

Read Owner's Manual before Using the Trailer

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Trailers made to transport livestock, horses or other cargo are designed for a specific purpose and should not be used interchangeably without first reading the owner's manual. A common fact, however, is that if you don't want somebody to read something, put it in the owner's manual. The owner's manual is often lost in the shuffle of newness. The natural tendency inherent in all of us is to ask rather than read.

The target of the question is generally the person next to you who has a similar device or knows someone who does. The hours of detail and input from the company, displayed in an easy-to-read guide, are scrapped for a quick scenario based on the ability to speak, not factual data derived from company research.

At the Dickinson Research Extension Center, our cattle enterprise, like most in western North Dakota and the surrounding region, is extensive. Covering distance in a safe, timely manner is critical.

Recently, a complaint that one of our rigs was exceeding the speed limit caused me to pull out the owner's manual. A review of the safety guidelines, as published in the owner's manual for the center's Featherlite trailer, was presented to the staff. The complete document is available on the Featherlite Inc. Web site at www.fthr.com/trailers/enclosed-owners-manual.pdf.

The first safety tip deals with speed. According to the manual, the maximum speed the trailer can be safely towed, under ideal road conditions, is 60 miles per hour. North Dakota interstate and state highway speed limits are faster, so drivers need to slow down and not get caught in the flow of traffic. In addition to monitoring speed, towing a trailer significantly impacts the performance of the towing vehicle, including slower acceleration, increased stopping distance, increased turning radius and a longer distance needed to pass another vehicle.

An experienced driver needs to be aware of trailer movement at all times, especially when the road surface is slippery. The driver needs to anticipate swaying when

meeting or passing vehicles and maintaining a proper balance between utilizing brakes and using the towing vehicle's engine and transmission.

Overall safety is a function of the driver. The driver must select the proper vehicle, trailer and accessories, starting with the hitch. The trailer must be properly coupled to the hitch with an appropriately rated hitch and ball for the specific trailer being pulled. Check the ball, hitch and safety chains for wear before use. Safety chains need to be fastened to the frame of the tow vehicle and crossed underneath the hitch and coupler.

In some trailers, a breakaway brake system will engage if the trailer does disconnect. These systems must also be monitored for proper function. Tire and wheel maintenance needs to be completed before each tow. Tire pressure should be set as recommended for each brand of tire and checked in a cold state. Check the tire lug nuts to assure the proper torque.

Proper loading, load distribution and securing the load are critical. Never overload the trailer or position a load so as to overload a tire or axle. Keep the weight distribution even and monitor the loading to assure proper tongue weight for stable trailer handling.

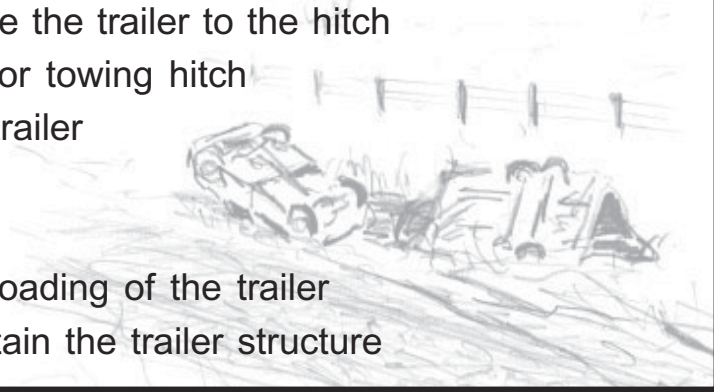
The owner's manual has all the precautions and advice needed to safely operate livestock and horse trailers. Anyone operating the vehicle and trailer needs to read the manual, study it and drive accordingly. Your future depends on it.

May you find all your USAIP ear tags.

Your comments are always welcome at www.BeefTalk.com. For more information, contact the North Dakota Beef Cattle Improvement Association, 1133 State Avenue, Dickinson, ND 58601 or go to www.CHAPS2000.com on the Internet. In correspondence about this column, refer to BT0219.

Causes for Loss of Livestock Trailer Control

- Driving too fast for conditions (trailer maximum speed 60 m.p.h.)
- Failure to properly couple the trailer to the hitch
- Inadequate tow vehicle or towing hitch
- Absence of braking on trailer
- Improper tire pressure
- Loose lug nuts
- Overloading or uneven loading of the trailer
- Failure to properly maintain the trailer structure



Source – Featherlite Inc., www.fthr.com