

TOWING IN EUROPE

IS THERE A PROBLEM - SOME SAY THERE IS

For a long time now, in fact it seems to be forever, people have been writing in with horror stories about problems associated with towing a car behind an RV in Europe. A recent article by an RV owner who was stopped in Spain on the road from Gibraltar to Portugal does indicate the importance of being fully prepared for all eventualities, and to have the necessary documentation to hand.

I have been towing a car behind an RV in England and the rest of Europe for the past five years, covering approximately 30,000 miles, and I have NEVER once had any trouble with Police, Gendarmes, Guardia, or any other form of authority. Indeed quite to the contrary, I have always been met with enthusiastic approval. I had an article printed on the joys and benefits of 'Towing in Europe', a few years ago, which prompted a good response from fellow RVers.

Braked or unbraked?

When I first started to tow a car behind an RV, the main point of contention, especially in France, was whether or not the tow frame should be braked or not. The law in England states quite categorically and clearly that trailers with a gross weight of under 750kgs DO NOT REQUIRE brakes. However, as this point regarding braking appeared to raise some questions, right from the beginning I used a BRAKED tow frame for my Panda which had an in use weight of UNDER 750kgs. Apart from negating any queries regarding type of tow frame, I felt an awful lot safer using a braked system, in particular when coming down from the Pyrenees and the Sierra Nevada's.

You can reverse with a tow car hooked-up

To clear up what is a little lack of knowledge by some people when they state that you cannot reverse when you are towing a car, you CAN in fact reverse simply by straightening the front wheels of the car and putting the steering wheel lock on. Common sense and a light gentle touch should of course be used. In fact in the very first year that I towed I covered over 4,000 miles with the steering lock engaged because that is what I had been told to do. The car did not suffer any ill effects and has

only just died a natural death due to old age after covering over 110,000 miles, which ain't bad for a little Panda.

Out on the road

To show the veracity of my statements it may be of interest to explain a few of the most notable times that my towed car was the point of perusal and discussion.

On a road in Spain, in the extreme south, travelling towards Portugal we were followed for about 4 miles by two Police motorbikes who positioned themselves one behind the

actually got down under the front of the car to see how the tow frame was constructed and connected to the car. We had a good friendly chat in Pidgin English and Pidgin Spanish about towing and Liverpool (my home town) and it seemed that these 'Bandits' were worse than Liverpool Football Fans.

I was also helped by some French police on a Motorway when a fan belt snapped. They stationed their vehicle about 25 yards behind me (to save me putting my Triangle out) whilst I replaced the fan belt. They were very pleasant, and were quite amused at the big RV and little colour coded Panda together, one even laughingly describing it as a 'Canard et bebe'.

Another time I had a rather heated argument with a policeman in Portugal who took exception to me attempting to use a bus terminus to turn my outfit around in. I stopped arguing when I realised that he had a gun and I didn't! Even with the argument, and having had a good look at the car being towed, he didn't say anything about the car being towed.

There have also been many, in fact countless, times when various police and traffic officials have taken an interest in the car being towed, and all have been very happy, if somewhat surprised sometimes, to see a little car behind a big RV. I have been noticed in Cities, on Motorways, in Villages, traffic jams etc. etc. in France, Spain, Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg, Andorra, and of course England.

The last time of particular note was last year just north of Dijon in France. We were followed again by two police motorcycles following in similar positions to those in Spain, taking great interest in the car and the braking system, but this time we were travelling along the Motorway (at 50mph of course) They lost interest after about five minutes and sped away giving me a wave as they passed.

Towing four wheels down – more stable than on a trailer?

Still on the subject of towing, I firmly believe that a small car being towed with all four wheels on the ground is far more stable and safer than a car on a trailer, whether two wheeled or

A few simple tips for trouble free towing in Europe

Use the correct A-frame

Carry all the necessary paperwork

Obey the rules of the road

Be courteous to the authorities

Be prepared for all eventualities

towed car, and the other riding just between the RV and the car. (a bit hairy!). They took extreme interest in the whole outfit as we went round bends, along straights, up and down hills, and they appeared to be looking to see if the braking system was working or not. This went on for about ten minutes, then seemingly satisfied, they stopped at a lay-by whilst I carried on.

Another time we were requested by two policemen, in the middle of Spain at one in the morning, not to wild camp in a particular lay-by because of the danger of 'Bandits, Bad Men with Guns who will steal everything from you'. The two Spanish Police were quite taken with the idea of having a little car towed behind an RV and one of them

four close coupled wheels. Also, regarding towing a car on or off a trailer one has to consider the weight that you are legally entitled to tow when driving an RV, bearing in mind the type of licence that you hold. If you are driving an RV on a car licence, you are only entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination of up to and not exceeding 8.25 tonnes MAM (maximum authorised mass), or GVW (gross vehicle weight). This is the TOTAL maximum weight that the outfit is ALLOWED to weigh, not the total weight of the outfit UNLADEN. If you tow a trailer then its maximum gross weight, not actual loaded weight, must be added to the gross weight of your RV. A trailer can quite easily bring the total Combined Gross Vehicle Weight well over 8.25 tonnes.

If you hold an LGV Class C licence for a rigid vehicle, as opposed to a Class C+E for an articulated vehicle, you are allowed to drive a rigid vehicle of over 7.5 tonnes gross weight and up to the maximum allowable weight for the country you are in, but you are only entitled to tow any type of trailer, including a car, up to and NOT exceeding 750 kgs. This being the case, any car being carried on a trailer will almost undoubtedly exceed the maximum allowable for your rigid LGV licence.

All in all, I strongly recommend the towing of a car behind an RV, the benefits are huge, and let's face it who wants to use an RV to go shopping and down to the beach in (apart from me that is) when you are on holiday.

When is an RV under 7.5 tonnes?

Regarding driving an RV on a car licence, I am quite horrified and more than a little concerned at what is going on at the moment when people are buying or attempting to sell RVs. Being due to retire myself (AGAIN) in a few weeks time, we decided to have a change of recreation plans and go for either a large American caravan permanently sited on the Costa Blanca or French Riviera, or a small apartment out there somewhere. We advertised, and sold to the first couple who came, our Allegro 33. But the day after it went we started to suffer withdrawal symptoms and consequently we have been searching for another R.V. as good as the one we had just sold for near enough the same price. (FAT CHANCE).

What surprises and horrifies me is the ignorance, deliberate or not, that people have when selling RVs as under 7.5 tons and therefore able to be driven on a car licence. There are private individuals, and small traders, who take their empty RV to a weighbridge and get a weight ticket showing UNDER 7.5 tons, and saying that this piece of paper proves that one can drive the RV on a car licence. This is a very definite NO NO. The weight of a vehicle that applies to your eligibility of your car licence is the MAM (Maximum Authorised Mass) or GVW (Gross Vehicle Weight), and NOT the KERB WEIGHT, which is the unladen weight of the vehicle. It matters not if

a vehicle's kerb weight is only 4 tons, if the MAM or GVW that is marked on the 'Plate' is over 7.5 tonnes (16,500 lbs.), then a car licence cannot be used to drive that vehicle.

Also on a similar subject, there are individuals and traders who are selling fifth wheelers as being car licence driveable because they weigh less than 7.5 tonnes, when these outfits are in fact 'Articulated' vehicles which require an LGV (class C+E) for articulated vehicles.

There have been enough reports, far more extensively covered than I have done, laying out all these facts. My experiences over the last few weeks have taught me that there are a lot of inexperienced people out there trying to sell RVs to unsuspecting purchasers who may not have the appropriate licence to drive them.

I am not simply pontificating for the sake of it, but trying to make people aware of the facts that they seem to be ignorant of, and if they are involved in an accident, (Heaven Forbid), or simply checked by the police, they will be guilty of driving without a licence and driving without insurance, as your insurance policy will only give effective cover if you hold the appropriate licence to drive your vehicle.

Finally

Take your RV, with the correct licence, and get out on the road and enjoy yourselves - see you soon.

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Relating to European Language Requirements

The European Commission has just announced an agreement whereby English will be the only official language of all the Member States of the EU. The only other alternative is German, but this was not acceptable to the UK Government. However, in order to sanction this agreement, Her Majesty's Government conceded that English spelling had some room for improvement and has accepted a five year phased plan that will result in the introduction of **Euro English**.

In year one, the letter S will be replaced by the soft C. Certainly, this will make the Sivil Servants job a lot

easier. Additionally the hard C will be dropped in favour of the letter K. This should clear up confusion and computer keyboards can have one fewer letter.

During the second year, there will be growing public enthusiasm, when the troublesome PH will be replaced with the letter F. This will make words like fotograf 20% shorter.

In the third year, public acceptance of the new spelling can be expected to reach the stage where more complicated changes are possible, Government will encourage the removal of the double

letters, which is illogical and has always been a deterrent to accurate spelling.

Also, allow me to agree that the wasteful use of silent Es in the language is a disgrace and they should be removed.

By year 4 people will be receptive to steps such as replacing the TH with Z and replacing W with V.

During the fifth year, we will have a really sensible written style. There will be no more troubles or difficulties and everyone will be understanding each other.

Ze plan vil not fail, al ze pepilz of Europ vil kompli - reziztanz iz uzlez!!! Ze drem vil kum tru!!!