

A motor home offers us the freedom to explore the open road. We can go where we want when we want. But what happens when we arrive at a destination where we plan to stay put for a day, a week or a month? How do we explore the area, or take a quick trip to the grocery store? Well, we have our bikes with us right! Bikes are nice and we even get some much needed exercise, but are they really practical for touring the surrounding area or taking a day trip? Probably not, so what do we do?

One option is to disconnect everything from the motor home and take it. What a pain this can be just for a loaf of bread. Another option is to tow a vehicle behind the motor home. Now when we need a loaf of bread or want to take a day trip we have our transportation. This makes much more sense, but just how do we do this?

How much weight can we safely tow? Do we need to use a tow dolly or can we tow it with all four wheels on the ground? If we can tow it with all four wheels on the ground do we use a vehicle mounted tow bar or a coach mounted tow bar? What about brakes? What else will I need? These are all good questions, so let's start at the beginning.

To learn everything you need to know about dinghy towing check out our "Towing Behind Your Motorhome" DVD at www.rveducation101.com

How much weight can we safely tow?

Your motor home has a weight rating referred to as the Gross Combined Weight Rating (GCWR). This is the maximum combined weight of the fully loaded motor home and the fully loaded tow vehicle when weighed together. You never want to exceed this or any other weight rating. Another consideration is the amount of weight the hitch receiver on the back of the motor home is rated for. The motor home itself might have a tow rating of 7,000 pounds, but if the receiver is only rated for 3,500 that's the most you can tow.

Do we need to use a tow dolly, or can we tow our vehicle with all four wheels on the ground?

Some vehicles can be towed with all four wheels down with no problems while others would result in serious damage to the vehicle transmission. In some cases modifications can be made to the driveline and or transmission so you can tow the vehicle with all four wheels on the ground. You need to do your homework before attempting to tow a vehicle with all four wheels on the ground. Read your vehicle owner's manual and check with the vehicle manufacturer. Many vehicles that can be towed with all four wheels on the ground still have restrictions like max speeds or max distances. In some situations it is best to use a tow dolly. A tow dolly is designed to lift the drive wheels off of the ground to prevent any damage to the tow vehicle. If the vehicle you want to tow requires expensive driveline modifications or has speed and distance restrictions a tow dolly may be the way to go.

If we can tow our vehicle with all four wheels on the ground do we use a vehicle mounted tow bar or a coach mounted tow bar?

If you can tow your vehicle with all four wheels down the first step will be to have tow bar mounting brackets installed on the tow vehicle. Now we can decide on which type of tow bar best suits our needs. Regardless of the type you choose make sure it is rated in excess of the fully loaded tow vehicle weight. There are two basic types of tow bars, a rigid A-frame and a collapsible. Rigid A-frame tow bars are the most basic. They are less expensive and because the arms don't adjust or collapse they require more precise aligning to hook up.

Collapsible tow bars are more common among RVers. They are self aligning and much easier to hook up and use. The arms extend, self-center and lock in place automatically when you drive away. There are two types of collapsible tow bars, car-mounted and motor home-mounted. Car-mounted tow bars are a little easier to use and fold away on the front of the vehicle when you are finished using it. Motorhome-mounted tow bars fold away on the rear of the motor home and never have to be lifted or removed from the front of the vehicle.

What about brakes?

Most U.S. States and Canadian Provinces have their own laws on the requirement for brakes on a towed trailer or vehicle being towed behind a motor home. The brakes on a motor home are designed by the vehicle manufacturer to stop the weight of that particular vehicle, not the additional weight being towed behind it. This additional weight adds a substantial increase to the distance required to stop safely. You need to have some type of braking system on the towed vehicle to SAFELY reduce the stopping distance and to protect you, your loved ones and the safety of others. After researching all of my options I chose the BrakePro™ by Roadmaster Inc. I decided on the BrakePro™ for several reasons.

- 1) It's portable and will work on any towed vehicle.
- 2) It doesn't require any modifications to the existing brake system.
- 3) It brakes your towed car proportionally and simultaneously to the motor home braking.
- 4) It's is easy to install and use.

What else will I need?

You will need safety cables and lights for the towed vehicle. You need safety cables in the event the towed vehicle is ever separated from the motor home. One end of the cables is attached to the tow vehicle tow brackets and the other end to the receiver on the motor home.

You need to have running lights, tail lights, brake lights and turn signals on the towed vehicle that work in conjunction with the motor home lights. If you don't tow your vehicle that often you may want to purchase a light accessory kit that can be strapped to the tow vehicle or uses magnets. These kits have a wiring harness that is plugged into the motor homes wiring harness plug. If you tow your vehicle frequently you will probably want to use a more permanent method where tow vehicle lights are wired directly to the motor home lights. Once this is done you just plug the tow vehicle wiring harness plug in to the motor home wiring harness plug.

The only thing left to do is hook up your tow vehicle and head down the road. Try to get in the habit of making the following checks before you leave and every time you stop. Check the tow bar, base-plate, safety cables and light plug to make sure everything is properly attached. When you stop check the tires of the towed vehicle to make sure they are not hot or losing air. If you are using a dolly or trailer, check the wheels to make sure they are not hot to the touch. If the wheels are hot, it may indicate a brake or bearing problem. Check all of the lights everyday before towing.

Check out our new "Dinghy Towing" e-book for more information at www.rveducation101.com

Happy Camping,
Mark

Mark Polk is the owner of RV Education 101, www.rveducation101.com RV Education 101 is a North Carolina based company that produces professional training videos, DVDs and e-books on how to use and maintain your RV. Mark also hosts the RV savvy segments for RVTV which airs on the Outdoor Channel.