

SCOPE OF THIS LEAFLET:

The following notes summarise road vehicle law affecting those trailing boats or roof-racking dinghies, masts or other boat equipment.

No attempt is made to deal comprehensively with regulations applying to boats larger than those designed to be trailed and sailed.

The notes are not intended to provide sufficient guidance for anyone building a boat trailer.

Further reference may be made to:-

- The Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986 SI 1078 (amended) (C&U).
- The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 SI 1796 (amended) (RVLR).
- The Vehicles Crime (Registration of Registration Plate Suppliers) (England and Wales) Regulations 2002
- The Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001 (as amended by The Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2002)

DRIVING LICENSING REQUIREMENTS:

CAR LICENCES HELD BEFORE 1ST JAN 1997

Drivers who passed their test before 1/1/97 are entitled to drive a vehicle/trailer combination up to 8.25 tonnes.

CAR LICENCES OBTAINED SINCE 1ST JAN 1997

There is a vehicle/trailer combination weight limit as follows:

Category B Vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes

Category B vehicles may be coupled with:-

a trailer up to 750kg maximum gross weight – allowing a combined weight of up to 4.25 tonnes maximum gross weight; or

a trailer over 750kg maximum gross weight, provided that the maximum gross weight of the trailer does not exceed the unladen weight of the towing vehicle and the combination does not exceed 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight.

Category B + E – Vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes maximum gross weight towing trailers over 750kg maximum gross weight

Over the category B weight limits, the licence holder is required to take a further practical test to obtain a B + E licence. This involves practical towing training and an expense of approximately £500/700 depending upon capability, area etc. Approx. 15 hours tuition.

Age Limit

Cat B & Cat B + E - 17.

For further advice on this contact the DVLA to obtain a copy of Information Sheet INF30.

GENERAL DUTY TO MAKE LOADS AND PROJECTIONS SAFE:

All vehicles and trailers, and their parts and accessories, must at all times be kept in such condition that no possible danger is caused to any person. The same principle applies to the weight, distribution and adjustment of any load carried on a vehicle or trailer.

Even if an overhanging mast or protruding outboard motor does not infringe any of the detailed size limitations set out below, carrying or towing will nonetheless contravene the law if by doing so you cause a possible danger to other road users.

Fines can be imposed if this principle or any other regulations are breached. Anyone injured could make a civil claim against the person responsible. Trailers and their loads should therefore be carefully maintained, secured and protected. Loads on roof-racks should be secured and where necessary marked, protected and lit.

INSURANCE:

The towing vehicle and the boat/trailer should be separately insured. The vehicle should be insured for the purpose of towing.

Liability for damage caused by the boat / trailer combination when

- i. attached to the towing vehicle; or;
- ii. after it has become accidentally detached from it;

should be covered under the third party liability section of the vehicle's insurance policy.
N.B. Some insurers regard the fitting of a tow bar to a vehicle to be a modification that must be notified to them.

Damage caused to the boat/trailer should be covered under the boat's insurance policy.

When the boat/trailer has been deliberately detached from the towing vehicle, any liability for damage caused by the boat/trailer should be covered under the boat's insurance policy.

The exact cover is a matter of contract between insurer and policy holder. If in doubt as to whether you have the required cover, or what your cover includes, then check with your insurer.

LENGTH RESTRICTIONS:

The Trailer

A trailer (overall length of the towed unit) drawn by an ordinary car (therefore a motor vehicle not exceeding 3,500kg maximum gross weight, or 2,040kg in the case of a dual-purpose vehicle) must not be longer than 7m excluding the hitching device.

The combined length of a motor car and trailer generally must not exceed (excluding projecting parts) –

- in the case of a motor vehicle manufactured before 1st June 1998, 18 metres;
- in the case of a motor vehicle manufactured on or after 1st June 1998, 18.75m.

If towing with a goods vehicle having a maximum gross weight of more than 3,500kg and the trailer has at least four wheels, then the trailer may be up to 12 m in length.

However, if the trailer is constructed and normally used for carrying an 'indivisible load of exceptional length' such as a boat, then

- the overall length of the towing vehicle must not exceed 9.2m, and;
- the overall length of the combination of vehicle and trailer must not exceed 25.9m including any projection of the load; if it does, then the police must be warned in advance and an assistant must be carried.

Projection of Loads on Trailers and on Roof-Racks

All projections should be protected so as not to be capable of causing any danger. It is particularly important to protect the exposed blades of an outboard motor mounted on a boat's transom: there have been a number of prosecutions for failure to do so.

Special marker boards must be fixed in specific positions if the load projects to the front or rear by 2 metres or more. Depending on the overall dimensions, an assistant may be required for the purpose of warning the driver of any danger that could occur because of the vehicle or its load. It may also be necessary to inform the police of the route to be travelled.

If the rearward projection of the load exceeds 1m, it must be marked so as to be clearly visible, both to the rear and on both sides (e.g. using a bright red or orange plastic bag or rag). A rearward projection extending between 2m and 3.05m must be fitted with an end marker board. If it extends beyond 3.05m a rear marker board and two side marker boards are needed, the police must be told in advance and an assistant must be carried. Extra side marker boards are needed if the rearward projection exceeds 5m.

End marker boards should be triangular, with two sides of equal length. The triangle base and height must both be not less than 610mm and the board should be marked with alternate red and white stripes. Side marker boards should consist of similarly marked right angle triangular boards not less than 610mm in height and 1,520mm in length. Diagrams of such boards are given in the Regulations (Schedule 12 of C&U S.I 1986/1078 at p.166).

WIDTH RESTRICTIONS:

Trailer

A trailer drawn by a motor vehicle must not exceed 2.55m.

Projection of Loads on Trailers and on Roof-Racks

The projection of a load on a trailer or roof-rack may be up to 305mm on either side of the vehicle or trailer, provided that the overall width of the vehicle or trailer (including projections) does not exceed 2.9m.

If the load for towing is wider than 2.9m then the police must be informed in advance of the journey. If the load width exceeds 3.5m then the police must be informed and an assistant carried. The maximum permitted width for the vehicle/trailer and its load is 4.3m.

Special marker boards must be fixed in position if

- a load projects to one side or both sides of any vehicle by more than 305mm or;
- a vehicle and its load exceeds 2.9 metres in width.

HEIGHT RESTRICTIONS:

There is no legal maximum height for a boat trailer and its load, or for a load carried on a motor vehicle. However, the general rule requiring that loads be safely attached and distributed should be borne in mind.

The trailer manufacturing industry suggests a maximum height of 3m or 1.7 times the wheel track of the trailer to be good practice. Equipment should always be stored so as to keep the centre of gravity of the load as low as possible.

Vehicles with a travelling height in excess of 3m should have the maximum height of the vehicle (including any load) displayed in the vehicle.

WEIGHT RESTRICTIONS:

The maximum weights given below

- must be read in conjunction with the advice of driving licence entitlements;
- do not mean that these are safe weights to tow with every motor vehicle.

The laden weight of a trailer manufactured before 27th February 1977 which has a parking brake and brakes which automatically come into operation on the overrun of the trailer, must not exceed 3,560kg.

The laden weight of a trailer manufactured on or after 27th February 1977 which is fitted with brakes which automatically come into operation on the overrun of the trailer must not exceed 3,500kg.

Trailers in excess of 3,500kg laden weight must have fully powered brakes operated by the braking system of the towing vehicle.

Weights of Motor Vehicles and Trailers

The Regulations use the following weight definitions:

'axle weight'		the sum of weights transmitted to the road surface by all the wheels of that axle.
'gross weight'	(a)	in relation to a motor vehicle, the sum of the weights transmitted to the road surface by all the wheels of that vehicle.
	(b)	in relation to a trailer, the sum of the weights transmitted to the road surface by all the wheels of the trailer and of any weight of the trailer imposed on the drawing vehicle.
'maximum gross weight'	(a)	in the case of a vehicle or trailer equipped with a rating plate, the maximum gross weight shown on the plate.
	(b)	in any other case, the weight which the vehicle or trailer is designed or adapted not to exceed when travelling by road.
'kerbside weight'	(a)	in the case of a motor vehicle, its weight when it carries no person and no load other than loose tools and equipment with which it is normally equipped and a full supply of fuel in its tank.
	(b)	in the case of a trailer, its weight when carrying no person and is otherwise unladen.
'laden weight'		in relation to a trailer, the unladen (or kerbside) weight of the trailer plus the weight of any load it is carrying. Equivalent to 'gross weight'.

The relevant weights can be checked using a local weighbridge.

There are no prescribed maximum power/weight ratios for passenger cars and trailer combinations. The weight of a goods vehicle must not exceed 1,000kg for each 4.4kw of engine power. Boat owners should always bear in mind the overall requirement for the vehicle/trailer/load combination to be roadworthy.

A maximum permissible trailer weight may be quoted by the vehicle manufacturer. Alternatively, the vehicle manufacturer may provide a maximum gross train weight (i.e. the laden weight of the trailer plus the laden weight of the towing vehicle). If either of these weights is exceeded, it is not of itself an offence but it is possible that the Courts may take the view that, in the circumstances, it constitutes a general offence such as 'dangerous driving' and it may also have an impact on your insurance cover.

Weight Markings

Unbraked trailers are required to be marked, in a conspicuous place on the nearside, with the maximum gross weight.

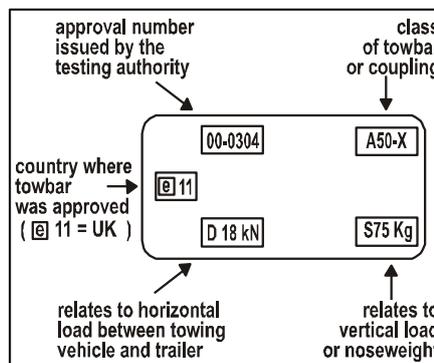
Heavy goods vehicle trailers exceeding 1,020kg unladen weight must carry a plate showing the details specified in Schedule 8 to the Construction and Use Regulations.

TRAILER FITTINGS:

The tow bar / vehicle coupling

With few exceptions, every mechanical coupling device fitted to a light passenger vehicle (i.e. 4-wheeled car equipped with an internal combustion engine, with no more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat and not being a goods vehicle) first used on or after 1st August 1998 must conform to an EU standard.

The coupling must be suitable for the vehicle combination and bear an indelible approval mark clearly legible even when it is attached to a vehicle. This mark or label must give certain information about its properties, including the manufacturer's name and part number.



Brakes and trailer coupling

An unbraked trailer may not be used on a road if:-

- the trailer's maximum gross weight exceeds 750kg; or
- the trailer's laden weight exceeds its maximum gross weight; or
- the laden weight of the trailer exceeds half the towing vehicle's kerbside weight.

Trailers up to 1,500kg laden weight manufactured after 1st January 1997 must be fitted with either:-

- a braking device designed to stop the trailer automatically in the event of separation of the main coupling or;
- a secondary coupling (e.g. a breakaway chain) which, in the event of separation of the main coupling, can prevent the drawbar from touching the ground and provide some residual steering action in the trailer.

Such a trailer must be marked with the year of manufacture on the nearside of the chassis or frame by a method such as hammering or stamping.

Trailers used before 1 April 1983 may be fitted with overrun or "inertia" brakes which apply automatically if the trailer overruns. Such brakes must be efficient but no specific performance level is set.

Trailers used from 1 April 1983 may also be fitted with overrun brakes but couplings must be damped and matched with the brake linkage. Brake design should have undergone a type approval test and braking efficiency must be at least 45%. The parking brake must be capable of holding the laden trailer on an 18% gradient. Trailers should also be fitted with an emergency device which will stop the trailer automatically if it becomes uncoupled. This does not apply to a single-axle trailer up to 1,500kg maximum gross weight if fitted with a chain or cable which will prevent the coupling head from touching the ground if it becomes uncoupled.

A trailer manufactured on or after 1st October 1982 which is fitted with brakes must be fitted with either a braking device designed to stop the trailer automatically in the event of separation or failure of the main coupling or a secondary coupling device, such as a breakaway chain.

Above 1,500kg laden weight the trailer must be fitted with a device to stop the trailer automatically in the event of separation of the main coupling and this is normally achieved by a breakaway cable attached to the parking brake mechanism – i.e. the trailer becomes detached from the towing vehicle.

Trailers in excess of 3,500kg laden weight must have fully powered brakes operated by the braking system of the towing vehicle.

Registration Marks

With some exceptions, the registration mark of the drawing vehicle must appear on a prescribed number plate on the back of the trailer when it is being towed.

The trailer registration number plate must be identical in shape, colour and characteristics to the plate of the towing vehicle.

Since 1st January 2003 in order to purchase a number plate it will be necessary to provide current verification of personal details and proof of entitlement to the registration mark quoted. Acceptable documents are:-

- **Proof of Identity**
 - Current photocard driving licence with paper driving licence; or
 - bank/building society statement or utility bill (current within the last six months);
and
 - passport; or
 - credit/debit card with photograph; or
 - foreign national identity card; or
 - travel pass with photocard

- **Proof of Entitlement**
 - Vehicle Registration document (V5); or
 - Certificate of entitlement to a mark (V750); or
 - Cherished Transfer Retention Certificate (V778); or
 - Vehicle Licence Renewal (V11); or
 - Authorisation Certificate (V948) from DVLA Local Office with official DVLA stamp; or
 - An extract from the schedule of vehicles supplied by a hire/leasing company; or

- A letter of authority from fleet operators on company headed note paper with contact details stating that the company holds the registration document (V5) and quoting either the document reference number or the vehicle identification number; or
- Certificate of Vehicle Registration/Temporary Export Certificate (V379)

Since 1st September 2001 the law has regularised the appearance of number plates in order to ensure that all plates conform to British Standard specification BS AU 145d. Thus new mandatory character sizes and a mandatory standard character font are now in place. Thus it is no longer permissible to make up one's own number plate using cardboard and a marker pen!

Suspension, Bearings and Mudguards

For those who trail long distances, it may be an advantage to have larger wheels on the trailer than the manufacturer's specification. Trailers bought from the manufacturers can be expected to comply with regulations. Those building their own trailer or renovating an old trailer should bear in mind that suspension units and mudguards must be fitted. Efficient suspension is important because the road impact on a small wheel is large, making the wheel more likely to collapse than a car wheel. It is not advisable to attempt the home building of a trailer without very carefully studying the Regulations.

If the road trailer is immersed during launching of the boat, there is considerable risk of subsequent corrosion both to bearing surfaces and those parts of the trailer framework which may retain water. Corrosion is likely to be particularly severe if there is immersion in salt water; this should be avoided whenever possible. Hosing down the trailer well after immersion is essential.

Tyres

Tyres must be pneumatic. Recut tyres must not be used on a trailer which is less than 1,020kg unladen weight. It is illegal to mix cross ply and radial tyres on the same axle of a trailer. It is essential that tyres are suitable for the use to which they are being put, have a sufficient depth of tread and be free from any defect which might in any way cause damage to the road surface, persons in the towing vehicle, or other persons using the road. Tyres must be correctly inflated; advice on correct inflation pressure should be obtained from the trailer manufacturer or tyre supplier. The tyres of trailers first used after 1987 must be designed and maintained to support the trailer's maximum axle weight at its maximum permitted speed of 60mph.

Minimum Tyre Tread

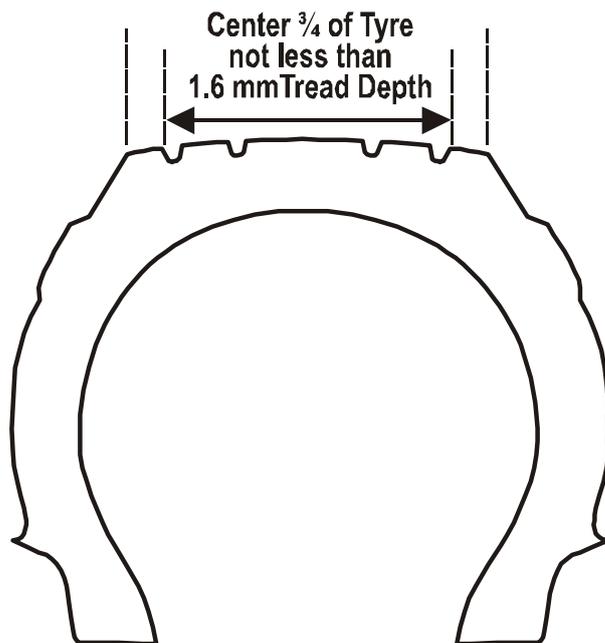
From 1 January 1992, the minimum legal tyre tread depth for car and trailer tyres is 1.6mm.

'The grooves of the tread pattern shall be a depth of at least 1.6mm throughout a continuous band comprising the central three quarter of the breadth of tread and round the entire circumference of the tyre.'

This standard applies to:-

- Cars meaning passenger vehicles which can carry up to 8 seated passengers in addition to the driver.
- Light goods vehicles (such as light vans) which have a maximum gross weight of up to 3,500kg.
- Light trailers which have a maximum gross weight of up to 3,500kg.

The maximum penalty for driving a vehicle with less than the legal minimum of tread depth is a fine of £1,000.



LIGHTING:

Summary of Lighting Requirements for Boat Trailers

Wider loads, or loads which overhang the carrying vehicle or trailer, may need to be fitted with extra lights and reflectors.

Boat trailers generally need not carry white front position lamps (Schedule 1, Table VI RVLR). However

- A trailer which projects sideways more than 400mm beyond the illuminated area of the towing vehicle's front position lamp on that side must fit a forward facing white lamp;
- A trailer whose load projects in a similar way must have a forward facing white lamp fitted to either the trailer or the load.

Regulation 21 of RVLR specifies in detail how these lamps should be fitted.

Lighting of Overhanging Loads

Additional lamps and reflectors must be fitted to loads which project (forward or rearward) more than 1m beyond the carrying vehicle or the trailer.

A load projecting rearwards more than 1m (whether on a motor vehicle or trailer) must be lit by an additional rear lamp and a red retro-reflector fitted not more than 1m from the rear of the load. In practice, the need for such a lamp is usually avoided when carrying an overhanging boat on a trailer by either fitting an extension to the trailer, so that the rear lighting board is positioned vertically below the rearmost part of the load, or by fitting the lighting board to the transom of the boat¹. If either of these methods of fitting is adopted, care should be taken that a boat's mast does not overhang the aft end of the boat by more than 1m.

A lighting board should not be positioned more than 1.5m from the ground (or 2.1m 'if the structure of the vehicle makes this impracticable'). Trailers made before 1 October 1985 are permitted to have their rear lamps up to 2.1m above the ground.

A load which is carried on a motor vehicle and which projects forward more than 1m from the front of the vehicle must be lit by an additional front facing white lamp and white retro-reflector fitted not more than 1m from the front end of the load.

¹ In order to obtain Vehicle Type Approval, new boat trailers need to meet the prescribed lighting requirements without a boat being carried and many manufacturers achieve this by fitting new boat trailers with lighting board extensions.

Type of Trailer	Source in RVLRL 1989 Regs of Detailed Information	Lights Required
ALL TRAILERS, irrespective of age or size	<u>Schedule 10 Part 1</u> <u>Schedule 12 Part 1</u> <u>Schedule 15</u> <u>Schedule 7 Part 1</u>	2 rear red position lamps. 2 rear stop lamps Rear white registration plate lamp(s) 2 rear red-reflectors (maximum of 400mm from the side of the trailer)
Trailers manufactured after 1st Sept 1965	Schedule 7 Part 1	2 rear amber direction indicators
Trailers manufactured after 1st April 1980	Schedule 11 Part 1	1 rear red fog lamp
Trailers manufactured after 1st October 1990	Schedule 21 Part 1	2 non-triangular white forward facing retro-reflectors
Trailers manufactured after 1st October 1990 <u>and</u> wider than 2.1m	Schedule 13 Part 1	2 forward facing white end-outline marker lamps 2 rearward facing red end-outline marker lamps (white and red lamps one side of trailer may be combined into a single light source).
Trailers longer than 5m (excluding hitching device and overhang)	Schedule 17 Part 1	At least 2 and more as required by length) amber side facing retro-reflectors on each side of trailer. Reflectors within 1m of rear may be red.
Trailers whose gross maximum weight exceeds 3,500kg (unless manufactured before 1st Aug. 1982 with an unladen weight of less than 1,020kg).	Schedule 19 Part 1	Rear marking board composed of red fluorescent and yellow retro-reflecting stripes. (Note: this requirement does not apply to a trailer carrying two or more boats.)

USING A BOAT TRAILER ON THE ROAD:

Speeds

The table below shows the maximum speeds at which a boat trailer may be towed, provided no lower limit is in force on a particular stretch of road.

Towing Vehicle Combination	Motorway	Dual Carriageway	Other Roads
Passenger car or motor caravan	60	60	50
Tow vehicle / trailer less than 7,500kg maximum gross weight	60	60	50
Tow Vehicle / trailer combination heavier than 7,500kg maximum gross weight	60	50	40

Towing on Motorways and Dual Carriageways

You may not tow in the outside lane of a three or four lane carriageway or motorway, or at any place where all three lanes are open for use by traffic proceeding in the same direction, except when passing another vehicle of such exceptional width that it can only be passed by entering such a lane.

On a two lane carriageway or motorway, both lanes may be used.

Detached Trailers

A trailer detached from the towing vehicle and left to stand on a road must have at least one wheel prevented from revolving, either by means of a brake, chain, chock or other efficient device. Failure to do so is an offence.

A detached trailer left to stand on the road between sunset and sunrise must be lit. This means that every,

- rear position lamp;
- rear registration plate lamp;
- side marker lamp;
- end out-line marker lamp

must be kept lit and visible. Boat trailers need not normally be fitted with the front position lamps when attached to the towing vehicle, but these lamps must be fitted and lit before the trailer is left detached on a road at night.

Obstruction

It is an offence for any vehicle or trailer to remain at rest on a road in a dangerous position or in such a way that it causes an obstruction.

The police and some local councils have authority, where obstruction is caused or where a motor vehicle or trailer is parked in contravention of certain parking orders, to remove either or both of them and to charge for the removal and subsequent storage.

GENERAL TIPS:

Do not hold up a long queue of traffic. If you are driving a large or slow-moving vehicle and the road is narrow or winding, or there is a lot of traffic coming towards you, pull in where you can do so safely so that other vehicles can overtake. This is advice given in the Highway Code. Never stop on narrow roads, bends, crests of hills or anywhere that could be dangerous to yourself and other road users.

A motor car must not generally tow more than one trailer at a time.

Allow for the full length of the vehicle and trailer when overtaking or pulling across a road.

Normally, passengers must not be carried in or on the trailer.

CAR TAX (VEHICLE LICENSING) RULES:

Since 1 January 2004 the registered keeper of a vehicle (the person named on DVLA's record) remains responsible for taxing a vehicle (or making a SORN declaration) until that liability is formally transferred to a new keeper. To avoid liability for taxing it, the keeper needs to inform DVLA when the vehicle is sold, transferred, scrapped or exported. Once DVLA has been notified about a sale/transfer the DVLA will issue an acknowledgement letter, which should be kept as proof that the vehicle record has been changed.

The rules mean that keepers who fail to re-license their vehicle (or declare SORN) will incur an automatic penalty of £80 (reduced to £40 if paid within 28 days). Determined offenders will be faced with prosecution and could be fined a minimum £1,000.

DVLA will carry out a computer check each month to identify those vehicles without a valid tax disc. Although the new rules mean that it is no longer necessary for the vehicle to be seen on a public road before a penalty is issued current on-road enforcement will still continue.

For detailed information on the new rules please contact the DVLA.

We are advised by the AA that when trailing overseas with a trailer one should ensure that the trailer bears a chassis number. If your trailer does not have a chassis number the AA are able to provide a Department for Transport Trailer Plate that contains an identification number.

DOCUMENTATION FOR TRAILING ABROAD:

- Passport (compulsory)
- International Certificate of Competence
- Boat Registration Document
- Bill of Sale
- VAT documentation
- Personal travel insurance (recommended) or European Health Insurance Card for health cover while travelling in the EU
- Vehicle/trailer insurance and insurance green card (obtain from your insurers)
- Boat insurance (compulsory in some EU countries and recommended in any event)
- Vehicle breakdown and recovery insurance (recommended)
- Vehicle registration document (compulsory)
- International driving licence (compulsory outside European Union)

Trailer Registration

From 28 March 2019 all trailers over 3,500kg and commercial trailers over 750kg must be registered before being towed through countries that have ratified the 1968 Vienna Convention on Road Traffic. Further information on the countries registration is required for and how to register a trailer is available [on the Gov.uk website](#).

Where trailer registration is required, trailers will need to:

- display their own registration plate (separate from the vehicle towing them)
- be able to show the trailer registration certificate to a foreign authority on request

For more information visit the boating abroad section of RYA website.

For more information kindly contact the RYA Legal Team on 023 8060 4223 or legal@rya.org.uk

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