

## Making Your Ride Road Worthy

Motor-vehicle drivers are the loneliest drivers in the world. Other types of motor land transport are surrounded by a support system of radar, co-pilot or engineer, communication with a base, or a supporting crew.

The lone haulier can haul with nearly as much security by using systematic checks much as do captains and crews, whether engineer of a locomotive or ship's captain.

Because the driver is necessarily fully responsible for the condition of the vehicle and cargo, he also has to oversee the work of the mechanics. I have learned to my cost and near loss of life that the driver must know how the maintenance work is done and to check it when it is presented as complete. In one instance, an oil change was charged for when it was not done. In another instance, improper torque and follow-up caused the tow vehicle wheel to come off on a dual highway at high speed. In still another instance, the dealer's mechanic had stripped screws in attempting to remove the hubs for packing with grease and had not packed the hubs or replaced the screws. A subsequent check by a more thorough mechanic exposed the fraud.

One way to create a check list specific to your needs is to review your route. Some areas of the United States require tire chains when going through winter mountain passes. Reviewing your maintenance and instruction manuals for vulnerable areas highlights your rig's specifics. Add these areas to your own personalized check list for trailer, hitch, and tow vehicle.

Checks must be hands on. It is not enough to "eye-ball" that cotter pin which looks as though it were in place. Put your hand on it, test it, and make sure it, and any other fittings, are secure. Hands on has saved me from damaging my own equipment or endangering my horses or other road users. Check all pins, clips, rundown wheels, stabilizers, break-away brake cables, chains, ball and couplers at all fuel and rest stops.

Here is a partial check list, using Bureau of Motor Carrier Safety guidelines as a starter. Modify the list to suit your requirements. Many of the items are included in competitive safety and driving events for hauliers. Date and retain your copies for easier reference when checking the development of a problem. Start your checks at least a month before the hauling date to allow time to repair or replace defective items. Then check again before hitting the highway.

### Pre Trip Checklist

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Mileage: \_\_\_\_\_

#### Inside The Vehicle

Parking brake. Apply and check for excessive travel

#### Start engine and check:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ease of starting and running                            | <input type="checkbox"/> Oil pressure                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fuel level  | <input type="checkbox"/> Air pressure and vacuum gauges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Instrument panel  | <input type="checkbox"/> Horn                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Windshield wipers and washers                           | <input type="checkbox"/> Heater/Defroster               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mirrors. Adjustment and condition                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Steering wheel for play        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn on all lights including 4-ways and interior        |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire extinguisher. When was it last filled and checked? |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Door locks  | <input type="checkbox"/> Window controls                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Feel of brake and clutch                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Fuel tank and cap              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sidelights  |   |

#### Outside: Front

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headlights   | <input type="checkbox"/> Clearance lights     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plate lights   | <input type="checkbox"/> Turn signals         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4-way flashers   | <input type="checkbox"/> Check wheel lug nuts |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tires: Pressure, tread, foreign matter, cracks, bulges |   |

#### Left Side, Including trailer where appropriate

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reflectors   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wheel lugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doors, including locks                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Windows    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tires: Pressure, tread, foreign matter, cracks, bulges |                                     |

#### Rear

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tail lights  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stop lights      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Turn signal and 4-way flashers                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Clearance lights |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Plate lights   | <input type="checkbox"/> Reflectors       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wheel lugs   | <input type="checkbox"/> Doors            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tires: Pressure, tread, foreign matter, cracks, bulges |   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spare tire secure and pressure checked                 |   |

#### Right Side

- |   |                                     |
|---|-------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fuel tank and cap                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Sidelights |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reflectors   | <input type="checkbox"/> Wheel lugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tires: Pressure, tread, foreign matter, cracks, bulges |                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Doors  | <input type="checkbox"/> Windows    |

### Pre Trip Checklist (con't)

#### Hitch

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Rundown wheel in place                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Wires, hoses and plugs intact         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hitch seated on suitable ball                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Acceptable wear on safety chain links |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Safety chains crossed beneath hitch                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Broken welds                          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sway control secured, set for loaded trailer weight | <input type="checkbox"/> Breakaway brake secured               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Trailer hand brake appropriately set                |  |

#### Underside

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wiring not cracked or hanging | <input type="checkbox"/> Bolts, including U-bolts, tight and unworn |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Shocks for sag or softness    | <input type="checkbox"/> Gas tank leaks                             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Muffler hangers for tightness |   |

#### Under the hood

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hoses uncracked, no soft spots | <input type="checkbox"/> Battery posts clean and cables tight     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> All fluid levels topped up     | <input type="checkbox"/> Automatic transmission fluid level/color |

#### The trailer

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unbroken welds                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Solid floor                              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tailgate hinges even, oiled and no rust | <input type="checkbox"/> Butt bars, chains padded                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hitch rings unworn                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Chains wrapped to dampen noise           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No splinters, protruding screws, nails  | <input type="checkbox"/> Trailer ties with no weak spots          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Springs showing full camber             | <input type="checkbox"/> No signs of thrown grease around wheels  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> No loose equipment or ties in trailer   | <input type="checkbox"/> Loaded and hitched, the trailer is level |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fire extinguisher in place              | <input type="checkbox"/> Spare tire loaded and pressure checked   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Interior lights                         | <input type="checkbox"/> No exposed wiring                        |

#### Before hitting the highway -

- Check for unevenness in braking.

#### As you approach the rig and at every stop, or before leaving it unattended:

- Walk around the rig and look beneath for oil, brake fluid, fuel, and anti-freeze leaks.  
 See that all wires and wiring harness are intact.

This check might reveal if your rig has been tampered with or damaged in transit. Just such a check, including hands-on again to satisfy as to equipment security after an over-night stop, alerted me to a cleanly cut break-away brake cable. Road debris can also ricochet into exposed wiring and cables causing mechanical or electrical damage and failure.

The stretches and bends required for a detailed rig walk around, cargo inspection, and windshield washing at stops double as a way to work out stiffness and tiredness.

Few things are as challenging as hauling liveweight properly. Make each trip more successful than the last. Then enjoy the buoyant satisfaction of a job well done.

Submitted by Sharon Cregier