

The field keeps growing as the auto manufacturers take notice of the runaway popularity of towing four-down

CHRIS HEMER

f you're planning a long journey in your motorhome to parts unknown, more than likely you'd like to bring a car along for the ride. A towed, or dinghy, vehicle allows you to park your coach, lower the leveling jacks and roll out the awning, but still have the freedom to travel to local attractions (or maybe just the general store) without parking hassles. Indeed, there are many reasons why a second vehicle makes sense, which is why dinghy-towing continues to grow in popularity.

Fortunately, the automobile industry has recognized the needs of motorhomers and continues to produce towable vehicles, as well as specific guidelines for towing them in company brochures and owner's manuals. Every year, Motorhome compiles a list of these towable vehicles, and for 2001 that list is extensive and diverse. No longer does a dinghy vehicle have to be a boring subcompact; it can be anything from a stylish Chrysler PT Cruiser to a rugged Chevy Tahoe or Ford Escape—even some pickup trucks can be flat-towed.

As usual, this year's guide contains information only on vehicles that are approved by the manufacturers for towing, and we've left out any vehicles that have towing speed limits slower than 55 mph, or distance limits of less than 200 miles. You may have seen vehicles other than those listed in this guide being dinghy towed; many vehicles can, in fact, be towed on all fours if methods are used to prevent rotation of drivetrain components, or if trans-

mission lubrication pumps are employed. Suitable products are available at RV stores. When it doubt, consult the vehicle's owner's manual; it's the final word.

ACURA

This year, Acura enters the sport-utility market with the MDX, a car-based sport-utility vehicle (SUV) with VTM-4 (Variable Torque Management) all-wheel-drive, fully independent suspension and a 240-hp 3.5-liter VTEC V-6 engine with a five-speed automatic transmission. The MDX gets a



MDX

respectable 17 mpg city, 23 mpg highway, and can be dinghy towed at up to 65 mph for unlimited distance, provided the prescribed transmission-fluid recirculation procedure is followed after every eight hours of towing. The MDX is the only vehicle in Acura's line-up that is approved for dinghy towing.

DaimlerChrysler

The Dodge Stratus Coupe and Chrysler Sebring are all-new for 2001. Last year's base 2.0-liter engine swells to 2.4 liters and produces 142 hp in the Sebring, 147 hp in the Stratus. Both cars are available with an optional 3.0-liter V-6 that produces 200 hp, and both are available with



Stratus



Sebring



PT Cruiser

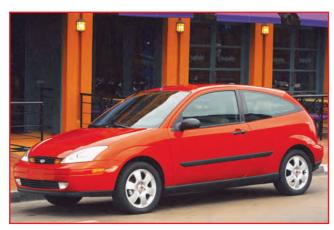
manual transmissions that allow these vehicles to be dinghy towed. The 2001 PT Cruiser, introduced mid-2000, is towable with the manual transmission, as is the popular Neon, which is available only as a four-door this year.

The Dodge Dakota and full-size Dodge Ram are towable only in four-wheel-drive (4WD) configuration, but can be towed with either manual or automatic transmissions. The midsize truck-based Dodge Durango is available only with an automatic transmission, but it is towable in this configuration with no speed or distance limits.

The Jeep lineup remains essentially unchanged. Grand Cherokee is offered with a new 545RFE automatic transmission with a second overdrive gear for increased highway fuel economy and reduced engine noise at highway speeds. All 4WD Jeeps can be dinghy towed with either an automatic or a manual transmission, making them good choices for adventurous motorhomers.

FORD

Ford's Focus is offered with the new AdvanceTrac vehicle dynamics system as an option on the ZTS sedan and the ZX3 hatchback, while the SE Wagon now has a standard 2.0-liter Zetec I-4 engine and an available manual transaxle. All Ford Focus models are towable when



Focus

equipped with a manual transaxle, and there are no speed or distance limits. The compact Escort ZX2 continues in 2001 with no significant changes, and is towable with a manual transmission.

The Ford Escape, the company's new compact SUV, is available in a number of configurations. However, the only one that is towable is the front-wheel-drive version, powered by the 2.0-liter Zetec I-4 engine and backed by a five-speed manual transmission (the same applies to Mazda's Tribute). In this model, the Escape pulls down 23 mpg city and 28 highway, and has a towing speed limit of 55 mph. There is no distance limit, however. The newly redesigned Ford Ranger pickup is towable in both two-wheel drive (2WD) and 4WD when equipped with a manual transmission, and there is no distance limit. Speed is limited to 55 mph.

GENERAL MOTORS

You might expect GM, the world's largest automobile manufacturer, to have a whole slew of towable vehicles, and it does—cars, trucks and SUVs.

2001 DINGHY TOW GUIDE

Chevy's popular Cavalier is offered in a two-door coupe, a Z24 coupe, a four-door sedan and an LS sedan. A 115-hp, 2.2-liter engine is standard in the coupe and sedan, while the 150-hp, 2.4-liter engine is available as an option in the LS and is standard in the Z24. The Cavalier is very tow-friendly, with a 65-mph speed limit and no distance

Blazer/Jimmy, Silverado/Sierra (1500 Series), Tahoe/Yukon and Suburban/Yukon XL are towable (automatic and manual, where applicable) with no speed or distance limits.

Pontiac's Grand Am is offered in four trim levels this year: SE coupe/sedan, SE1, GT and GT 1. Whether it is equipped with the 2.4-liter, Twin Cam 16V engine and five-



Cavalier

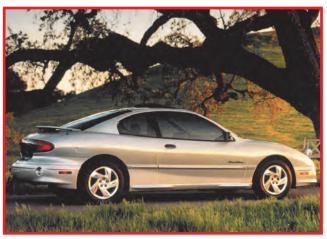
limits with either automatic or manual transmission.

The midsize Chevy Malibu receives a few interior/exterior changes, but other than that it is essentially unchanged. The 3100 V-6 and 4T40-E four-speed automatic transmission is the only drivetrain available, and it is towable at up to 65 mph with no distance limits. The subcompact Metro, having met with only lukewarm response in recent years, will be offered only for fleet service in 2001.

Chevy's compact sport ute, the Tracker, offers two new models this year: the sporty ZR2 and the higher-end LT. Both are powered by a 155-hp, 2.5-liter DOHC V-6 engine, while a 2.0-liter, 127-hp four-cylinder is offered on the base Tracker. The Tracker is towable with either its four-speed automatic or five-speed manual, is limited to 55 mph and must have the transfer-case oil recirculated every 200 miles. (The same is also true of the Vitara/Grand Vitara manufactured by Suzuki.) Four-wheel-drive versions of the



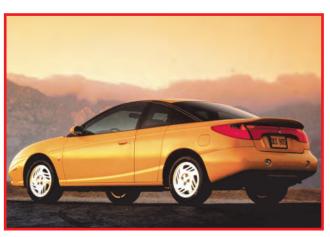
Grand Am



Sunfire



Tracker



Saturn

2001 DINGHY TOW GUIDE

Manufacturer	Base Curb Weight (lb)	Speed/Distance Limits	Manval Trans	Automatic Trans	EPA Mileage City/Hwy	Base Retai Price
		CHEVRO	OLET			
Cavalier Coupe	2,617	65/None	Yes	Yes	24/34	\$13,160
Cavalier Sedan	2,676	65/None	Yes	Yes	24/34	\$13,260
Malibu	3,051	65/None	Yes	Yes	20/30	\$17,020
Malibu LS	3,077	65/None	Yes	Yes	20/30	\$19,320
		CHRYSLER/	DODGE			
Neon 4DR	2,559	None	Yes	No	28/35	\$13,275*
PT Cruiser	3,123	None	Yes	No	20/26	\$16,500*
Sebring Coupe	3,100	None	Yes	No	21/27	\$20,495*
Stratus Coupe	3,012	None	Yes	No	23/30	\$18,395*
* Prices include destination						, ,,,,,
		For	D			
Escort ZX2	3,085	None	Yes	No	25/33	\$12,050
Focus	2,551	None	Yes	No	25/35	\$12,125
		Hyun	DAI			
Accent	2,255	Legal/None	Yes	No	28/37	\$8,999
Elantra	2,635	Legal/None	Yes	No	25/33	\$11,999
Tiburon	2,633	Legal/None	Yes	No	23/31	\$13,999
		Infin	ITY			
G20	2,923	60/500	Yes	No	24/31	\$21,395
		Lexu	IS			
ES 300	3,373	55/200	N/A	Yes	20/28	\$31,505
		MITSUE	BISHI			
Eclipse RS	2,822	None	Yes	No	23/31	\$17,987
Eclipse GS	2,910	None	Yes	No	23/31	\$18,797
Eclipse GT	3,053	None	Yes	No	20/28	\$20,947
Eclipse Spyder GS	3,042	None	Yes	No	22/30	\$23,407
Eclipse Spyder GT	3,241	None	Yes	No	20/27	\$25,407
Mirage	2,125	None	Yes	No	33/40	\$11,877



Alero

speed manual transmission or the optional 3400 V-6 and 4T45 automatic transaxle, this sporty compact is towable at up to 65 mph with no distance limits. The Grand Am's smaller sibling, the Sunfire, has the same speed/distance limits and is available with either a 115-hp, 2.2-liter four in the base model or a 150-hp, 2.4-liter Twin Cam four in the GT. Oldsmobile's Alero is now available with a five-speed manual transmission, offered as an option on the GX and GL. A four-speed automatic is standard, and both transmissions allow dinghy towing.

The darling of the dinghy-towing world, Saturn remains towable for 2001—and that goes for all models and transmissions. The biggest news from Saturn this year is the availability of optional "head curtain" air bags (designed to decrease the severity of head and neck injuries in side-impact collisions) on the L- and S-series sedans and wagons.

	Base Curb	Speed/Distance	Manual	Automatic	EPA Mileage	Base Retail
Manufacturer	Weight (lb)	Limits	Trans	Trans	City/Hwy	Price
		Niss	AN			
Altima XE	2,851	70/500	Yes	No	23/31	\$15,140
Maxima GXE	3,186	70/500	Yes	No	22/27	\$21,049
Sentra XE	2,548	70/500	Yes	No	27/35	\$11,649
		OLDSMO	ORII E			
Alero GX	3,050	65/None	Yes	Yes	21/30	\$16,425
	· ·	·				. ,
		Ронт				
Grand Am	3,066	65/None	Yes	Yes	21/29	\$16,715
Sunfire	2,606	65/None	Yes	Yes	24/34	\$14,695
		SATU	RN			
SC Series	2,384	65/None	Yes	Yes	Manual 28/40	\$12,535
					Auto 25/35	
SL Series	2,351	65/None	Yes	Yes	Manual 29/40 Auto 25/35	\$10,570
SW Series	2,461	65/None	Yes	Yes	Manual 27/38 Auto 25/35	\$14,290
LS Series	2,945	65/None	Yes	Yes	Manual 25/33 Auto 20/26	\$14,495
LW Series	3,083	65/None	Yes	Yes	Manual 24/32 Auto 20/26	\$18, 835
		Suba	RU			
Impreza L Sedan	2,735	None	Yes	No	23/29	\$15,995
Impreza L Wagon	2,835	None	Yes	No	23/29	\$16,395
Outback Sport	2,860	None	Yes	No	23/29	\$18,195
Legacy L	3,255	None	Yes	No	21/28	\$19,295
Legacy L Wagon	3,345	None	Yes	No	21/28	\$19,995
		Toyo	ΤΔ			
Camry	2,998	None	Yes	No	24/33	\$18,475
Corolla	2,405	None	Yes	No	32/41	\$12,793
Celica GT	2,460	None	Yes	No	28/33	\$16,985
Celica GT-S	2,500	None	Yes	Yes*	23/32	\$21,455
Echo 2DR	2,035	None	Yes	No	34/41	\$9,995
Echo 4DR	2,055	None	Yes	No	34/41	\$9,995

MITSUBISHI

Mitsubishi's popular Eclipse is now available in five flavors: hardtop RS, GS and GT and convertible Spyder GS and GT. All are towable with no speed or distance limits when equipped with a manual transmission. The more pedestrian Mirage is towable as well with the same limits as the Eclipse.

NISSAN

The Altima XE, the Maxima GXE and the sporty compact Sentra XE are towable with manual transmissions, and have a liberal towing speed of 70 mph and a distance limit of 500 miles before transmission fluid must be recirculated.

The redesigned Frontier pickup is towable in 4WD and 2WD versions with a manual transmission, and has the same distance limit as Nissan's passenger cars, but speed must be held to 60 mph. Nissan's long-standing Pathfinder and entrylevel SUV, the Xterra, are towable with manual transmissions and can be towed at 60 mph as well, but distance varies, depending on which engine the vehicle is equipped with.

SUBARU

Subaru may not be a household name, but the company has made quite a resurgence in recent years and offers a number of interesting vehicles, all of which are allwheel drive and towable with no speed or distance limits

2001 DINGHY TOW GUIDE

TOWABLE SPORT-UTILITY VEHICLES & PICKUPS

Manufacturer	Base Curb Weight (lb)	Speed/Distance Limits	Manual Trans	Automatic Trans	EPA Mileage City/Hwy	Base Retail Price
		Acui	RA			
MDX	4,328	65/None*	N/A	Yes	17/23	\$34,370
* Follow prescribed automati	ic transmission fl	uid recirculation proced	ure after every e	ight hours of tow	ving.	
		CHEVROLE	r/GMC			
Blazer/Jimmy2DR 4WD	3,848	None	Yes*	Yes*	15/18	\$22,170
Blazer/Jimmy 4DR 4WD	4,049	None	N/A	Yes*	16/20	\$26,770
Silverado/Sierra 4WD	4,413	None	Yes**	Yes**	15/20	\$18,945
(1500 Series)	· ·					
Tahoe/Yukon 4WD	5,113	None	N/A	Yes**	14/17	\$27,857
Suburban/Yukon XL 4WI	5,219	None	N/A	Yes**	14/16	\$28,837
Tracker 2DR 4WD	2,811	55/200***	Yes	Yes	25/27	\$16,335
Tracker 4DR 4WD	2,987	55/200***	Yes	Yes	22/25	\$16,955
*** After 200 miles, the trans	ster case on mus			minuing.		
		Dope				
Dakota 4WD	3,852	None	Yes	Yes	20/24	\$18,075
Durango 4WD	4,648	None	N/A	Yes	15/18	\$29,355
Ram 4WD	4,718	None	Yes	Yes	13/17	\$21,785
		Ford/Mi	RCURY			
Escape 2WD	2,991	55/None	Yes	No	23/28	\$17,645
Mountaineer 4WD	4,045	None	N/A	Yes*	16/20	\$29,655
Ranger	3,085	55/None	Yes	No	22/26	\$16,995
Ranger 4x4	3,411	55/None	Yes	No	17/20	\$23,940
* 4WD V-6 model with Contr	ol-Trac and deal	er-installed neutral tow	kit only.			
		Hon				
CR-V	3,126	Legal/None	Yes	Yes*	22/25	\$20,450
* Only with prescribed towin	g procedure.					
		Infin	ITY			

60/200

when equipped with a manual transmission. The Impreza L Sedan/Impreza L Wagon and Legacy L/Legacy L Wagon are reasonably priced family cars, while the Outback Sport and Outback Wagon feature heavy-duty raised independent suspension for better maneuverability on rough roads. The Forester L, meanwhile, combines SUV versatility with a carlike ride. Restyled for 2001, the Forester L is designed to handle rough terrain and questionable driving conditions.

4,074

TOYOTA

Toyota offers a broad spectrum of towable vehicles, and most of them do not have any speed or distance limits. The best-selling Camry is towable with a manual transmission and has no speed or distance limits. The same goes for the compact Corolla and the economical Echo. The recently redesigned Celica and the aggressive-looking



15/19

\$34,150

Yes

RAV4

No

QX4

TOWABLE SPORT-UTILITY VEHICLES & PICKUPS

	Base Curb	Speed/Distance	Manual	Automatic	EPA Mileage	Base Retail
Manufacturer	Weight (lb)	Limits	Trans	Trans	City/Hwy	Price
		JEEI	P			
Cherokee 2DR 4WD	3,297	None	Yes	Yes	17/22	\$21,465
Cherokee 4DR 4WD	3,355	None	Yes	Yes	17/22	\$22,500
Grand Cherokee 4WD	3,972	None	Yes	Yes	16/21	\$29,855
Wrangler 4WD	3,105	None	Yes	Yes	18/20	\$15,475
		KıA	<u> </u>			
Sportage 2WD	3,186	55/400*	Yes	No	20/27	\$15,295
Sportage 4WD	3,352	55/400*	Yes	No	20/22	\$16,795
*Stop every 400 miles, start	t engine and let ic	lle for a few minutes to	ensure that tran	smission is suffici	ently lubricated.	
		LAND R	OVER			
Discovery	4,576	None	Yes	Yes	13/17	\$34,150
Range Rover	4,960	None	Yes	Yes	12/15	\$59,000
		Lexu	JS			
RX 300 2WD	3,715	55/200	N/A	Yes	19/23	\$33,095
RX 300 4WD	3,924	55/200	N/A	Yes	18/22	\$35,655
		Mazi	DA			
B-Series Pickup 2WD	2,960	55/None	Yes	No	20/25	\$12,225
B-Series Pickup 4WD	3,380	55/None	Yes*	Yes*	17/20	\$18,250
Tribute DX 2WD	2,991	55/None	Yes	No	23/28	\$17,005
*With manual transfer case						
		Niss	AN			
Frontier 2WD	3,050	60/500	Yes	No	22/26	\$11,699
Frontier 4WD	3,903	60/500	Yes**	No	16/18	\$18,549
Pathfinder SE	3,940	60/200/500*	Yes**	No	17/19	\$27,649
Xterra XE	3,504	60/200/500*	Yes**	No	19/24	\$17,999
* V-6 engine, 200 mile limit		mile limit. Start engine t	o recirculate trai	nsmission fluids v	vhen this limit is r	eached.
** 4WD transfer case must	be lett in neutral.	SUBA	RU			
Forester L	3,140	None	Yes	No	21/28	\$20,295
Outback Wagon	3,425	None	Yes	No	21/28	\$22,895
		Suzu	KI			
Vitara 4WD	2,987	55/200	Yes**	Yes*	22/25	\$17,099
Grand Vitara	3,197	55/200	Yes**	Yes*	19/21	\$19,599

^{*} Stop towing vehicle every 200 miles. With the transfer case lever in neutral, start engine, shift into D (Drive) and rev engine for about one minute to circulate oil in the transfer case. Shift into park before next towing.

^{**} Stop towing vehicle every 200 miles. Leave manual transmission in second gear. With the transfer lever in neutral, start engine and rev for about one minute with the clutch engaged to circulate oil in the transfer case.

Тоуота							
RAV4 2WD	2,711	55/200*	Yes	Yes	25/31	\$16,215	
RAV4 4WD	2,877	55/200*	Yes	Yes	22/27	\$18,665	

^{*} After 200 miles, the engine must be started and allowed to idle for more than three minutes before driving or continuing to tow.

Celica GT-S are towable, and the GT-S can even be towed with an automatic transmission with some speed/distance limits. Some of the biggest news at Toyota this year is the introduction of the newly redesigned RAV4. The new RAV4 is longer, wider and taller than its predecessor, and is pow-

ered by an all-new 2.0-liter VVT-i engine that produces 21 more horsepower than last year's model. The RAV4 is offered in both 2WD and 4WD. It is towable with both the five-speed manual transmission and four-speed automatic with a speed limit of 55 mph and a distance limit of 200 miles.

Dinghy Versatility



Dollies and car trailers provide platforms for towing just about any vehicle behind a motorhome

■ JOEL DONALDSON

motorhome towing a dinghy vehicle is a common sight today. Many motorhomers rely on some form of auxiliary transportation for errands, sightseeing and shopping trips. For most, the transport of choice is an automobile or a sport-utility vehicle (SUV).

Since no vehicle comes ready-to-tow from the factory, some additional equipment is required. For many dinghy-vehicle users, this hardware takes the form of a tow bar with a matching mounting base. As evidence of the popularity of this approach, Motorhome published "The Dinghy Connection," in which almost 30 different models were covered, in the July 1997 issue. Motorhome also publishes an annual dinghy towing guide; see page 56 in this issue. It lists all vehicles that are towable on all four wheels without modifications.

However, there are many potential dinghy vehicles that aren't factory-approved for towing on all four wheels without drivetrain modifications. People who want to tow these vehicles must rely on alternative systems, driveshaft-disconnect devices—or choose to leave the vehicle unmodified and use a tow dolly or a car trailer.

If towing a dinghy on all fours is so popular, why would anyone want to use any other method, other than for manufacturer approval? Actually, there are several good reasons, including:

• *Compatibility*. Fitting a tow bar to some vehicles involves ingenuity and some risk if a model-specific baseplate built by a name-brand manufacturer is not available. Without such a setup, the vehicle may be permanently altered in the process, which can detract from its appearance and resale value. If your car is one of the rare models for which no special baseplate exists, the custom installation process can get downright expensive.

Since dollies or trailers accommodate a wide variety of vehicles, the owner does not have to make a hardware change when buying a new car or SUV. Furthermore, using a dolly with front-wheel-drive (FWD) vehicles avoids the need for drivetrain modifications (provided the vehicle is

towed in the recommended forward direction), and using a trailer allows the towing of just about any vehicle as long as the motorhome is capable of handling the additional weight. Thus, when the time comes to buy a new car, there's no new towing equipment to purchase and install all over again.

• Vehicle wear. With a tow dolly, only two of the vehicle's wheels are in contact with the road; on a trailer, there is no contact. This means that tire and suspension wear is reduced as opposed to towing four-down. Also, on FWD vehicles with the drive wheels on the dolly, no mileage is accumulated on the odometer. This eliminates the need to install a speedometer disconnect (which may be technically illegal in some states) on vehicles that don't have electronic speedometers, and can further enhance resale value.

• Vehicle damage. With a tow bar, there is a critical list of procedures that must be followed prior to towing the vehicle: steering column unlocked, parking brake off, fuses removed (depending on vehicle), transmission in neutral, and in some more complex setups, drivetrain modification hardware must be employed. Forgetting one of these items can cause major damage to the dinghy vehicle.

TOW DOLLIES



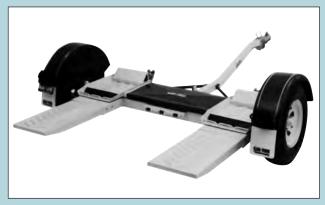
Dethmers Demco KarKaddy



Dethmers Demco Towit



Roadmaster Tow Dolly



Ultra-Fab KarTote KT200

The list of procedures is considerably shorter when using a tow dolly, and virtually nonexistent with a car trailer, although both examples still call for safe preparation. Also, the likelihood of causing serious damage by skipping a step is reduced. This is particularly true with FWD vehicles, where no damage results from leaving the car either in or out of gear, or from leaving the steering column either locked or unlocked. It is conceivable that you could still wear out a set of rear brake pads or rotors by accidentally leaving the parking brake on, but that's about the extent of the potential damage. Of course, using a car trailer rules out even that possibility.

■ TRAILERS: THE PROS

Although open car trailers are occasionally used by motorhomers, it is the enclosed models that have found increasing favor in recent years, especially among owners of high-end coaches. Many of these folks drive relatively expensive cars and want maximum protection, looks and versatility while on the road. Some key reasons for the popularity of the enclosed models include:

• Protection from road dirt and debris. With the

vehicle riding safely inside, there's little chance of it coming in contact with mud, dust, road tar, engine-oil spray or road salt. This makes washing the car after every trip a thing of the past. It also eliminates the need for stone guards, mudflaps or brushes on the back of the motorhome. In short, the vehicle arrives looking just as good as it did before the trip started.

- *Security.* All enclosed trailers are lockable, and most can be equipped with a security alarm. This helps protect the vehicle from theft or vandalism, especially during stopovers at shopping malls, truck stops or road-side rest areas. Furthermore, the ability to prevent potential criminals from seeing what kind of vehicle (if any) is inside the trailer may provide some additional deterrence.
- *Shelter*: An enclosed trailer also makes a handy place to park the vehicle during campsite stays. A mobile garage can not only help protect the vehicle against overnight crime, but also provides shelter against hail, tree sap and car-hating birds.
- Extra storage space. Many car trailers have plenty of space for carrying other items besides the car itself. Some models can be ordered with storage cabinets or even small closets. This makes it possible to bring along

CAR TRAILERS



Featherlite 4951



Trailex CT-1741 Aero Front Trailer



Trailer World Exiss All-Aluminum Tag-Along



Wells Cargo AutoWagon

tools, shop equipment or gear to support just about any hobby. Thus, the trailer becomes not only a vehicle transporter, but also a base of support for a wide variety of activities.

- Compatibility, revisited. Most upscale automobiles and SUVs are rear-wheel-drive. Many of these vehicles would require a driveshaft disconnect or lube pump if towed on a dolly. A trailer avoids alterations on the very same vehicle types with which it is most likely to be used.
- Customization. Some trailer manufacturers offer an extensive list of options, including custom paint schemes, diamond-plate interiors, work benches, overhead cabinets, sinks, windows, interior lighting, exterior storage compartments, awnings, triple axles, air conditioning, AC generators and even rooftop observation decks.

It's interesting to note that many car trailers are sold to either

motorsports enthusiasts or classiccar owners, a fact reflected in the features and options typically offered. The motorsports models tend to reflect the highly style-conscious attitude so pervasive in this sport, with flashy, diamond-plate interiors and an almost endless list of options being de rigueur. By contrast, trailers that are marketed to classic-car owners tend to be more subdued in appearance and less feature-laden.

• Brakes. Most enclosed trailers are equipped with electric brakes on all axles. This allows considerable braking force to be summoned at any time, at the mere slide of a lever or a nudge of the brake pedal. Also, most models include a breakaway feature that automatically applies the brakes in the event of trailer/motorhome separation. Most tow dollies can be fitted with surge or electric brakes, and although, in effect, there's just one axle of the two on the towed

vehicle providing braking help, it's better than none.

As is often the case with vehicles towed four-down or tow-dolly use, many coach owners install supplemental motorhome braking systems, such as exhaust brakes or retarders, to handle the extra weight.

DOLLIES: THE PROS

Tow dollies have been around for a long time and have achieved a state of considerable refinement. Most models are equipped with self-steering tires or swivel platforms, either of which permits the towed vehicle to follow the motorhome during turns. Some products are offered in several models to fit different vehicle sizes; others accommodate large size variations with a single model by using adjustable axles and ramps. Some key advantages of

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dollies include:

- Cost. A dolly costs considerably less than just about any enclosed trailer, and usually less than all but the most basic of open trailers. However, any direct cost comparisons should include all anticipated extras, such as rock guards, brakelight and turn-signal wiring and, if applicable, supplemental braking systems. With a dolly or an open trailer, you'll definitely be putting a lot more quarters in the car wash, and maybe occasionally spending a little cash on fixing paint chips and dings caused by road debris. Some manufacturers offer protective front shields to guard towed vehicles against such road hazards, and most work very well.
- Weight. The heavier weight of an enclosed trailer plus the dinghy vehicle limits the number of motorhomes that can safely tow them. The motorhome's rated towing capacity should be checked before choosing

this direction. The towing capacity is usually figured as the difference between the gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr) and the gross combination weight rating (gcwr), and it can vary from a low of about 5,000 pounds to a high of 10,000. Trailer Life's Towing Guide (available by calling 800-766-1674) lists gywr and gcwr figures for most motorhome chassis.

Even when the motorhome can handle the extra weight, acceleration and braking performance may suffer. Another related consideration is the amount of hitch weight and the capability of the motorhome's rear frame to handle it safely. For best handling characteristics, hitch weight should be at least 10 percent of the trailer's gross weight, which is more than the hitch receivers factory-fitted to most motorhomes are rated to handle. Higher-rated hitch receivers are available at RV supply stores. By comparison, most dollies exert relatively little

hitch weight.

- Road manners. An enclosed trailer's large side profile makes it more vulnerable to the effects of wind gusts. Also, most vehicles ride on a higher center of gravity inside a trailer than on a dolly, which can affect handling. However, one situation where trailers handle better is during maneuvers that involve backing up. Although dolly manufacturers recommend against backing their products while hitched to motorhomes, no such limitations exist for trailers. In the hands of an experienced driver, this advantage could get some trailer/motorhome combinations out of dead-end situations that would have most dolly owners reaching for the car keys.
- Fuel economy. An enclosed trailer's large frontal area might be regarded as a threat to fuel economy, although the location close to the back of the motorhome often pro-

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vides a "drafting" effect that may reduce this drag. Also, some enclosed trailers can be equipped with a wedged front end or a fiberglass nose cone that further reduces air drag. Thus, a trailer's higher weight may actually be the dominant factor on fuel economy at highway speeds.

• Storage. A dolly can fit in some campsites that are tight or prohibitive for a trailer and can usually be stored in an unused corner of the lot or partially hidden under the motorhome. In most cases, a dolly is also small enough to be stored at home without objections from the neighbors. Conversely, the sheer size of most trailers makes off-premises storage the only viable option for some homeowners. Not only is this inconvenient, but it may represent an additional ongoing expense. Also, since some campgrounds won't allow trailers to be parked for extended periods, temporary off-premises storage may occasionally be required while traveling.

■ How User-Friendly Is Each Option?

Although not quite as easy as using a tow bar, loading a dinghy onto a tow dolly is relatively straightforward. Most dollies are equipped with a latch that allows the wheel ramps to be dropped to a street-level vehicle-loading position. Typically, driving the vehicle up the ramps causes the ramps to automatically pivot into the latched towing position. Some dollies can also be ordered with a hand winch, providing an alternative method of moving the vehicle up the ramp. Once the vehicle is in the towing position, each front tire is cinched to the dolly with a heavy strap. Most dolly manufacturers recommend placing the vehicle in gear

SOURCES

Tow Dollies:

Dethmers Manufacturing Company

P.O. Box 189
Boyden, Iowa 51234
(800) 543-3626
Web site: www.demco-products.com
CIRCLE 211 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

Roadmaster Inc.

5602 N.E. Skyport Way Portland, Oregon 97218 (800) 669-9690 Web site: www.roadmstr.com CIRCLE 212 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

Ultra-Fab Products Inc.

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as further insurance against frontwheel movement while under way. Unloading the dinghy entails performing essentially the same process in reverse.

With car trailers, a set of ramps is usually temporarily set in place before driving the vehicle onto or into the trailer. Vehicle securing schemes vary, but typically rely on straps or chains attached between "hard points" on the trailer and the vehicle's frame or axles. Many vehicles are equipped with shipping tie-downs or recovery hooks that can be used as points of attachment.

Making a Choice

Which car-transport option is best for you probably depends a lot on your own personality. If you're the kind of person who is fastidious about car care, and if your motor-

SOURCES

Car Trailers: Featherlite Inc.

P.O. Box 320

Cresco, Iowa 52136 (800) 800-1230 Web site: www.featherlitemfg.com CIRCLE 214 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

Trailer World Inc.

800 Three Springs Road Bowling Green, Kentucky 42104 (888) 724-5377 Web site: www.trailerworld.com

Web site: www.trailerworld.com

Circle 215 on Reader Service Card.

home will safely handle it, a car trailer can be a great way of keeping that Lexus or Mercedes looking like new. On the other hand, if you're looking for a dinghy with an automatic transmission that is not designed

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Canfield, Ohio 44406
(800) 282-5042
Web site: www.trailex.com
CIRCLE 216 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

Wells Cargo Inc.

P.O. Box 728 Elkhart, Indiana 46515 (800) 348-7553 Web site: www.wellscargo.com CIRCLE 217 ON READER SERVICE CARD.

to be towed on all four wheels, then a dolly is a good option.

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