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Requirements for Trailers

Statement

Requirements regarding trailers used on the road are given in the *Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986*, as amended (C&U) and the *Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989*, as amended (RVLR). The following is a summary of the main requirements.

Every effort has been made to ensure that it is factually correct but recipients should check with the producers of this document if they are unsure about the validity of a particular regulation after the date of publication or if they have reason to believe any part is not correct or is now out of date.

1 Weight

In the case of light trailers, that are less than 3500kg in maximum laden weight, there is not any specified relationship in UK law between the weight of the towing vehicle and the weight of the trailer.

For M1 category vehicles (motor vehicles used for the carriage of passengers and comprising not more than eight seats in addition to the driver's seat) the maximum permissible trailer weight may be quoted by the vehicle manufacturer. Alternatively, the vehicle manufacturer may provide a maximum gross train weight (the laden weight of the trailer plus the laden weight of the towing vehicle). If either of these weights are exceeded it is possible that the Courts or Insurance Companies may take the view that this constitutes a danger.

The maximum laden weight of a trailer which may be towed by an M1 or a light goods vehicle depends on

- (a) the stated gross train weight of the towing vehicle (GTW) and/or
- (b) the vehicle manufacturer's recommended maximum permissible trailer weight.

Neither the maximum permissible trailer weight nor the maximum gross train weight (the laden weight of the trailer plus the laden weight of the towing vehicle) should be exceeded.

It is possible that the stated gross train weight is less than the sum of the stated maximum permissible laden weight of the towing vehicle and the stated maximum permissible laden trailer weight. In this case the towing vehicle and the trailer must be loaded such that each does not exceed its individual maximum limit and the sum of both does not exceed the maximum gross train weight.

It is not a requirement to display a notice of the unladen weight of the trailer or the towing vehicle, unless the towing vehicle is either a motor tractor or a locomotive, as defined in the C&U.

2 Dimensions

If the towing vehicle has a permissible gross weight in excess of 3.5 tonnes the maximum width and length of the trailer are 2.55 metres and 12 metres respectively. If however the gross weight of the towing vehicle is 3.5 tonnes or less, then the maximum permissible width and length for a drawbar trailer are 2.55 metres and 7 metres respectively. In both cases, the overall length of the towing vehicle and trailer must not exceed either 18m or 18.75m depending on the type of towing vehicle. If the vehicle combination (not including buses) is of the articulated category the maximum permissible width and length of the semi-trailer are 2.55 metres and 12.2 metres respectively. The overall length of the towing vehicle and trailer must not exceed 15.5m¹.

The C&U definition of the overall length of a trailer makes it clear that the coupling device and draw-bar are not included in the length dimension. In the case of a caravan, where a protective box is mounted on to the front (for example to hold gas storage tanks) and is supported on the draw-bar, this box is included in the overall length.

These requirements also apply to visiting vehicles. Under Regulation 4(4) Item 2 of C&U, we permit a vehicle to be brought into Great Britain by a person resident abroad, provided that the vehicle complies in every respect with the requirements relating to motor vehicles or trailers contained in:

- (a) article 21 and paragraph (1) of article 22 of the Convention on Road Traffic concluded at Geneva on September 19, 1949 and Part I, Part II (so far as it relates to direction indicators and stoplamps) and Part III of Annex 6 to that Convention; or
- (b) paragraphs I, III and VIII of article 3 of the International Convention relative to Motor Traffic concluded at Paris on April 24, 1926.

Therefore we provide visiting vehicles an exemption from the construction, equipment and maintenance of vehicle requirements specified in Part II of C&U but not from the requirements for Regulations 7, 8, and 10, which relate to length, width and height respectively.

There is significant harmonisation of regulation within the European Union and freedom of movement across borders. European Council Directive 96/53/EC, Annex I, states the maximum authorised dimensions for certain road vehicles circulating within the Community. However Annex I relates to large passenger carrying vehicles, large goods vehicles and trailers with a weight of over 3500 kg. There are no specific requirements for light vehicles.

Article 3(2) permits Member States to require vehicles, not covered by Annex I, put into circulation in their own territory, to be in conformity with their own national requirements.

¹ 16.5metres if king pin to rear of trailer not over 12 metres and no part of trailer outside 2.04 metre radius in front of kingpin.

The UK is permitted to refuse to admit vehicles into the UK if the dimensions exceed limits fixed by the domestic legislation.

3 Brakes

Braking requirements are prescribed in Regulations 15 and 16 of C&U:

- A trailer with a maximum design laden weight of more than 750 kg must be braked
- An inertia (overrun) type braking system may be used up to a maximum permissible laden weight of 3500kg².
- It is not permitted to use an unbraked trailer, the laden weight of which exceeds 50% of the kerbside weight of the towing vehicle.
- The braking system must be fitted with a device to stop the trailer automatically in the event of separation of the main coupling. This is normally achieved by a breakaway cable attached to the parking brake mechanism which applies the brakes when the trailer becomes detached from the towing vehicle. However, for trailers up to 1500kg laden weight, it is permitted to use a secondary coupling (chain, wire rope, etc) which in the event of separation of the main coupling, will retain the trailer attached to the towing vehicle, prevent the nose of the trailer from touching the ground and provide some residual steering of the trailer.
- An inertia braking system must allow the trailer to be reversed with the towing vehicle without imposing a sustained drag force exceeding 8% of the technically permissible maximum mass of the trailer. Devices used for this purpose must act automatically and disengage automatically when the trailer moves forward.

4 Lights

The requirements for trailer lighting can be found in The Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations 1989 as amended (SI No.1796). A copy can be obtained from The Stationery Office, or see Section 7 below.

5 Suspension and Wings

Most trailers will need to be equipped with suitable suspension between each wheel and the frame of the vehicle as required by C&U Regulation 22. They will also require wings or other similar fittings to catch mud, water, etc thrown up by the rotation of its wheels as required by C&U Regulation 63. .

6 Coupling devices (Towbars)

Any coupling device fitted to a passenger carrying vehicle with up to eight seats plus the driver that:

- a) has European Whole Vehicle Type Approval (ECWVTA) and

² In the case of a semitrailer or centre-axle trailer, the maximum mass to be considered for classifying the trailer corresponds to the static vertical load transmitted to the ground by the axle or axles of the semitrailer or centre-axle trailer when coupled to the towing vehicle and carrying its maximum load.

- b) that the manufacturer has authorised to tow a trailer and
- c) is first registered on or after 1 August 1998

must be type approved in accordance with EU Directive 94/20/EC. (Regulation 86B of C&U)

Modification to the coupling in any way, for example, by the addition of other devices that alter the position of the centre of a coupling ball, will render the approval invalid unless the coupling device manufacturer has taken this into account during approval of the device. You will need to consult the manufacturer for advice.

A vehicle that has ECWVTA will have a Vehicle Identification Number plate (VIN plate) bearing the vehicle manufacturer's name, chassis number and an approval number including the letter "e" in a small rectangle.

If the manufacturer has not authorised the towing of a trailer by declaration during the type approval process, it is not permitted to fit a coupling device or tow a trailer.

7 Legislation

The Regulations referred to above may be obtained through The Stationery Office (TSO) under the references, SI 1986 No.1078 for the *Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations* and SI 1989 No. 1796 for the *Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations*. However, there have been many amendments to these base Regulations and it is important to obtain all of these in order to be aware of the current situation.

As an alternative, you may find it easier to visit a good, city based, reference library where a publication such as *The Encyclopaedia of Road Traffic Law and Practice*, published by Sweet and Maxwell, may be available. This publication tracks the amendments to legislation and presents them in a consolidated and up-dated form. One of the volumes will contain both the Construction and Use and Lighting Regulations.

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Website: www.tsoshop.co.uk

The RVLRL amendments together with amendments to C&U from 1988 can be found as Statutory Instruments on the following web site: www.opsi.gov.uk/legislation

European Union legislation can be found on the European Union Law website at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/en/index.htm>.

8 Other considerations

The above information relates to basic construction requirements and some aspects of the use of trailers. In addition it is recommended that you check whether you have the appropriate Driving Licence entitlement and whether the vehicle or combination of vehicles requires a tachograph to record driver's hours. The latter will apply to most vehicles and combinations of vehicles above 3500kg gross weight, where used for commercial purposes.

For Driving Licence enquiries contact:

DVLA Customer Enquiries, Telephone 0300 790 6801

Further details are available at: www.direct.gov.uk

For Tachograph requirement enquiries contact:

Vehicle and Operator Services Agency, Telephone: 0300 123 9000

Further details are available at: <http://www.dft.gov.uk/vosa/>

Further information

If you require any further information regarding the content of this fact sheet, please contact the DfT at the address below:

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NOTE: The information in this document is a summary of the Department's understanding of what the law requires. However, ultimately the interpretation of the law is a matter for the courts based on individual facts of any particular case. You are therefore advised to consult the relevant legislation and, if necessary, seek independent advice.