



## TRAILER MAINTENANCE

A trailer broken down on the side of the road can ruin a good fishing trip. It is even worse if an accident results from the breakdown. To help prevent breakdowns, it is important to service your trailer regularly. The following are typical items that should be considered in establishing a maintenance program.

**CORROSION:** The first defense against corrosion (rust) is to keep your trailer clean and dry. This is particularly important if the trailer is used in salt, brackish or polluted water. First, wash the trailer off, at the boat ramp if possible, or at the nearest carwash. Depending upon the roads you travel, it may also be necessary to wash it when you get home. Although salt is probably the major cause of corrosion encountered in Louisiana, mud on the trailer can create a galvanic cell and cause rust. To keep the trailer as dry as possible, store it in a well ventilated area. If you use a cover or tarpaulin, make sure air can circulate under it and that it will not sag and pool water.

Inspect your trailer before and after each use for scratches, rust or weak spots. Pay particular attention to joints and fasteners. Remove any rust immediately and apply a preventive coating such as a cold galvanizing compound. Weak spots should be repaired and rusted bolts replaced. Welds should receive preventative treatment since they also can form galvanic cells which can cause rapid corrosion. Welds should also be inspected for stress cracks.

**WHEELS:** Wheel problems—flats, blowouts, and burned-out bearings—are probably the major cause of trailer breakdowns. Tires should match the load requirement and be rated for your tow speed. Many off road tires cannot tolerate the heat generated under sustained high-speed operation. Tire pressure should be checked (cold) before each trip, and tires should be balanced. Tires should be the same size and type so that the trailer will track evenly, and worn or damaged tires should be replaced. Before each trip inspect the wheels (particularly around the bolt holes) for cracks or deformation and replace the wheel if you find either. Also check the lugs for tightness and be sure that they are not rusted (anti-seize can be used).

Routinely inspect and repack wheel bearings. Use hubs that allow grease to be added prior to each use of the trailer. Try to prevent water from entering the bearings by allowing them to cool down before immersing the trailer in water because rapid cooling in water causes a hot bearing to take up water. Bearings should be repacked before any period of prolonged storage to prevent moisture in the bearings from rusting them. When you repack the bearings use a marine grade grease, a new grease seal, and a new cotter pin. Remember to pack grease into the bearing before installing it and tighten the bearing to the correct torque. Most bearings need only to be snugged down by hand (spin the wheel while tightening). Back off the nut to insert the cotter pin. The wheel should spin freely but without play. On trips, stop and touch the grease cap and hub to make sure the bearing is not hot.

To service wheels and bearings, you should take along a spare wheel, a jack, lug wrench, and a flashlight or spotlight. A tire repair kit, screwdriver, pliers, wrenches, and a spare set of bearings and grease could also come in handy.

**LIGHTS:** Lights are a vital safety feature for your trailer and are also required by state law. Proper lighting starts at the connector, which should be made to match or adapt the cars system to the trailer, and should include a ground hookup. A ground connection through the trailer ball is not sufficient since the resulting poor ground may cause dim or flickering lights and also corrosion. The electrical wires should be sound and secured to the trailer. If the wires are cracked or frayed , replace them. Tie down loose wires, which can flap around, wear, and eventually fail. If possible, mount the lights so that they can be removed before launching. If the lights must be submerged during launching, unplug them from the vehicle, and allow them to cool first so that they won't break. Use silicone or rubber sealant to seal the lamps where the wires enter. Electrical grease will help protect the sockets and prevent their corrosion. Carry sufficient supplies and tools to make lighting repairs should it be necessary. You will need screwdrivers to fit the lenses, spare light bulbs for each trailer light, fuses, wire, a crimping tool, connectors and wire nuts.

**MISCELLANEOUS:** Inspect the trailer regularly. Notice if the trailer sags or sits unevenly. Check the springs for corrosion/breakage and the axle for straightness. Check the wood runners and carpet. When replacing wood runners, use pressure treated wood. Be sure the coupler is in good condition and that the ball is the proper size for the coupler. Safety chains should be of the proper length and size, and securely attached to the vehicle. For example, when using S-hooks and a horizontal attaching hole, put the S-hook through the bottom of the hole. The winch should be lubricated and the cable or rope checked. Check the license and inspection tag. Are they current? Establish a procedure and checklist to make sure that everything is connected properly and tied down as it should be.

**CORRECT RIG:** Finally, remember that even good maintenance cannot make an overloaded trailer or tow vehicle safe. Be sure that the trailer is capable of handling its load, that the load is balanced, and that the tow vehicle is capable of handling the weight of the loaded trailer.

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