



Trailers: To Hitch or to Haul

The right trailer to hitch or haul can help you carry animals down the road to a new pasture, or across the country for a show or sale. The right trailer will make the job safer and easier.

By Carol Ekarius

About the Author:

Carol Ekarius is a contributing editor to HF and author of books, including *Small-Scale Livestock Farming* (Storey Books). Choosing the right trailer to hitch or haul your animals makes the job safer and easier. I bought our stock trailer at a large consignment auction, on a cold March afternoon, back in the mid-1980s. It was to be my husband Ken's birthday present that year, so he didn't know I was going trailer shopping—instead of to work—when I left the house that morning.

Trailer Manufacturers

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<http://www.cmtrailers.com/>
(888) 268-7577

Exiss

<http://www.exiss.com/>
(877) 55-EXISS

Featherlite Inc.

<http://www.fthr.com/>
(800) 800-1230

Hart Trailers

<http://www.harttrailer.com/>
(888) 810-HART

Jamco

<http://www.jamcofinetrailers.com/>
(519) 527-1823

Kiefer Built Trailers

<http://www.kieferbuiltinc.com/>
(888) 254-3337

S&H Trailers

<http://www.shtrailers.com/>
(800) 367-5577

Logan Coach

<http://www.logancoach.com/>
(800) 742-7047

Sooner Trailer Mfg. Co.

<http://www.soonertrailer.com/>
(800) 256-6668

Sundowner Trailers

<http://www.sundownertrailer.com/>
(800) 438-4294



4-Star Trailers Inc.
<http://www.4startrailers.com/>
(800) 848-3095

Trails West
<http://www.trailswesttrailers.com/>
(208) 852-2200

I spent all morning in the area of the auction yard where several dozen trailers were lined up. Some were pretty, with striking paint jobs; others were homely, with dings, dents and faded paint. There were two-horse bumper-pull trailers and big gooseneck types that could easily haul a dozen animals.

My budget was somewhat limited (as budgets usually are when you're in your 20s), and my practical knowledge of trailers was even more limited. An "older" farmer (probably not too much older than I am today) saw me studying the trailers, and struck up a conversation.

I told him that I wanted to bid on one as a present for my husband. It didn't take him long to realize I was a complete neophyte. He took me under his wing that day, and we studied each trailer together.

He pointed out where striking was a spiffy new paint job masking big structural problems—most likely the result of an accident, and where homely was simply on the outside of a really great trailer. As we studied each trailer, he gave me his appraisal of top price and bargain bid for each. He was my angel that day, and we still use the trailer that I purchased with his assistance.

If you're a first-time trailer buyer, you may not have an angel with you as you go shopping, but armed with some knowledge, you will improve your chance of getting what you need at the right price.

Determine Trailer Your Needs

Norm Helmke, director of administration for Featherlite Inc. and president of the National Association of Trailer Manufacturers, recommends that before you buy a tow vehicle or a trailer, determine what you are going to do with the rig, both now and in the future.

Certifiably Compliant

The National Association of Trailer Manufacturers has a voluntary, third-party certification program that most major manufacturers are participating in.

The program is designed to assure consumers that the manufacturer is fully compliant with all federal safety regulations and the latest industry standards for trailer manufacturing.

Look for the NATM certification decal when shopping for trailers.

For example, he says you should think about your payload and the conditions you will be operating under. Consider things like: What kinds of animals will you be hauling? How often will you be hauling them? How many will you need to haul at one time? How far will you be going? Do you need storage space—and if so, how much? Are living quarters a requirement in the trailer? Will you drive on highways or off-road? Will you drive in the mountains? Snow? What about maintenance; do you have time and skill to do it yourself, or will you have it done by someone else?

The answers to these questions will ultimately help you decide on the appropriate trailer.

Helmke recommends that if you have neither truck nor trailer, you start out by shopping for the trailer that will meet your needs, and then shop for the truck that is most suitable for hauling it. If you already own a truck, you need to find out what the manufacturer's recommended ratings are, and not exceed those when purchasing your trailer.

Know Vehicle Rating Before Choosing Trailer

When talking to truck or trailer dealers, you start to hear them discuss a variety of important ratings: Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR): The GVWR is the amount the truck may weigh when it is fully loaded, including passengers, fuel, and payload. Gross Trailer Weight Rating (GTWR): The GTWR is the weight of the fully loaded trailer, carrying livestock, tack and other equipment. Gross Vehicle Combination Weight Rating (GVCWR): The GVCWR is the total weight of your fully



loaded truck and trailer combined. Gross Axle Weight Rating (GAWR): The GAWR is the rating that the individual axles can handle, and it is determined by the axle, the type of tires, the rims, and the other components within the axle-and-brake system.

The GAWR is important because it is often the rating that trailer owners are likely to exceed, causing problems as they drive. Helmke says you can avoid exceeding this rating by balancing your load front to back, and side to side. For example, one customer had a four-horse trailer with slant-type stalls so it was designed for four horses to ride in a row. This person loaded one horse into the trailer, in the very back stall, thereby placing the load behind the rear axle. He had trouble, and blamed it on a trailer problem, but by loading the trailer the way he did, he actually exceeded the GAWR on the rear axle, even though it was nowhere near the trailer's GTWR.

Tongue weight is the last measurement you might hear manufacturers and dealers refer to, and it is the amount of the trailer's weight that presses down on the hitch.

Types of Trailer Hitches

There are two basic types of trailers: The tag-along (or bumper pull), which connects to a hitch receiver that is mounted to the truck's bumper or chassis. The fifth-wheel hitch (gooseneck) that connects to a receiver mounted in the bed of the truck.

The hitches used for tag-along trailers are further broken down into five classes. Here's how the U.S. Forest Service classifies them in its Fleet Equipment Management Handbook (#7109): Class 1 - All types of tag-along trailers up to 2,000 lbs. GTWR. Class 2 - All types of tag-along trailers over 2,000 lbs. to a maximum 4,000 lbs. Class 3 - All types of tag-along trailers over 4,000 lbs. to a maximum 6,000 lbs. Class 4 - All types of tag-along trailers over 6,000 lbs. to a maximum of 10,000 lbs. Class 5 - All types of tag-along trailers up to 14,000 lbs.

Class 1 and 2 hitches are insufficient for pulling any kind of livestock trailer. Class 3 hitches are the minimum that will do the job, but they are limited to hauling a two-horse style trailer; for any trailer that is larger than that you must have either a Class 4 or Class 5 hitch. Class 3 hitches may have a weight distributing design, and Class 4 and 5 both utilize weight-distributing mounting brackets to transfer the weight to all of the truck's wheels.

The fifth-wheel hitch takes more of the weight off of the trailer and transfers it to the truck as it centers the hitch over the truck's rear axle. This increases the GTWR you can pull by transferring a greater percentage of the trailer's weight to the truck. Fifth wheels also have more stability and a better ride, as well as a decreased turning radius.

Disadvantages to the fifth wheel include: higher profile than tag-along trailers; the hitch might limit use of the truck bed; the fifth wheel can't be towed by SUVs or vans; and the up-front cost (which tends to be significantly higher than a comparable tag-along).

As a rule of thumb, the tongue weight for a hitch is one tenth the maximum GTWR. Too much tongue weight for the hitch system can cause the front of the truck to lift up, possibly resulting in suspension or drivetrain damage to the truck.

Trailer Features: Construction, Safety

Today's trailers are constructed using aluminum, steel or a combination of an aluminum skin over a steel frame. Aluminum doesn't rust and there's minimal maintenance, so it tends to have a longer life span than steel or steel/aluminum.

It's also lighter than steel by about 25 percent, so it improves mileage. All-aluminum trailers have higher resale values, but they cost as much as 50 percent more up front than a comparable steel trailer, and they have higher insurance rates.

Steel trailers are durable, particularly if you will be hauling off-road or on gravel roads, and durability is an important selling point if you will be hauling animals that are rough on their surroundings (for example, if you will be hauling bison or range cattle). In spite of their durability, steel trailers require more maintenance, including repainting. Dents that are not repaired will quickly rust.

The combination trailers cost more than all-steel models and less than all-aluminum trailers. Although the skin doesn't deteriorate as quickly as un-maintained steel, it may have problems with "electrolysis"—a type of potentially serious corrosion that occurs where the aluminum skin and steel framing meet.

John Hall, director of corporate communications at Featherlite says it is important to consider safety features when shopping. You need the windows to be sturdy and large enough to affect good airflow in the trailer.



"Mats, which should be thick rubber, are particularly important—especially if you are transporting horses any distance—because it reduces fatigue on the animals' legs, causing them to be calmer and more rested when they arrive," Hall says.

There are some other safety features to look for as well: Check that latches and connectors are easy to operate. Good lighting, both inside the trailer and outside, is important. Enclosed wiring harnesses reduce light failures due to corrosion. Resin coatings on chains and rings will reduce noise, which makes the ride less stressful for animals.

What to Know When You go Trailering

Towing a trailer is not a simple matter; any mistakes or problems can lead to tragic consequences for you or your animals. The gross trailer weight and the tow vehicle's capacity, as well as the connection between the trailer and the tow vehicle, must all be compatible. The trailer and the truck must be in good repair. Live animals are even more challenging to tow than a trailer with dead weight (like a car or a boat), because animals tend to move around and shift their weight during the trip.

Also, you need to consider some of the legal and liability issues associated with trailering. Generally speaking, most livestock trailers that are operated for personal use are exempt from the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations. But if you are crossing state lines and are operating a commercial stable, or hauling animals for shows, sales or rodeos with intent to profit, or hauling horses that you will be training for compensation, you may fall under the "commercial ventures" language of this United States Department of Transportation regulation, meaning that you will have to comply with its terms. If you fall under this regulation, you will be required to have a commercial driver's license (CDL) and you will have to maintain a logbook and have a medical card, as well as suitable safety equipment.

Some states may require a CDL, even if you are exempt from the federal regulation, if the GVCWR of your trailer and truck exceeds 10,001 lbs., a weight that is fairly easy to exceed with anything above a two-horse bumper-pull trailer. Your state may have an exemption from CDL requirements—called a farm exemption—if you strictly trailer within 100 miles of home. Check your state's requirements.

Jennifer Brooks of Gloria Walker & Associates, an insurance agency in Raymore, Mo., specializing in farm and ranch insurance, including trailer coverage, says, "Between your truck, your trailer and your animals, you can easily have up to \$100,000 tied up every time you pull out of the driveway! With that kind of investment, it is important that you make sure the coverage and liability limits are adequate before you begin trailering."

Brooks explains that typically your truck provides the liability coverage for your trailer, but comprehensive and collision on the trailer are separate. To complicate matters, contents of the trailer are not covered under these policies.

She illustrates with an example: "Let's say that you are driving along with your trailer and have an accident that is your fault—maybe the trailer comes unhitched and goes down the road and whacks another vehicle. The regular auto insurance liability coverage that is on your truck is what would cover this accident from a liability aspect. In other words, your regular vehicle policy will pay the other driver's expenses and damages.

But, if the trailer has sustained damage, it won't be covered unless you have a comprehensive and collision policy specifically on it—your vehicle collision and comprehensive won't pay for your trailer.

If your animals were injured or killed in the accident, they would not be covered by either your regular auto policy or the trailer policy, so to cover the animal-related losses, you would need a livestock medical and mortality policy. And finally, if your tack or other personal property was lost or destroyed in the accident, those items would have to be covered by your homeowners policy."

The rate for trailer coverage depends on the state and county you live in. For full coverage, which includes comprehensive, collision and theft, you can expect to pay somewhere between \$100 and \$500 annually, depending on the value of the trailer and your location."

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