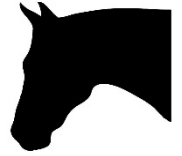


## Horse Trailer Maintenance 101



Learn to take care of your horse trailer for safety and longevity.

It is essential to get into a regular routine of trailer maintenance, just like maintaining your car. Your owner's manual will give the most specific schedule of tasks to do at certain intervals, but here's a general overview of maintenance items that will help keep your trailer in tiptop shape for use when you need it.

### **Before Leaving**

Connect everything properly. Make sure that the hitch ball on your tow vehicle is tight on the ball mount and that the ball is the proper size for the trailer's towing-coupler socket. The sizes are generally printed or stamped right on the ball and coupler. Be sure the coupler is completely closed and securely attached to the ball. Plug in the trailer's electric cord and hook up the breakaway tether to the tow vehicle, cross the trailer's safety chains and hook them to the tow vehicle and make sure the trailer's jack is fully retracted and wheel chocks are removed.

Check your tire pressure (including your spare) using a simple tire gauge. Underinflated tires run hot, which can cause them to fail. On newer trailers, you will usually find the manufacturer's recommended tire pressure printed on a small badge on the tongue, frame or low on the driver's side toward the front of the trailer. While you're at it, look for obvious dangers, such as nails or abnormalities on the treads and sidewalls. If a tire shows wear on the outer edge, it could be an indication that it is underinflated. On an overinflated tire, the center of the tread will be more worn because it's carrying the load there. Wear on only one tire could be a sign of a bent axle.

Check your lights. After your trailer is hooked up, have a friend help you check you're parking and brake lights and turn signals.

Do a walk-around. After loading your horse, and right before you leave, do a basic safety check. Make sure all doors, ramps, dividers and butt and chest bars are secure. Check that wires under the trailer are intact with no debris hanging on them.

### **After a Trip**

Clean the floor. Excess moisture in your trailer can lead to mold or rot, so each time you come home, muck out the trailer, strip the bedding and take out or roll back the mats and rinse both sides of them with plain water. Also wash the floor (aluminum floors included). Hosing down with plain water is usually fine, but some

manufacturers recommend soap and water or an acid wash. Prop or roll up the mats to dry. Visually inspect the floor for wear and tear.

Unplug the trailer's electric cord. Coil the cord and hang the plug upside down over the trailer tongue and off the ground to keep water out. Don't cover it; plastic bags and other coverings may hold moisture.

Lubricate the coupler. Use a lubricating spray or grease to ensure that the collar mechanism slides freely.

Store your trailer. Jack up the trailer so the nose sits a few degrees higher than the back and any moisture will run out. Use a chock to rest the jack on, and put one between the wheels, either behind the front tire or in front of the back tire to keep your trailer from rolling. Once the floor and mats are dry, shut all windows and vents.

Update your odometer log. A trailer doesn't have an odometer, so it's a good idea to keep track of the miles you put on it so you know when various services need to be performed according to the manufacturer. Normal use is considered 12,000 miles over 12 months.

### **Periodically**

Grease the hitch ball. If the ball is dry, it can be difficult to hitch and unhitch your trailer, and the ball and coupler socket may wear. Using a gloved finger, smear wheel-bearing grease on the ball or purchase a small squeeze tube of grease. (When not in use, store the ball mount in a shoebox or put a ball cover on it to avoid road-dirt buildup.)

Check the tightness of your wheel lugs (the nuts that hold the wheel on the axle). Your owner's manual will include the specific torque settings. Tighten gradually if you need to make adjustments.

Check your electric brakes. When applying the electric brakes manually, crank up the power and listen for the hum that indicates they are working properly.

Inspect the floor. Probe pressure-treated wood floors with the point of a knife to look for soft spots.

### **Once or Twice Yearly**

Bring your trailer in for a checkup. Regular maintenance can help you avoid more costly repairs in the future. A technician will inspect and adjust your brakes, test your breakaway battery and repack the wheel bearings with grease as well as check for any other problems. If you notice any change in the way your trailer rides, handles or stops, get it checked out immediately.

Wash and wax. You wouldn't think of leaving your car unwashed, but it's surprising how many people don't regularly clean their expensive trailers. Even just one or two washings a year, at the beginning and end of the season, can really make a difference in longevity five to eight years down the road.

Grease the door hinges. Regular lubrication will keep your ramp, side doors and drop-downs in working order.

Learn where the fuses in your tow vehicle are located. Your vehicle owner's manual will be able to tell you if your vehicle has separate fuses for the trailer circuits and, if so, where to find them. Learn how to tell if one is blown and how to replace it. Keep extra fuses in your glove compartment. Knowing the fuse locations and having spares on hand can make the difference between being safely on your way and being stranded after dark without lights.

### **Every 5-6 Years**

Replace your tires. Even if you don't put a lot of mileage on your trailer, ultraviolet rays and the elements take a toll on tires.