EDUCATION

Motorhome Magazine Towing Guide

PUBLISHED
November 25, 2026

REFERENCE
#1795581161741594

Introduction: Navigating the Open Road With Confidence

There is a unique sense of freedom that comes with owning a motorhome. You have your accommodation, your transport, and your itinerary all rolled into one. But for many enthusiasts, the adventure does not stop with the motorhome itself. The ability to tow a secondary vehicle—often called a "toad" or "dinghy"—unlocks a new dimension of travel. You can set up camp in a remote location and still have the flexibility to explore the local area without breaking down your entire living space. This is where a reliable **Motorhome Magazine Towing Guide** becomes an indispensable tool. Understanding the mechanics, regulations, and best practices of towing is not just about convenience; it is about safety. Whether you are a seasoned RVer or planning your first long-distance trip, mastering the art of towing ensures that every mile is as enjoyable as the destination.

Why Trusting a Motorhome Towing Guide Matters

The world of RV towing is filled with technical jargon and conflicting advice. A comprehensive **Motorhome Magazine Towing Guide** cuts through the noise. It provides a centralized source of information that covers everything from hitch selection to state-specific towing laws. Because the stakes are high—improper towing can lead to accidents, vehicle damage, or voided warranties—relying on curated, expert advice is essential. A well-researched guide helps you make informed decisions about your equipment and driving habits, turning a potentially stressful process into a seamless part of your travel routine.

The True Value of Expert Curation

When you read a specialized towing guide, you are benefiting from the collective experience of mechanics, long-term RVers, and safety engineers. These guides test equipment under real-world conditions. They understand that a car that tows perfectly on flat ground may behave differently in mountainous terrain. By following a trusted resource, you avoid the trial-and-error approach that can be expensive and dangerous. The best guides also update regularly to reflect changes in vehicle technology and legal requirements, ensuring you always have current information at your fingertips.

Understanding the Fundamentals of Motorhome Towing

Before you attach any vehicle to your motorhome, you must understand a few core concepts. These basics form the foundation of every safe towing setup. Ignoring them is the primary cause of accidents and mechanical failures on the road.

Weight Ratings: Your Non-Negotiable Numbers

Every motorhome has specific weight limits that must never be exceeded. The most critical figures are the **Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR)** and the **Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR)**. The GVWR is the maximum weight of your motorhome when fully loaded with passengers, cargo, and fluids. The GCWR is the

plus the weight of the towed vehicle and everything in it. A common mistake is to focus only on the towing capacity listed in the owner's manual. While that number is important, it is only part of the equation. You must also consider the payload capacity, which includes the tongue weight of the trailer or the weight of your toad on the hitch. A detailed towing guide will always emphasize that your actual safe towing limit is lower than the theoretical maximum once you factor in your specific load.

Tongue Weight and Payload: The Hidden Factors

Tongue weight refers to the downward force that the towed vehicle exerts on the hitch ball. For a conventional trailer (including a car on a trailer), tongue weight should typically be 10% to 15% of the total trailer weight. However, for flat towing (also known as dinghy towing), the tongue weight is different because the vehicle is attached via a tow bar. In this case, the weight on the hitch is much lower, but the towing vehicle must still account for it. Payload is the total weight your motorhome can carry, including passengers, cargo, fluids, and tongue weight. Many motorhomes, especially smaller class C models, have surprisingly low payload capacities. Adding a heavy towed vehicle can quickly eat into that margin. A good towing guide will show you how to calculate these figures for your specific combination.

Choosing the Right Towing Method

There are three primary ways to tow a vehicle behind a motorhome: flat towing (four-down), using a tow dolly, or using a full trailer. Each method has distinct advantages and drawbacks, and the right choice depends on your motorhome, your budget, and the vehicle you intend to tow.

Flat Towing (Four-Wheels Down)

Flat towing is the most popular method for motorhome owners because it is simple and requires no additional equipment to store. You attach a tow bar directly to the frame of your toad, and all four wheels of the towed vehicle remain on the ground. This method works best with vehicles that are specifically designed for flat towing. Most new cars and trucks have a "dinghy towing" specification in their owner's manual. If a vehicle is not rated for flat towing, attempting it can ruin the transmission in a matter of miles. A comprehensive **Motorhome Magazine Towing Guide** will always list popular vehicles that are known to be flat-towable. The main advantages are ease of use, lower initial cost (no trailer to buy), and easier maneuvering in tight campsites.

Using a Tow Dolly

A tow dolly lifts the front wheels of the towed vehicle off the ground while the rear wheels roll. This method is often used for vehicles that cannot be flat-towed. It is generally less expensive than a full trailer and easier to store. However, it still requires you to secure the vehicle properly and manage the additional weight and length of the dolly. One downside is that you are not supposed to back up with a dolly-attached vehicle without disconnecting it, which can be inconvenient. The towing guide will often compare the pros and cons of dolly versus flat towing based on your specific vehicle and travel style.

Full Trailer Towing

Hauling a vehicle on a full trailer offers the highest level of protection for your toad. All four wheels are off the ground, which eliminates wear on the tires and drivetrain. It also allows you to tow vehicles that are not suitable for any other method. However, a trailer adds significant weight and length to your rig, which can reduce fuel economy and make parking more challenging. Trailers also require a separate storage space when not in use. The towing guide will help you determine if the extra complexity and cost are justified by your needs.

Essential Towing Equipment and Setup

Once you have chosen a method, you need the right equipment. This is an area where cutting corners can have serious consequences. A robust towing guide will walk you through the essential components and how to select them.

Hitches and Tow Bars

The hitch is the connection point on your motorhome. Most motorhomes come with a standard receiver hitch, but you must ensure its rating matches the weight of your toad. For heavy loads, a weight-distributing hitch may be necessary to level the motorhome and distribute the load more evenly across all axles. For flat towing, the tow bar is the critical link. Tow bars come in different weight classes, and you must choose one that is rated for the **Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR)** of your towed vehicle. Look for tow bars with a high safety margin and features like self-aligning mechanisms that make hooking up easier. The **Motorhome Magazine Towing Guide** often includes ratings and user reviews of popular tow bar models.

Brake Controllers: Safety First

When you tow a vehicle weighing over a certain threshold (typically 1,500 to 3,000 pounds, depending on state law), you are legally required to have a braking system on the towed vehicle. For motorhomes, the most common solution is a **supplemental braking system** installed in the toad. This system activates the toad's brakes when you press the brake pedal in the motorhome. There are several types, including proportional systems that apply brakes based on deceleration, and time-delayed systems. Proportional systems are widely considered safer because they provide smoother, more natural braking. A comprehensive towing guide will help you understand the difference between systems like the Air Force One, the RVI Brake, and the Stay-IN-Play Duo, explaining which one might be best for your vehicle and budget.

Safety Chains and Cables

Safety chains are a mandatory backup connection between your motorhome and the towed vehicle. They are designed to keep the trailer or toad attached if the primary hitch fails. Chains must be crossed under the hitch to form a cradle that catches the tongue if it falls. They should be rated for at least the gross weight of the towed vehicle. Many towing guides also recommend using a **breakaway switch** with a cable. If the towed vehicle becomes detached, the cable pulls the pin on the switch, activating the toad's brakes (if it has a supplemental system) and bringing it to a stop. This simple device can prevent a catastrophic runaway.

Driving Techniques for Safe Towing

Towing a vehicle changes the way your motorhome handles. Acceleration, braking, turning, and backing up all require adjustments. A good towing guide will not just talk about equipment; it will prepare you for the road experience.

Acceleration and Following Distance

Your combined rig will be heavier and slower to accelerate. Plan for longer merging distances on highways. More importantly, your stopping distance increases significantly with added weight. A good rule of thumb is to double your following distance compared to driving without a tow. This gives you time to react and allows your brake controller to work smoothly. Avoid sudden stops whenever possible by scanning far ahead and anticipating traffic flow.

Cornering and Turning Radius

A motorhome already has a wide turning radius; adding a towed vehicle makes it even wider. You must swing wider when turning to avoid curbing the toad's tires or hitting obstacles. In tight parking lots or campgrounds, it is often better to unhook the toad before maneuvering. Many towing guides recommend practicing turning in a large, empty parking lot to get a feel for how your rig tracks. Pay attention to the "off-tracking" phenomenon, where the rear wheels of the toad follow a tighter path than the front wheels of the motorhome.

Backing Up With a Toad

Backing up with a towed vehicle is challenging, especially with a dolly or a trailer. Flat-towed vehicles are

slightly easier because the tow bar allows some articulation, but it is not intuitive. The key is to use small steering inputs and, if possible, have a spotter outside the vehicle to guide you. For complex backing maneuvers, consider investing in a wireless backup camera that shows the area behind your toad. This

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Pre-Trip Inspections and Maintenance

Consistent inspection is the cornerstone of safe towing. You should perform a thorough check before every trip, not just once a year.

The Pre-Drive Walkaround

Before you pull out of your campsite or driveway, walk around your entire rig. Check that the hitch pin is secure and locked. Ensure safety chains are properly crossed and attached. Verify that the tow bar is locked in the towing position and that all lights on the toad are working. Test the brake controller by applying the manual lever to confirm the toad's brakes engage. Look at tire pressure on both the motorhome and the toad. Underinflated tires are a leading cause of blowouts when towing.

Regular Service Intervals

Towing puts extra strain on your motorhome's transmission, engine cooling system, and brakes. Follow the severe service schedule in your owner's manual for oil changes, transmission fluid changes, and brake inspections. Pay special attention to the transmission fluid temperature. If you are towing in mountainous terrain, consider installing a transmission cooler if your

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