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## How to Choose a Car Trailer and Secure Your Vehicle Safely

Our Friends · Thursday, August 13th, 2026

Loading a car onto a trailer looks simple until you do it. You may be hauling a project car to a show, a track car to an event, a prop car to a film set, or an older sedan to a new home.

The job comes down to choosing the right trailer, matching it to your tow vehicle, and securing the car so it cannot shift. Here is how to handle each step.

### Trailer types in plain terms

Most car haulers fall into two groups. Open trailers are generally lighter, less expensive, easier to load, and easier to store. You can also see the car while driving.

Enclosed trailers cost more and weigh more, but they protect the vehicle from weather, road debris, and unwanted access.

Whichever type you prefer, compare specifications rather than relying on photos. Check the deck length, width between the fenders, ramp length, empty weight, payload capacity, and tie-down locations.

Buyers in Western Australia and New South Wales can [shop car trailers online](#) through Coastmac to compare model dimensions and configurations. Individual listings publish figures such as aggregate trailer mass, tare weight, carrying capacity and useable deck space, so readers outside Australia can still use them as examples of the specifications worth comparing.

### Matching the trailer to your tow vehicle

Your tow vehicle, hitch and trailer each have weight limits. The trailer's gross vehicle weight rating, or GVWR, is the maximum permitted weight of the trailer and everything loaded on it.

The car's curb weight may also be higher than expected once you add fuel, tools, spare parts, and other equipment. Weigh the loaded combination if you are close to any published limit rather than guessing.

### Brakes and breakaway systems

A braked trailer helps the tow vehicle stop the combined load. A breakaway kit provides a backup if the trailer separates from the tow vehicle: a small cable pulls a pin and activates the trailer brakes.

Connect the cable to a solid point on the tow vehicle, separate from the hitch ball and safety chains. Brake and breakaway requirements vary by trailer weight and location, so check the rules for every state or territory on your route.

## Tie-down gear that works

Over-the-tire wheel nets are a practical choice for many cars because they restrain the tires while allowing the suspension to move over bumps. Axle or chassis straps can also work, but they must connect to suitable factory-approved points.

Never route a strap around brake lines, steering parts, rubber bushings, or plastic components.

Every strap, chain and ratchet should have a legible working load limit. Commercial cargo rules require the combined working load limit of the tiedowns to equal at least half the cargo's weight, which is also a useful minimum benchmark for personal towing.

Replace gear that is unmarked, frayed, cut, badly corroded, or difficult to operate. Use edge protection anywhere a strap could rub against a sharp corner.

## Securing the car step by step



*Photo: Mike Bird via Pexels*

1. Park on firm, level ground and chock the trailer wheels before loading.
2. Confirm that the trailer is coupled, the latch is locked, and the ramps are fully supported.
3. Load slowly and keep the car centered. Position it to achieve the tongue weight recommended by the trailer and tow vehicle manufacturers.
4. Set the parking brake and leave the transmission in Park or first gear, but do not treat the drivetrain as a tie-down.
5. Use four wheel straps, one at each wheel, or suitable front and rear straps attached to approved points.

6. Check strap angles and possible rub points, adding edge protection where needed.
7. Tighten each tie-down evenly. Wheel straps should hold the tires securely without crushing the sidewalls.
8. Cross the safety chains, connect the breakaway cable separately, and test the lights and trailer brakes.
9. Recheck the complete setup after five to ten miles, again near 50 miles and at later fuel or rest stops.

That routine takes real time on every trip. If it starts to look like more work than the journey justifies, weighing up **shipping and driving** is a sensible check before you commit to towing.

## Road checks and legal basics

Unsecured-load laws and trailer equipment requirements vary by location. Before leaving, confirm the rules for registration, brakes, breakaway systems, lighting, mirrors, speed limits, and tie-downs in every state or territory you will enter. Private towing and commercial hauling may be subject to different standards.

Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration rules apply to commercial carriers, but they provide a useful reference. The rules call for vehicle restraint at the front and rear, and wheel-over tiedowns must prevent sideways, forward, rearward, and upward movement. Any load that can roll should also be held by chocks, wedges, a cradle, or another device that cannot work loose.

These are the safe vehicle transport basics worth remembering. Common problems include underrated straps, tiedowns that loosen after the first few miles, chains dragging on the road, incorrect tongue weight, and skipped inspections.

During each stop, check the coupler, chains, breakaway cable, straps, tires, wheel hubs, lights, and any cargo stored inside the car or trailer.

## When shipping makes more sense

Towing is not always the right choice. For a cross-country move, a tight schedule, or a car that is difficult to replace, hiring a carrier may reduce both risk and effort.

Compare open and enclosed carriers, confirm what the insurance actually covers, and ask how the vehicle will be restrained in transit. Add up fuel, trailer rental or purchase, accommodation, and the days the drive will take, then set that total against a carrier quote for the same route.

## If you want hands-on practice



*Photo: SHVETS production via Pexels*

Reading about strap angles is not the same as tightening and inspecting a tie-down under supervision. Structured training can cover loading, unloading, blocking, chocking and selecting rated gear while an instructor reviews your technique.

Readers in Western Australia can explore nationally recognised **load restraint courses in Perth** through Perth Transport Training. The provider delivers TLIA1001 Secure Cargo alongside TLID0015 Load and Unload Goods/Cargo as a single combined program.

The course runs as one full day of face-to-face practical training and assessment, and finishing it earns a Statement of Attainment for both units. This is securement training rather than driver licensing, and the content covers WA regulations alongside national load restraint standards.

Check current schedules, entry requirements, and costs directly, because course details and pricing can change.

## Slow beats fast

Many trailer problems begin with rushing. Choose equipment with a safety margin, use rated gear, follow the same loading order every time, and stop early to inspect the setup.

Whether you learn through experience, a written checklist, or a structured course, consistency matters. A careful routine should make the drive uneventful, which is exactly the goal.

## FAQ

What should I check after the first few miles? Stop after five to ten miles and walk around the entire setup. Check each strap for slack, confirm that the ratchet handles are locked, and make sure the chains are clear of the road. Inspect the coupler, breakaway cable, lights, tires, and wheel hubs.

If a hub is unusually hot, stop and investigate rather than continuing. Repeat the inspection near 50 miles and at later stops.

How many tiedowns should I use? Use four wheel straps, one at each wheel, or suitable front and rear straps connected to approved points.

Should safety chains cross under the hitch? Yes. Cross them under the coupler and keep them clear of the road, following the trailer manufacturer's guidance.

Do I need trailer brakes? Requirements vary by trailer weight and location. Check local laws and confirm that the brake system is working before departure.

*Photo: Csaba Nagy via Pexels*

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