

# **HORSE FLOATS**

## **SAFETY, CARE AND MAINTENANCE**

### **FOREWORD;**

This document is not intended as and should not be viewed as a comprehensive technical guide to the regular preventative maintenance of horse transport solutions. It is intended to prompt the reader to be aware of the various components associated with the many types of horse transport equipment, be observant and seek additional professional advice regarding the correct operation and preventative maintenance requirements of relevant components. The safety of all road users and the welfare of animals being transported is the highest priority. Should personal safety and animal welfare be in doubt at any time the intended transport should be terminated until all safety concerns are addressed.

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### **KNOW YOUR TOW VEHICLE, FLOAT OR TRUCK;**

There are numerous types of horse transport solutions ranging from basic single axle, single horse trailers up to purpose built trucks and trailers. It is the legal responsibility of the driver to know the limit of their driving licence and all of the limits of the towing vehicle, the trailer and the vehicle/trailer combined. To exceed these legal limits is unlawful, unsafe and may compromise the longevity of the combination. This information can be found in several locations such as your driver's licence, the instructional documents used to gain your class of driver's licence, Dept of Transport WA website, the tow vehicle owner's handbook or vehicle manufacturers (Australian) website. The registration documents of a commercial type tow vehicle will state the "Tare" (unladen) mass, the "Aggregate" (loaded) mass and maximum "Combination" (laden tow vehicle plus laden trailer) mass. The trailer registration documents will state the "Tare" and "Aggregate" mass limit which must not be exceeded even if the towing vehicles "Combination" mass specification allows for a heavier trailer to be towed. Passenger vehicles being used to tow are generally limited by the towing hitch and equipment installed to the vehicle. A label is fixed to the tow hitch of such modern vehicles to guide the driver. Older passenger vehicle towing guidelines are to be found on Main Roads WA or Dept of Transport WA website.

NOTE; Any vehicle and trailer including livestock involved in a fatal or serious collision will be impounded and thoroughly inspected and weighed. Additional penalties may be applicable and Insurance may be void in the case of overloaded or unroadworthy vehicles or combinations.

## MAJOR FLOAT COMPONENTS;

- Tow Hitch including tow vehicle attachments are to be complete (with any safety pins), secure, lubricated, compatible (eg. 50mm ball with 50mm hitch) and in a visually serviceable and undamaged condition. Any sign of deflection, bending or looseness of the hitch connection requires immediate attention.
- Safety Chains with load rated “D” shackles must be secure in accordance with the hitch and trailer manufacturers Australian Standard (“AS”) specifications. Where safety pins, “R” clips or similar are used, insert from the top or highest point to avoid the potential of rattling out downwards whilst driving.
- Brakes must be fully functional. There are numerous types of brake systems used on trailers including (but not limited to) fully mechanical over-ride cable operated drum or disc brakes and hydraulic actuated over-ride drum or disc brakes for trailers up to 1999kg “Aggregate” Mass. For trailers exceeding 2000kg “Aggregate”, electric magnetic actuated drum brakes, electric hydraulic actuated drum or disc brakes, vacuum over hydraulic actuated drum or disc brakes, air pressure over hydraulic drum or disc brakes and full air pressure actuated drum brakes with spring actuated park brake may be found and all are required to activated automatically in the event of the trailer becoming detached from the tow vehicle. These systems are known as “Breakaway” brakes. All of these systems are susceptible to wear, corrosion, leakage, seizure, electrical faults and mechanical (impact) damage. The road wheels of the trailer (with brakes installed) must be elevated (individually or in groups) from the ground with the tow vehicle fully connected, powered up, full air pressure or vacuum if applicable. Each brake can be tested by spinning the wheel and applying the brake to ensure positive activation and complete release. Should any brake not stop the wheel spinning or fail to spin freely once the brake is released, immediate attention is required. The “Breakaway” function may also be tested by disconnecting either the electrical brake connection or the vacuum or air pressure hoses as applicable. Some imported trailers are fitted with mechanically activated “Breakaway” brakes. These can be tested manually.
- Wheel Bearings can be checked (non-intrusive) whilst the brakes are being tested as outlined above. Again each wheel should spin freely and quietly whilst the wheel is elevated and little or no endfloat (bearing play) should be evident. If this is not the case, immediate attention is required. Wheel bearings should be removed, inspected and repacked on a regular basis depending on the usage of the float. Annually is a good guide for most users. More frequently for high usage.
- Tyres must be inspected visually prior to each usage and the correct air pressure checked to allow the best operating condition for the tyres (including the spare/s). Tread depth and any impact damage must also be monitored. Most tyre manufacturers caution the use of tyres older than 5 years (irrespective of tread depth) due to material degradation.
- Load Ramp and its fixings must be in good condition and secure. Visual inspection of the timber or panelling and any matting is critical as moisture damage is common. Ponies with small hooves and large heavy breeds will break through a rotten ramp. Ramp hinges must be in good condition, ramp springs and latches must also be in good condition.
- Floor material must be inspected regularly as moisture will gather under the matting and rot the floor timber or panelling.

- Suspension system designs vary greatly from trailer to trailer manufacturer. Breakage and wear is common and annual trailer service by a qualified mechanic should identify potential problems before a roadside break down occurs.
- Breeching bars, bay dividers, bum bars or chains, head dividers, tie-up points (for horses, haynets etc), internal tack boxes and any other inside attachments should be secure and of a design to limit the possibility of horse injury. No loose cargo should be carried with any horse. Many newer floats have innovative quick release bay fixings and tie-up points to be used in emergency situations. These should all be fully functional.
- Lights should be fully functional, secure, undamaged, compliant and fitted in such a way as to avoid injury to horses or damage to lamp assemblies. Light cabling, plugs and fittings should be secure and in good condition. Check the operation of all lights (with an assistant) prior to every trip. Trailer plugs are to be wired to a colour and numerical pin code but minor variations are possible for auxiliary or reverse lamp circuits so in the event of towing a borrowed trailer, ensure correct operation prior to towing. Some trailers may be fitted with 24volt globes for 24volt towing vehicles. LED lamps are multi-voltage but older lamps may require globe changes.
- Exterior fixings such as yards, awnings, tool boxes, watertanks or similar are common and all should be secure and installed to minimise snag points if horses are to be tied to floats. Never tie any horse to a float that is not attached to a vehicle. Do not attempt to use the park brake facility to secure a float as an alternative whilst horses are tied to the float.
- Tools and equipment should be stored securely in the float or in the tow vehicle. Some vehicle jacks and wheel braces may be compatible with your float but a good quality cross brace is a wise investment. A bottle jack and a flat block of hard wood may be required if your tow vehicle jack is unsuitable. Make certain the wheel nuts of your trailer can be loosened with a cross brace. If they have been over tightened with an impact wrench (rattle gun), have them loosened and retightened by hand so that a roadside wheel change is possible.

Your horse transport solution is critical to your equestrian enjoyment. It is ideal to store the float or truck under cover when possible, ensure it is cleaned after each use and allowed to dry out to avoid moisture retention resulting in corrosion damage and rotting timber.