EDUCATION

Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795581379739574

Introduction: The Freedom of Roaming with Your Car in Tow

For many RV enthusiasts, the open road is a calling. The ability to park your motorhome in a scenic spot and then explore the surrounding area without breaking camp is one of the greatest luxuries of the lifestyle. This is where dinghy towing—also known as flat towing—comes into play. A **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide**is more than just a set of instructions; it is a roadmap to a more flexible and enjoyable adventure. Whether you are a full-time RVer or a weekend warrior, understanding the nuances of towing a car behind your motorhome can transform your travels. This guide will walk you through everything from selecting the right vehicle to mastering the legal and mechanical aspects, ensuring you are safe, compliant, and ready for any journey.

Why Dinghy Towing? The Case for Bringing Your Car Along

Imagine arriving at a stunning national park, only to realize the visitor center is five miles away, the trailhead is in the opposite direction, and your motorhome is too large to navigate the narrow mountain roads. Without a secondary vehicle, you are stuck. Dinghy towing solves this problem elegantly. It allows you to detach your compact car and use it for errands, sightseeing, or emergency trips while your motorhome remains secure at the campsite. According to seasoned RVers, this flexibility is the single biggest benefit. Moreover, towing a small vehicle can be more fuel-efficient than driving a larger truck or SUV alongside your RV. The **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** emphasizes that the right setup saves time, reduces stress, and enhances the overall travel experience.

Common Misconceptions About Towing a Dinghy

- “Any car can be flat-towed.” This is false. Many modern vehicles cannot be towed with all four wheels on the ground due to transmission and drivetrain limitations. Always consult the owner’s manual or a reliable towing database.
- “Towing is complicated and dangerous.” While it requires attention to detail, proper equipment and a methodical approach make it safe for anyone to learn.
- “You need a huge motorhome to tow anything.” In reality, many Class C and even large Class B motorhomes can tow a small car when properly equipped.

Selecting the Right Dinghy Vehicle for Your Motorhome

Not every car is a good candidate for flat towing. The ideal dinghy is lightweight, reliable, and built with a transmission that allows for four-down towing (all four wheels on the ground). Popular choices in recent years include the Jeep Wrangler, Chevrolet Equinox, Ford Fiesta (manual transmission), and the Honda CR-V (select

Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide, you'll find that weight is paramount. Your motorhome's towing capacity—listed in the owner's manual and on the driver's door sticker—must exceed the gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of your toad (the towed vehicle). A good rule of thumb is to keep the towed weight below 80% of your motorhome's maximum capacity for safety margins.

Key Factors to Consider

1. Weight: The lighter the car, the easier the tow. Less strain on your motorhome's engine, transmission, and brakes.
2. Steering and Suspension: The car must be able to be towed with the steering wheel unlocked. Some vehicles require a fuse pull or a special procedure.
3. Cooling System: Some cars can overheat if towed for long distances without the engine running. Check for transmission fluid pump issues.
4. Insurance and Warranty: Towing a car behind a motorhome may void the manufacturer's warranty if not explicitly allowed. Verify before purchase.

Essential Equipment for Safe Dinghy Towing

A reliable towing system involves several components working in harmony. Skimping on quality here can lead to catastrophic failures. The **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** recommends the following as non-negotiable:

Tow Bar

The tow bar attaches your motorhome to the towed vehicle. There are three main types: bumper-mounted (rarely recommended), frame-mounted, and adjustable arms. For long-term use, invest in a brand like Blue Ox, Roadmaster, or Demco. Look for features like self-aligning mechanisms and easy disconnect.

Base Plate

This is the mounting bracket permanently attached to your dinghy's frame. It must be professionally installed to ensure it can handle the stress of towing. Base plates are vehicle-specific, so do not try to use a universal one unless it's known to fit.

Braking System

Most states and Canadian provinces require a supplemental braking system for any vehicle towed behind a motorhome when the toad's weight exceeds a certain limit (often 1,500 to 3,000 pounds). The system applies the car's brakes automatically when the motorhome brakes. Popular options include the ReadyBrake, BrakeMaster, and InvisiBrake. A breakaway switch is also mandatory—it engages the brakes if the towed vehicle becomes detached.

Safety Cables

Always use two safety cables crossing under the tow bar as a backup. They must be rated for at least the gross weight of the toad. They prevent the car from rolling away if the tow bar fails.

Lighting and Wiring

Your motorhome's turn signals, brake lights, and running lights must be replicated on the dinghy. A diode kit or a dedicated wiring harness prevents feedback and electrical damage. Many RVers opt for a magnetic light kit for ease, but permanent wiring is more reliable.

Additional Accessories

- Tow dolly (optional): If your car cannot be flat towed, you might use a dolly that lifts the front wheels.
- Supplemental mirrors: To see around the motorhome while towing.
- Battery charge line: To keep your dinghy's battery charged during long trips.
- Key reminder: A simple device to remind you to turn the ignition to the correct position (usually "ACC" or

“ON”) before towing.

Step-by-Step: How to Setup Your Motorhome and Dinghy

Having all the gear is only half the battle. Proper procedure is vital. Here is a straightforward process based on the typical **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** recommendations:

1. Position the motorhome and car: Park on level ground. Align the tow bar with the center of the base plate.
2. Attach the tow bar to the motorhome: Ensure the receiver is clean and the pin is secured with a locking clip.
3. Connect the tow bar arms to the base plate on the car: Push until you hear the latch click.
4. Secure safety cables: Cross them under the tow bar and hook them to designated points on the motorhome frame.
5. Connect the electrical plug: Test lights with someone behind the vehicle.
6. Connect the breakaway cable: Attach to the motorhome, not to the tow bar.
7. Check the steering wheel: Ensure it is unlocked and the ignition key is in the correct position (as per vehicle manual).
8. Release the parking brake: The car should roll freely.
9. Do a final walk-around: Check that nothing is dragging, and all pins are secure.

Safety Rules Every Towing RVer Should Know

Towing changes the dynamics of your motorhome. Your stopping distance increases, your turning radius widens, and your acceleration is slower. The **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** stresses these safety tips:

- Brake earlier: Give yourself at least twice the normal gap from the vehicle ahead.
- Watch your speed: Most states have lower speed limits when towing; 55-65 mph is typical.
- Avoid sharp turns: The dinghy may hit curbs or obstacles. Practice in an empty parking lot.
- Check your mirrors often: Make sure the car is tracking straight and not swaying.
- Weight distribution: Keep heavy items in the motorhome, not in the towed car, to prevent sway.
- Break away training: Know how to manually stop your dinghy if it detaches (the breakaway switch does it automatically).

Legal and Regulatory Considerations

Regulations vary by state and province. In the United States, most states require a functional brake system on towed vehicles over 3,000 lbs. However, some states like California and Oregon have specific requirements regarding breakaway switches and auxiliary braking. Canada generally requires a braking system for any towed vehicle over 1,500 kg (approx. 3,300 lbs). Always check the laws of every jurisdiction you plan to visit. Insurance is another area: confirm that your motorhome policy covers the dinghy while being towed, and your car policy covers it while detached. A comprehensive **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** will always remind you to carry copies of your vehicle’s towing certification and the installation receipts for your base plate and towing system.

Maintenance Checks for Your Towing Setup

To extend the life of your equipment and ensure safety, perform regular inspections:

- Tow bar and base plate: Look for cracks, loose bolts, or worn pins. Lubricate moving parts every season.
- Electrical connectors: Clean corrosion from plugs and sockets.
- Braking system: Test the breakaway switch monthly. Check the battery in the toad’s braking unit.
- Tire pressure: Both motorhome and dinghy tires need to be at the recommended pressure for towing.

Underinflated tires can overheat.

- Bearings and hubs: If using a tow dolly, grease the bearings annually.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even experienced RVers make errors. Here are some frequently cited pitfalls in a **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide**:

- Forgetting to unlock the steering wheel: This can damage the steering column. Always verify before moving.
- Overloading the dinghy: Packing the towed car with heavy gear increases the strain on your motorhome's brakes and suspension.
- Improper wiring: A faulty diode can blow fuses in both vehicles. Use a tested wiring harness.
- Skipping the breakaway check: A broken breakaway cable renders the safety system useless.
- Ignoring weight distribution: A nose-heavy or tail-heavy toad can cause fishtailing.

Conclusion: Towing Confidence Through Knowledge

Ultimately, dinghy towing is a skill that enhances your RV lifestyle exponentially. With the right vehicle, robust equipment, and a thorough understanding of safety and legal requirements, you can unlock new horizons without sacrificing comfort. This **Motorhome Magazine Dinghy Towing Guide** has outlined the essentials, but remember that every combination of motorhome and car is unique. Invest in professional installation for base plates and braking systems, and always test your setup in a safe environment before hitting the highway. The freedom to explore is the heart of the RV lifestyle, and towing your own car along for the ride is the key that opens every hidden road. Safe travels, and may your tires always be steady and your adventures boundless.

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