on-line forums to get the opinion of other people who have experience.

Common Fifth Wheel Questions – Feb 2004

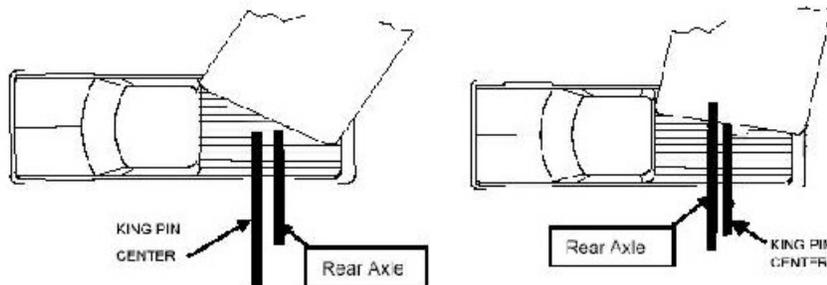
The installation instructions give the exact location of where to install the fifth wheel trailer hitch for optimal towing. With an eight foot wide fifth wheel trailer, Reese and Draw-Tite recommend a distance of 52" from the cab of the truck to the center of the fifth wheel hitch. Because the hitch must remain in front of the rear axle, long bed full size trucks are recommended. Any truck with a bed less than 8 feet long is considered a short bed.

If a short bed truck is going to be used, a [Slider](#), along with an extended pin box, is recommended to help compensate for the reduced turning clearance. Without the slider or pin box extension the trailer can strike the cab on sharp turns. The Slider allows the vehicle to make normal turns during low speed maneuvering more comfortable. The extended pin box (minimum 13") creates even more space between the truck cab and the trailer.



A Slider?

When towing a fifth wheel trailer on the highway, the trailer king pin must be between the cab of the truck and the rear axle. This makes maneuvering a trailer around a narrow camp site with a short bed truck very difficult. The slider locks in place between the cab and the rear axle for highway towing. However, when maneuvering around narrow spaces, the slider can be released, moving the hitch and therefore the king pin 10" closer to the tailgate. The greater space between the cab and the trailer allows for greater turning clearance.



This diagram shows how turning is restricted when the hitch is located in its proper position for highway use.

This diagram shows how sliding the hitch closer to the end of the truck provides a greater distance between the cab and the trailer, optimizing turning clearance.

Installation?

When each is done properly, there is no benefit to welding the installation brackets to the frame compared to bolting the brackets. If welding is preferred, make sure it is done by a certified welder.

The universal rail kits [50035](#) and [6005](#) mount to any full size pickup, but the kits require drilling to mount to the truck's frame. If the tow vehicle is a late model Ford ('97 +), Chevrolet ('99 +), or GMC ('99 +), [Custom Installation Kits](#) can be used that mount to existing holes in the frame. Not only do these custom kits make finding the proper installation location easier, most applications require no drilling, reducing installation time by up to 50%. The custom rail kits will also work with both long bed and short bed trucks. Not included with the custom installation kits are the rails that the fifth wheel hitch sits on. The custom installation kits are designed for part # [50033](#) but work with most fifth wheel rails.

Bed Liners?

Fifth wheel installation rails cannot be installed over plastic bed liners. The liner will eventually disintegrate and a loose hitch is the result. However, the installation rails can be installed over a spray in liner.

Maintenance?

1. Use either a [plastic lube plate](#) or an automotive type chassis grease to lubricate the skid plate surface. The plastic lube plates must have a diameter of at least 10 inches and be no thicker than 3/16 of an inch. To keep moving parts in good working order, use engine oil or white

lithium spray lube. For the joints inside the hitch head use a white lithium spray, for the other moving points use a high pressure lube (i.e. 80/90 gear lube). Also, lubricating the interior handle and the spring coils eases hitch operation.

****Lubrication is extremely important. Before lubricating, remove the old dirty lubricant. ****

2. Prior to each use, engage the jaws to make sure they operate easily.
3. Make sure the pull pins are in the proper position, including the spring retaining pins.
4. Periodically make sure all the hardware is securely fastened.

Truck Conversions – Mar, 2004

Reprint of article by Bob Strader

In the April '02 Issue of the NKK Konection, John Anderson, Executive Director, RV Safety Education, presented an article entitled Towing a Fifth Wheel with a Medium Duty Truck. John's article focused on safety and truck characteristics needed tow our larger fifth wheels. He briefly mentioned a lighter class of truck, commonly referred to as "light medium duty" trucks that are designed to fill a gap between pick-up trucks and medium duty trucks. These lighter trucks are also referred to as Class 4 and Class 5 trucks as opposed to the medium duty, which starts at Class 6.

Starting with the 1999 model year, Ford Motor Company introduced new models of the light medium duty Class 4 and 5 trucks (F450 and F550) to accommodate towing fifth wheel trailers in the 16,000 to 21,000 lb. ranges, with a Gross Combination Weight Rating (GCWR) of up to 30,000 lbs.

These trucks are manufactured as dual wheeled chassis models with cab, drive train, and suspension completed. They are delivered as an incomplete chassis and then the conversion facility manufactures and installs a body on which the fifth wheel hitch is mounted and storage compartments are incorporated into the design. The conversion is then ready to be sold through Ford Motor Company's dealer network.

Why would we want to upgrade to the higher-class truck? (Safety) As John Anderson so aptly stated in his article, "the maximum allowable fifth wheel weight for most pick-ups is in the vicinity of 13,000 to 15,000 pounds". The Class 4 and 5 F550's will safely tow and stop our larger fifth wheels that are manufactured with multiple slideouts and carry a Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR) of 16,000 to 20,000 lbs

These trucks usually are equipped with the 7.3 liter PowerStroke diesel engine, four speed automatic transmission, like the Class 2 and 3 pick-up models, the cab area is also identical. The differences are in the frame, suspension, brakes, drive shaft, axle, rims, and tire size. These components are more heavy duty. Examples would include 15" ABS brakes as opposed to 12" ABS. Axle's accommodate up to 13,500 lbs. as opposed to 6,830 lbs. SRD, and 9,750 lbs. DRW, on the F350 models. Payloads are significantly increased with GVWR's up to 17,500 lbs. with the Crew Cab model.

An important consideration is how well the truck rides especially when used as a "daily driver". This is where I believe a major difference exists between the Class 6 medium duty trucks and the Class 4 & 5 light medium duty trucks. The front axles are rated for up to 6,000 lbs., as opposed to 8,000 lb. The 6,000 lb. axle provides a softer ride. The F550 especially benefits from optional rear air ride suspension. Air ride suspensions are adjustable and the ride can be significantly softened for non-towing application.

As John Anderson mentioned in his article, the addition of an air suspension hitch will provide additional dampening motion between the truck and the trailer. Some hitch manufacturers recommend this style of hitch on all dually pick-up through medium duty trucks. Some fifth wheel manufacturers have had to redesign their fifth wheel pin-box areas to accommodate the heavier suspensions of this newer breed of tow vehicle. The combination of rear air-ride and the air suspension hitch has made a

significant difference in the ride and elimination of the “surging motion” common with standard suspended models.

Towing your fifth wheel safely is an important responsibility. Overloading the truck and fifth wheel can create a significant liability. Use of these newer model trucks help add the needed margin of safety not available with the pick-up. In the September 2001 issue of Trailer Life, writer Ken Freund responded to a question about overloading a tow vehicle with this quote: “When you overload a vehicle, you are using yourself and your family as test pilots to find out what fails first. It also puts all other users of the road at risk. In all cases, our response will be to not exceed manufacturer’s ratings.”

Can Your Vehicle Carry the Load? – Mar, 2004

Reprint of article by Carl A. Nelson

Perhaps one of the most ignored and misunderstood aspects of obtaining the proper vehicle for the job is determining the requirements the vehicle needs to fulfill. "Rightsizing" the vehicle will cut costs and downtime, while increasing the comfort and efficiency of the employee.

A vehicle too small to meet your needs may result in insufficient room, lower fuel mileage, excessive repairs and downtime, premature wear, and possible liability issues. Too large a vehicle may increase acquisition and operating costs, decrease mileage and maneuverability, and adversely affect employee comfort.

For these reasons, it is necessary to first identify your needs. The cargo type, weight and size must be considered. What are the operating conditions--city, urban, rural? What are the temperature ranges and terrain? Will it need to tow, and if so, what type and size trailer?

Are there any corporate requirements, such as maintaining an image, external agreements, or special safety concerns? Do you have any special driver needs? All of these issues must be part of the equation when writing your specs.

Before you can effectively determine your specs, however, you need to be aware of the following terms:

Curb Weight: The weight of the vehicle with all permanently mounted equipment and maximum capacity of fuel, oil, and coolant.

GAWR: Gross Axle Weight Rating. The value specified by the manufacturer as the loaded weight of a single motor vehicle. Cannot exceed the sum of all GAWR's.

GCWR: Gross Combination Weight Rating. The value specified by the manufacturer as the entire weight of vehicle, trailer(s), equipment, driver, fuel, and payload

.Payload Capacity: The amount of weight the vehicle is rated to carry, computed by subtracting the curb weight from the GVWR.

Knowing Towing

If towing is a part of your requirements, it is also necessary to be familiar with the following towing terminology:

Trailer Classes

Class I - Light Duty: 2,000 pound maximum weight, trailer and cargo combined.

Class II - Medium Duty: 2,001 to 3,500 pound gross trailer weight, single axle, small to medium, length up to 18 feet.

Class III - Heavy Duty: 3,501 to 5,000 pound gross trailer weight, dual axle or large single axle.

Class IV - Extra Heavy Duty: 5,001 to 10,000 pound gross trailer weight, usually fifth wheel or gooseneck.

Hitch Types

Weight Carrying: Supports trailer tongue weight, used for Class I and II up to 300 pound tongue weight, 3,500 pound trailer weight.

Weight Distributing: Applies leverage between towing vehicle and trailer, distributing weight to all wheels.

Fifth Wheel: Typically Class IV or higher, mounting platform over rear axle improves sway control, makes long trailers more maneuverable.

Gooseneck Ball: Typically 2-5/16 ball mounted at bed level, improves sway control and maneuverability.

Tongue Weight must be included in payload calculations. Properly loaded tag-a-long trailers are usually 10 percent to 15 percent of loaded trailer weight. Fifth wheel and gooseneck trailers are typically about 25 percent of the loaded trailer weight.

TOWING CAUTION: You can maximize the vehicle manufacturer's value for trailer size OR you can maximize the vehicle manufacturer's value for payload. YOU CANNOT MAXIMIZE BOTH!

Defining the Categories

Several years ago, as part of a cost cutting effort, AT&T recognized that many different sizes and types of vehicles were being used to support similar jobs nationwide. To analyze the differences, a Process Management Team was formed with representatives from each region.

The first step taken was to ask drivers to provide an inventory of the equipment and supplies carried on their vehicles. The responses were then compared, and the equipment and supplies were separated into broad categories, such as "Basics," which included tools, personal items, driver weight, documents and reference materials, and communications equipment.

Some of the other categories were "Optional Equipment" (toppers, shelving, etc.), "Special Equipment" (winches, plows), "Occasional Allowances" (extra passenger, special project tools), and "Towing."

The next step was to weigh the most common equipment in each category, and determine an average weight. Using the results of this exercise, a "Weight Matrix" was devised listing the common items in each category, and known weights.

Provisions were made to allow each driver to add his or her own weight for each item, and add additional items within each category. This provided the flexibility to accommodate regional variations as well as provide for customization. All weights could then be totaled and compared to the manufacturers' specifications to insure the vehicle ordered could meet the requirements.

Because at its' implementation the matrix was required with each order, it was necessary that it be simple to understand and complete. nationwide implementation resulted in considerable cost savings through lower downtime, fewer repairs, and standardization.

To illustrate this under real world conditions, let us examine the following hypothetical scenario. The people and trip are fictitious, but the vehicle specs and weights are real.

It is important to understand that your weights may vary with your equipment. The principle, however, is the same whether you are looking at a Ford or a Freightliner, a Kia or a Kenworth.

Ray's Camping Trip

Ray has just purchased a shiny new Ford F150 four wheel drive Super Cab short bed. He has a 5.4L V8, a 3.55 axle, and a 139" wheelbase. The curb weight is 4,775 pounds with a payload of 1,725 pounds, for a GVWR of 6,500. The GCWR is 11,500, with a maximum trailer weight of 7,800.

He has invited his best buddies, George, Fred, and Al to go with him for a long weekend of camping, fishing, and relaxing. They will be towing Ray's old fiberglass boat and trailer.

Ray has installed a fiberglass topper on his truck, which weighs in at 165 pounds. Additionally, he carries jumper cables (2 pounds), a tool box (25), and a first aid kit (2). This has now reduced his available payload to 1,531 pounds (1,725 minus 165 minus 2 minus 25 minus 2 equals 1,531).

Ray weighs in at 190, George is 195, Fred is 185, and Al weighs 170. Subtracting this from the available remaining payload of 1,531 gives us 791 pounds of payload available (1,531 minus 190 minus 195 minus 185 minus 170 equals 791).

The four-person tent they are carrying weighs 23 pounds, four sleeping bags are another 20 pounds, the cook stove is 5 and two lanterns are an additional 4 pounds. Total is 52, leaving us with 739 available.

Now, let's add in the cooler, with hot dogs, hamburgers, etc. (25), two cases of beer at 20 pounds each (light beer does NOT weigh less), coffee, snacks, canned goods (10), pots, pans, utensils, dishes (15), and these items add another 90 pounds of weight. Four folding chairs (16), personal items, i.e. shaving kit, change of clothes, jackets, etc. (15 pounds each), tackle box, boots, etc. (10 each), subtract another 116 pounds, bringing us down to 533 pounds remaining.

Ray's older 20-foot fiberglass boat, with a galvanized trailer and big engine, weighs in at 5,250 pounds, fully outfitted. Since it is properly loaded, the tongue weight is 10 percent or 525 pounds. Subtract this tongue weight from the remaining payload of 533, and we are safe by 8 pounds. Or are we?

Pay Attention

As you can see by this example, neither the payload nor the trailer rating was exceeded, yet Ray was still overloaded. Without paying attention to what is put in/on the vehicle, it is very easy to become overloaded without even trying.

Adding to this illusion is the fact there is still plenty of space in the pickup bed for more items. Can the vehicle handle this? Perhaps, but stopping distances are increased, handling is severely affected, and the liability is unbelievable.

Try this little test on yourself. Take several common items and estimate their weights. Then, put them on a scale and compare their actual weights with your estimate. You will be amazed at the differences.

By becoming more aware of how quickly these can add up, you will not only save money, but also put a much safer fleet on the road. What price can you put on that?

Tips for Towing Vehicles – Tow Hitches for 4x4 Truck or SUV ... - Apr 2004

Reprint of article from 4-Wheel Drive Offroading with [Jim Walczak](#)

Basic Towing Tips

Determining what your 4WD SUV or 4x4 pickup truck can tow can be a difficult task. Perhaps you've spent an evening or two sifting through your vehicle owner's manual, only to find the information to be as clear as mud. Add to this the fact that all manufacturers don't use the same formula to determine a vehicle's towing capacity, and it becomes apparent why consumers continue to be confused.

Here are some tips to make your towing trip a success:

Determine Your Tow Vehicle

If your needs are as basic as towing a small boat or transporting horses or 5th wheel trailers, having the right tow vehicle is one of the most important aspects. Before purchasing a tow vehicle, it's best to determine the maximum weight you might tow and then match that weight to a vehicle of your choice.

To fine-tune your choices of which tow vehicle to use, consult a Tow Vehicle Guide like [this one](#) or [this one](#) first.

Basic Terms

Becoming familiar with the [terminology](#) can lessen the confusion in determining how much your vehicle is capable of towing. Sherline offers a [Trailer Load and Balance Worksheet](#) that will help take some of the guesswork out of the formula.

Hitches

After you have determined how much weight you will be towing and [how much weight your tow vehicle can handle](#), the [hitch](#) will be the next tough choice. It's often a choice that consumers unwisely spend too little time considering, however, the hitch is perhaps the most important factor in assuring that your tow vehicle and load make it to their destination safely. There are several [types of hitches](#) to choose from. In some cases, the [trailer](#) you are towing will determine the type of hitch you'll need. Perhaps the most popular hitches today are the [Hidden Hitch](#) and [Reese Hitches](#), but one of the more unique hitch systems is offered by [Advanced Air Hitches](#). Their one-of-a-kind design improves handling, braking, traction and wear and tear on your equipment. Check out these [videos showing Air Ride hitches](#) in action.

Safety First

Although safety should always be a concern when driving a vehicle, you should have a heightened sense of awareness when towing. Before each trip take a few extra minutes to go over this [towing checklist](#) and give yourself peace of mind. The time spent checking safety concerns could not only save your equipment from damage but also reduce the possibility of accidents on the highway. And before you even hit the road, make sure to review these [braking basics](#). You need to make sure you can stop before you even start!

Towing Terminology

(GVWR) Gross Vehicle Weight Rating	This is the maximum amount of weight that a given vehicle can weigh - including its passengers, fuel and cargo - without being overloaded.
(GCWR) Gross Combined Weight Rating	The maximum a vehicle plus its trailer - including cargo, fuel, and passengers - can weigh without being overloaded.
(GAWR) Gross Axle Weight Rating	The maximum weight an axle is rated to carry. It includes the weight of the axle.
Tow Rating	The manufacturer's figure for the maximum trailer weight a vehicle is rated to tow.
Axle Weight	The weight of an individual tow vehicle's axle, or the weight of a trailer's axle (or axles), but does not include the trailer's tongue weight.
Base Curb Weight	This is the weight of the empty vehicle (with a full fuel tank and the standard equipment)
Cargo Weight	The cargo weight is the base curb weight, plus any additional weight that is added to that (such as the trailer tonnage weight).
Maximum Loaded Trailer Weight	This is the maximum weight of your (fully loaded) trailer that your truck can tow.
Tonnage Weight	The amount of weight that pushes down on the trailer hitch.

Tow Weight	This is a rating by the manufacturer for how much combined weight the truck can pull with a loaded trailer. (tonnage weight and GCVR) If you have any doubts about the weight of your load, there are public scales used by truck drivers located at most truck stops. Be sure to have your loaded vehicle weighed before you begin your trip.
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Types of Hitches & Cargo Weights

Hitches are rated as follows:

Class	GTW (Gross Trailer Weight)	TW (Tongue Weight)
I	Up to 2,000 lbs	Up to 200 lbs
II	Up to 3,500 lbs	Up to 300 lbs
III	Up to 5,000 lbs	Up to 500 lbs
IV	Up to 10,000 lbs	Up to 1,000 lbs

For additional information on towing issues click the following for a government report:

<http://www.nhtsa.dot.gov/cars/problems/Equipment/towing/Towing.pdf>

Introduction to Fifth Wheel Trailers – Apr 2004

The following article is a reprint from rv.org

Safety Issue

The fifth wheel type of trailer has been used in the trucking industry for almost 100 years because it is a safe way of carrying heavy loads. It's safe because the hitch configuration allows approximately 20 to 30 percent of its hitch weight to be exerted on the front suspension of the towing vehicle. Because of its forgiving nature to road and driving conditions, commercial truckers use the fifth wheel hitch configuration to carry extremely heavy loads. A fifth wheel trailer will stick to the tow vehicle through thick and thin. In many adverse handling situations, a fifth wheel trailer will actually enhance the ability of the tow vehicle to stick to the road. Whether in tractor-trailer rigs or in travel trailers, the fifth wheel configuration is popular because of its safety and handling capabilities.

Easy to Use

A fifth wheel trailer is particularly popular with RVers who are full timing because most of these RVers want to go as big as the towing vehicle will allow. The fifth wheel is easy to connect and disconnect from the truck. It's relatively easy to back up. Its tendency to sway is much less than that of a trailer coach. Because it can easily carry more height, it allows for more storage space - something every fulltime wants.

What You Need

Now that we've gone through a litany of praises for the fifth wheel trailer, let's look at the big picture with a bit of objectivity. Fifth wheel trailers are not for everyone. For one thing, you must have a truck to pull a fifth wheel. You cannot hook it onto a van, a sedan, or a pickup with a canopy. You cannot generally pull another car behind it. You cannot generally pull a boat behind it. You cannot generally let the family ride in it as you go down the road. These are very important limitations for some people.

Too Easy To Build

Because of the number of retired people who have taken up full timing, hundreds of large and small RV builders are specializing in fifth wheels from 30 to 45 feet in length. Some of these builders have become very rich building cracker boxes of that size. Right now there are dozens of brands being produced that will not last 5 years without serious deterioration and severe frustration for the users. In addition to this problem, there are hundreds of relatively good manufacturers who are cutting corners on quality in places where the cuts are not easily seen because they feel they need to compete with the cracker box makers.

Weight Issue

The most serious problem is, of course, the size and weight of the fifth wheel trailers coming off the assembly line. Weights need to be limited because the axles, brakes, and tires have limitations. An example is that the most popular axle assembly has a capacity of 6,000 pounds. Unless you go to three axles, which is somewhat limiting in itself, you will be limited to a 12,000-pound maximum load on the axles. The hitch capacity on this example should be approximately 3,000 pounds (25% of axle capacity), which means the entire trailer should not weigh more than 12,000 pounds at the curb if you want a payload of 3,000 pounds. A weight of 12,000 pounds at the curb means that a manufacturer must limit a fifth wheel's size to approximately 32 feet if it's going to have a 12-foot slideout and a bedroom slideout. And to make it a bit more interesting, the walls and structure must be kept to a minimum to keep the unloaded vehicle weight (UVW) between 11,000 and 12,000 pounds - the average range for this size fifth wheel trailer. Add the average personal payload for snowbirding or fulltiming at 2000 pounds and you'll have a gross vehicle weight (GVW) between 13,000 and 14,000 pounds. This means that this 32-foot fifth wheel trailer will need a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 15,000 pounds. And to top it all off, the manufacturer knows that there is no pickup truck made that is approved for towing 15,000 pounds.

Closing Thoughts

This introduction to fifth wheel travel trailers should be just the beginning of your studies into techniques for choosing and using. We encourage you to begin your research with the [RV Ratings CD-ROM](#).

We hope that you, as a member of RV Consumer Group, contribute by sharing your experiences and observations. Making RVing safer and better always begins with you.

Choosing the Correct Tow Vehicle – May 2004

Choosing the correct tow vehicle is paramount in a safe trailer experience. Make the wrong choice, even if you tow only once or twice, could prove to be deadly and costly for your towing experience.

The intent of this article is to give you some points to consider when purchasing a tow vehicle and to get you better informed on things to consider before purchasing a tow vehicle.

As a rule of thumb when you tow, the more your Gross Trailer Weight (GTW) is greater than your gross tow vehicle weight, you reduce the ability to be in 100% control proportionally as your GTW increases.

When you are selecting your tow vehicle, you must consider more than just your vehicle and trailer. Below are some added points to consider that may affect your decision:

- Inexperienced tow vehicle operators
- Others on the road creating unexpected maneuvering
- Bad road conditions
- Changing or declining weather
- Semi trucks that ride beside you that are only 15 foot longer than you are
- Short beds

- Overloaded contents in truck & trailer

Add to this confusion and the often misleading loaded trailer weights, we have the tow vehicles and trailer industry changes, such as:

- 4 x4 (Higher and larger tires)
- 5 " height increase on ¾ ton 2 wheel drive
- Trailer industry responds to the height of trucks by raising the already top heavy trailers 5"

Consideration for your tow vehicle:

- When towing a trailer with over 10,000 lbs GTW it we recommend that use a dual rear wheel vehicle, no matter what the tow vehicle or trailer dealer manufacture say.
- Short bed or long bed?
 - The longer the wheel base lengths the more stable for towing.
 - The longer the distance between the front axel and the back axel, the better for towing stability will be.
 - Short wheel base trucks and 5th Wheel trailers either must consist of a kingpin extension or a hitch slider to permit short turns without having your trailer and truck collide.
- Adding Air Springs under the Truck:
 - Helps level the truck when you loaded
 - May improve the ride
 - Does nothing to change the rigid hitch problem
- In all calculations, you must figure how much you are loading in the truck and trailer to determine the proper truck.
 - How many people will be riding in the tow vehicle
 - What items will you be placing in the tow vehicle
 - How much weight are you adding in the trailer (Food, clothes, camping equip, water, heavy objects, etc.)
- 4 wheel drive
 - Tall truck with tall tires may be difficult to hitch up to most trailers
 - ¾ ton 2 wheel drives have increased over 5" in height
 - How much do you anticipate needing 4 x 4 pulling a trailer?
 - Consider a 2 wheel drive with Limited-Slip
 - Cost for 4 x 4 will add around \$2,400 while Limited-Slip will only add \$250
 - Tow ratings for 4WD systems are usually lower than they are for 2WDs, because they add weight to the vehicle.
- Diesel or Gas
 - Diesels are more costly to manufacture, and you end up paying \$4,500 more than a gas motor
 - Diesel is not as easy to find as gas
 - The diesel should give you over 500,000 miles the gas 250,000
 - The diesel may out perform in fuel economy and torque
 - One must ask how many miles will I be towing. Everyone must due there own math on this equation.
- Automatic or Stick
 - Automatic:
 - Automatics have produced many transmission failures in all trailer towing trucks, no mater what brand and have proven costly and inconvenient
 - Several of the major truck manufactures have better automatic cooling and filtering designs and added transmission temp gages to monitor temperature
 - Stick
 - Have you driven a stick shift while towing a trailer?
 - Do you know what your doing when shifting while towing a trailer?
 - Consider others that may drive your truck (Can they drive a stick?)