



Got Truck?

*Ensure your **towing vehicle** has what it takes to haul your horse.*

By Shannon Stewart Salinsky

When hauling your horses on a road trip, it's important to determine if you've got enough truck for the job.

Safe hauling begins with a safe rig, and there are several factors to keep in mind from a vehicle's job rating and towing capacity to trailer hitches and accessories. Follow this advice from vehicle and trailer experts to ensure a smooth road ahead.

Towing Capacity

A vehicle's towing capacity is the maximum weight it can safely tow, and is determined by many factors, which includes vehicle weight and width, engine size, wheelbase, transmission and gear ratio.

Your towing vehicle must be able to pull and control its load. That's why it's important to understand the weight rating your vehicle has before you take your first trip.

To safely haul a two-horse trailer, experts recommend a vehicle should be able to pull at least 5,000 pounds. Most half-ton trucks or full-sized SUVs can handle a basic two-horse trailer, but two-horse trailers with a tack room require a vehicle that can haul at least 6,000 pounds while gooseneck trailers that carry three to four horses should be pulled by a three-quarter- or one-ton truck. Horse trailers that exceed four horses are best hauled by a one-ton, dual rear-wheeled pickup.

Some terms to understand about towing:

Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR):

The maximum allowable weight of the truck plus the cargo.

Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW):

The actual weight of the truck and everything in it including the trailer tongue weight.

Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR):

The maximum allowable total weight of the truck (per the manufacturer) plus the loaded trailer (GVWR).

Gross Combined Weight (GCW):

The actual weight of the loaded truck and loaded trailer.

Maximum Trailer Weight Rating (MTWR):

The maximum allowable towing capacity of a vehicle.

Curb Weight (CW):

The weight of an empty truck plus gas and driver's, or the weight of an empty trailer not hitched.

Tongue Weight:

The amount of weight on the coupler when your trailer is fully loaded.

Payload:

The maximum allowable weight that the truck is designed to carry per the manufacturer.

The designations half-ton, three-quarter-ton and one-ton indicate a vehicle's approximate load-carrying capabilities. The higher the number, the greater the weight it can carry.

In a perfect world, you would simultaneously shop for the vehicle and trailer. Although there are other choices in towing vehicles such as an SUV or RV, a truck is often the choice for transporting horses. The wheelbase of small- and medium-sized vehicles is usually not suitable for trailering.

Job Rate

An important step in deciding what type of towing vehicle to buy is knowing what you're planning to haul, how long your trips might be and what terrain you might be driving.

"Not enough people are doing this today, and it's very important," said Mike Orman, president of the 100X Marketing Group, Dodge Ram Rodeo Series. "Think about the biggest job and load you'll possibly haul and work backward from there."

For example, you know you'll have on the trailer at least two horses at 1,100 pounds each; a 45-gallon water tank with each gallon weighing eight pounds; and a couple of bales of hay and some feed with a combined weight of 200 pounds. You'll also need to consider the maximum number of passengers inside the vehicle and the approximate weight of each as well as the weight of tack and the dry weight of your trailer, among other things.

"It's much safer to estimate more equipment than you need than the other

Transmission

What's better—an automatic or standard (manual shift) transmission? This debate is age-old.

"In today's market, the automatic is quite robust, even though many customers still prefer the older-school method of having manual control over the truck's engine," Mike said. "However, one key thing an automatic gives you is freedom from shifting. While it might use slightly more fuel, it allows you to focus on other safety items like monitoring your side mirrors and vehicle gauges."

Some people swear by the automatic because it is usually rated higher for towing capabilities, will last longer and has the reputation of not overworking the engine. Automatics are also popular because they produce a more comfortable ride that both you and your horses will appreciate.

The old-school drivers who cut their baby teeth on their dad's manual shift will certainly debate the transmission decision. They claim you get better control because you can shift the gears as needed to get the appropriate torque. This can be helpful, especially in the wet and winter months. And a standard transmission tends to get a little better gas mileage.

If your truck comes with an automatic transmission, you might want to lock out of overdrive, especially on hilly roads and with heavier loads. This helps increase the life of the transmission. Also, keep in mind that driving in higher altitudes slightly reduces power in a gasoline engine and its towing capabilities.

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way around,” Mike said, adding that Ram Truck raised the GCWR this year in its Ram 3500 to 37,600 pounds. “That makes it the leader in towing capacity, and now allows the ability to tow a trailer weighing up to 30,000 pounds.”

Engine

A truck's engine must have enough power to pull the loaded trailer and perform in adverse weather conditions and, if applicable, in the mountains, where an engine loses 2 to 4 percent of its power for each 1,000-foot gain in altitude.

When it comes to engine size, a 5.9-liter V-8 engine with 235 horsepower at 4,000 rpm, for example, is appropriate for pulling a two-horse trailer. Buying a truck with a smaller engine might save in fuel costs but it will more than likely result in higher repair bills due to the stress and strain placed on the engine.

Most of today's trucks are equipped with either gasoline or diesel engines, and selection truly comes down to personal choice.

Diesel trucks provide power and strength, especially when going up steep hills. Diesels are higher priced and come with more expensive repair costs and fuel but might be the best option for towing heavy loads as they generally have longer life spans and are better for long-distance hauls.

Gasoline vehicles are usually less expensive, overall, and have better acceleration. In areas with an extreme cold climate, gasoline engines are usually easier to start.

Tires & Wheelbase

It's vital to equip the truck with the right tires for the payload and job planned. A truck hauling a two- to three-horse trailer should be equipped with six-ply Load Range C radial tires with at least 15-inch rims while a truck pulling a four-horse trailer should have on it eight-ply Load Range D tires with at least 16-inch rims. Putting tires with a lower-ply rating on a truck can cause the sidewalls to flex under the weight, which results in trailer sway.

Trucks with single rear tires might be suitable for a two-horse trailer, but anything larger than that performs best with a “dually”. Having the extra tires increases stability and traction.

When it comes to wheelbase, which is the distance between a vehicle's front and rear wheels, the longer it is the greater the stability when towing. The minimum wheelbase for hauling is 114 inches, which eliminates most small pickups and SUVs.

Deciding between a two-wheel or four-wheel drive truck depends on where you might be hauling. Four-wheel drive systems provide better traction in mud, ice and snow but are usually more expensive. It is also higher off the ground and might require adjustments in the way the trailer is hitched to the truck.

A two-wheel drive system isn't as good in inclement weather but is usually less expensive and gets better fuel efficiency.



Towing Packages

Truck manufacturers often offer different towing packages, which might include a heavy-duty radiator, battery, alternator, suspension and brakes as well as an engine-oil cooler, transmission-fluid cooler, wiring harness, specific axle ratio and special wheels and tires. Towing packages sometimes also include the trailer hitch receiver.

For heavy hauling of horses and tack, a towing package is not only necessary for some of the features it offers but also results in extended longevity and better performance of your towing vehicle.

Accessories

A truck can easily cost upwards of \$50,000 and the cost of replacing damaged factory parts can be expensive. The upfront investment of accessories like grill guards, heavy-duty bumpers, rails and steps can save you thousands in the long run and bring you peace of mind about the safety and capabilities of your truck.


“Our products add a level of high quality protection to your truck,” said Cherise Ratliff of Ranch Hand Truck Accessories. “We’ve received many stories from customers who ran into guardrails, trees, rocks, cliffs, cows and deer, and they thank us for making a high quality product. They tell us that they’ll never own another truck without putting a Ranch Hand on it. Ranch Hand

is the best protection you can buy.”

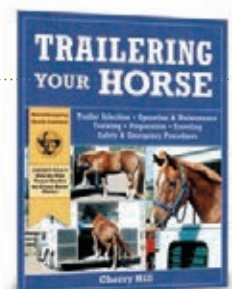
Another good safety accessory to consider is attaching mud flaps to the truck’s wheel wells. They offer protection from small rocks, mud and debris, and help prevent damage to the trailer.

After the Purchase

When you’ve finally bought the towing vehicle right for you, check the owner’s manual for information on scheduled maintenance, and make sure to regularly service all the major components including tires, brakes, engine, transmission and cooling systems.

Our families and horses—not to mention all the other folks on the road—count on us to make wise and educated decisions when selecting a truck. So be certain to take the necessary steps to ensure your new vehicle remains reliable and safe for many years to come. 

Trailer Your Horse, by Cherry Hill and published by Storey Publishing, was referenced for this article.



“HITCH UP”



Unless you have many horses to haul together at the same time, selecting the type of trailer and hitch is usually a decision of preference.

Randy Stamper, the director of sales and marketing for Hart Trailers, says many horse owners consider their own comfort when buying a horse trailer, looking at such features as living quarters.

“The whole reason you bought a trailer was to transport your horse. As horse trailer manufacturers, we need to keep our horse’s safety and comfort in mind as we’re selecting features for our trailers,” he said.

Curb weight, which is the heaviness of an empty trailer that isn’t hitched to the towing vehicle, needs to also be considered. Influencing curb weight is the trailer’s skin, frame and roof as well as floor and side-wall mats, spare tires, ramps and accessories for the tack room or living quarters.

Hart Trailer is well known for its quality aluminum construction. Other trailer manufacturers like Twister Trailer and Featherlite also tout aluminum-skin over a steel trailer, which is often heavier.

“Heavy-duty, all-aluminum construction lends durability to each trailer, and keeps them lightweight for superior fuel efficiency,” said John Hall, director of marketing and corporate communications at Featherlite.

When it comes to either a gooseneck hitch or bumper hitch, there are many factors to consider including that a gooseneck requires a truck bed for pulling while a bumper hitch can be hauled by a truck as well as an SUV or RV.

“There are pros and cons for each kind of hitch,” Randy said. “In a gooseneck, the weight is centered over the truck, which feels more stable to me and allows you to maneuver traffic and parking spaces easier. On a bumper hitch, the weight is on the very rear of the vehicle, so it will pull differently compared to a gooseneck.”

A bumper-pull trailer generally will have a tongue out front with the hitch on it. That hitch attaches to the back of the vehicle on a tow ball. That means the back of the vehicle has to hold quite a bit of weight: the tongue, the trailer and the load of the trailer.

“That makes this setup a bit less steady than a gooseneck setup, and

depending on the vehicle, the bumper-pull setup can mean more sway on the highway when larger vehicles pass,” Randy said.

There are many types of hitches to complete the horse-hauling package and the type you select is an important decision. The hitch should be the proper class and should be rated to match or exceed the weight of the trailer. Ball ratings must also match the GVW of the trailer and be the proper size to fit the coupler. The size and weight rating are stamped on the ball.

A bumper-pull trailer connects to a receiver hitch that is attached to the chassis of the vehicle. Often the receiver hitch offers removable ball mounts that offer varying heights to provide for level towing.

Although a gooseneck trailer and fifth wheel look similar, their method of coupling is different. A fifth wheel trailer attaches to a “fifth wheel” mounted in the bed of a truck while a gooseneck couples to a trailer ball mounted in the truck’s bed.

One of the disadvantages of a gooseneck is that the ball remains in the bed. For many years, the only options available to resolve this issue was to either remove the ball or install a large plate with a ball that folded down, which required a huge hole in the truck bed and installation could be cumbersome.

However, B&W Trailer Hitches changed this with its patented Turnover-ball gooseneck hitch, which has a ball that can be pulled out, turned over and stowed beneath the bed, requiring only a four-inch hole in the bed.

“Taking a greasy ball out of the truck and stowing it in a bag as some goosenecks require just isn’t convenient,” said Beth Barlow, marketing manager for B&W Trailer Hitches. “We found that folks who use gooseneck hitches wanted the ball to be out of the way so they could use their truck for various jobs, but still have it available right in the bed when they needed to tow.”

