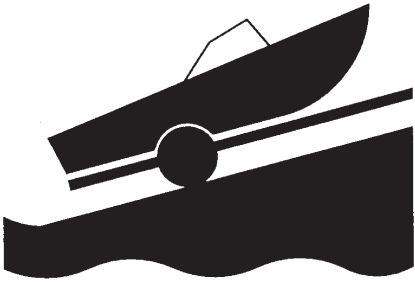


Boat Trailer Maintenance



A trailer that breaks down on 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. Here are typical items to consider in establishing a maintenance program.

Corrosion

The first defense against corrosion (rust) is to keep your trailer cleaned and dry. This action is particularly important if the trailer is used in salt, brackish or polluted water. First, wash off the trailer, at the boat ramp if possible, or at the nearest carwash. Depending on the roads you travel, it may also be necessary to wash the trailer 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 allow water to pool.

Before and after each use, inspect your trailer 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 preventive treatment since they also can form galvanic cells that 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. Check tire pressure (cold) before each trip, and balance tires. Tires should be the same size and type so the trailer will track evenly. Replace worn or damaged tires. Before each trip inspect the wheels (particularly around the bolt holes) for cracks or deformation, and replace the wheel if you find either problem. Check the lugs for tightness, and be sure they are not rusted (anti-seize can be used).

Routinely inspect and repack wheel bearings. Use hubs that allow grease to be added before each use of the trailer. Try to prevent water from entering the bearings by allowing them to cool before immersing the trailer in water – rapid cooling in water causes hot bearings to take up water.

Repack bearings before prolonged storage to prevent moisture in the bearings from rusting them. When you repack the bearings, use 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 to be snugged down only 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, 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 also could come in handy.

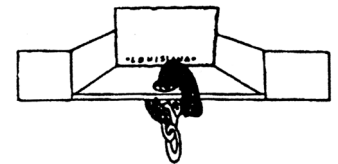
Lights

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 car's 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 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 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 necessary lighting repairs. 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 and 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 the ball is the proper size for coupler.

Safety chains should be 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 everything is connected properly and tied down as it should be.



Correct Rig

Finally, remember even good maintenance cannot make an overloaded trailer or tow vehicle safe. Be sure the trailer is capable of handling the weight of the loaded trailer.

Authors:

Lynn Hannaman, Ph.D., Professor
David Bankston Jr., Ph.D., Professor
Biological and Agricultural Engineering

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Louisiana State University Agricultural Center, William B. Richardson, Chancellor
Louisiana Agricultural Experiment Station, David J. Boethel, Vice Chancellor and Director
Louisiana Cooperative Extension Service, Paul D. Coreil, Vice Chancellor and Director
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