

# TRAILER BUYING GUIDE

This guide provides practical advice and highlights key facts to help you buy or hire a farm trailer that is safe, legal and appropriate for the task



## BASIC FACTS

- All agricultural vehicles, including trailers must comply with legislation such as Construction and Use Regulations whenever they are driven on the road.
- The legal speed limit for any tractor with an unsprung rear axle is 40km/h (approx. 25 mph) even if fitted with a gearbox capable of higher speeds.
- The maximum weight of a laden tractor and trailer on the road is 31t and the maximum laden weight of a conventional unbalanced trailer in this combination is 18.29t, even if the manufacturer's plates state that they can carry more.
- The braking systems for your trailer must be appropriate for the weight and speed of travel.

## What do you need the trailer to do?

You should consider:

- frequency of use;
- appropriate size;
- amount of road work;
- compatibility with tractors and other towing equipment.

## Brake comparison

The picture on the right shows a standard agricultural foundation brake next to a standard commercial foundation brake.

The difference in surface area between the agricultural spec brake on the right and the commercial spec brake on the left is clear.



More information on tractor braking is available from <https://aea.uk.com/look-behind-you/>



## Trailer brakes

It is important that trailer brakes are appropriate for the speed you intend to travel. Incorrect trailer brakes can result in premature tractor brake failure due to overwork. The table below provides a good specification for each type of brake system.

	STANDARD AG SPEC	COMMERCIAL SPEC
<b>Summary</b>	This specification should only be used for travel up to 40 km/h	This specification should be used if travel will exceed 40 km/h
<b>Braking system</b>	Single line hydraulic	Dual line fail-safe (air or hydraulic) with ABS
<b>Wheels</b>	6-8 stud hubs (but can be 10)	10 stud hubs
<b>Foundation brake size (diameter and width)</b>	400mm x 80mm	420mm x 180mm
<b>Cam type</b>	Flat cam	S-cam
<b>Brake ram size</b>	20-25mm hydraulic ram	T20-T24 air actuators or 35mm hydraulic rams
<b>Hydraulic hose size</b>	¼ inch standard	⅜ – ½ inch
<b>Brake arm adjuster</b>	Screw/automatic	Screw/automatic
<b>Min. brake efficiency</b>	25%	45%
<b>Other considerations</b>		Load sensing to avoid wheel lock up when empty

**BEFORE YOU BUY OR HIRE A TRAILER, ASK FOR A BRAKE PERFORMANCE CERTIFICATE TO PROVE THE TRAILER HAS WELL-FUNCTIONING BRAKES.**

## Tyres and wheels

- Must be the correct speed rating and condition for the application they are being put to.
- Your dealer should be able to supply you with advice on the correct tyre specification and pressures.
- Steering rear axles will reduce tyre wear and improve turning ability, especially on tri-axle trailers.
- Sprung/suspended trailer axles will give a smoother ride.
- Wheel nut security indicators can easily show any wheel nuts that are beginning to loosen.

## Hitch

- Check your tractor's manual to find the maximum vertical load capacity of the pickup hitch.
- The standard pickup hitch hook design can result in wear to both the hook of the tractor and towing eye of the trailer which can result in trailer disconnection if not maintained and replaced.
- Switching to ball and spoon hitches can reduce the play and wear between hitch and eye and eliminate the shunting effect you can get with standard hook designs.
- Swivelling rather than fixed trailer towing eyes can help avoid tractor turnover in the event of an accident.

## Lighting

- Make yourself as visible as possible to other road users.
- Using secondary rear lights higher on the rear of the trailer can better warn following traffic of your manoeuvres.
- Use secondary flashing beacons (especially on high trailers) so that a warning beacon is visible from all angles.

## Load security

- Ensure the trailer has sufficient hooking for straps to secure the load.
- If you need to sheet loads regularly, make sure the sheeting system is robust and easy to use, ideally without you having to stand on the trailer to sheet the load.
- Good inspection ladders make checking loads safer and easier.

## Other considerations

- Trailer ABS requires a permanent electrical feed to work correctly from a dedicated ABS socket on the tractor.
- Hydraulic tailgates will speed up your operation and improve safety by reducing the number of times you need to leave the cab.
- Reversing cameras can aid visibility in the yard, particularly for large trailers and are inexpensive to install.
- Your dealer should be able to give you good advice on all of these topics to ensure you get the correct equipment for your needs and are shown how to maintain it. If they can't – shop around!



## Number plates

All agricultural trailers must display a registration plate. The plate on a trailer does not need to match the plate on the towing vehicle. However, if the trailer plate is different to the one on the towing vehicle it must be the plate of some other agricultural machine kept by the keeper of the towing vehicle. Hired in trailers must display a plate that relates back to the owner of the towing vehicle.

This advice has been prepared by NFU and BAGMA, together representing farmers and growers in England and Wales and agricultural dealers in the UK.

Visit <https://www.nfuonline.com/cross-sector/farm-business/health-safety-and-wellbeing/> for the latest news, guidance and information on health, safety and wellbeing for those working on the farm. We have a range of useful leaflets on many areas including:

- slips and trips;
- working at height;
- trailers;
- farm vehicle health check;
- farm transport;
- farm machinery;
- electricity; and
- children on farm.

Contact **NFU CallFirst**

**0370 845 8458** for legal advice on buying equipment

Visit **[www.bagma.com](http://www.bagma.com)** to find a BAGMA member  
in your area.



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