

Trailer and tire tips for carefree traveling

by: Captain Lance Valentine

As I was headed up to the lake to do a charter last Saturday morning I passed seven (7!) boats on the side of the road with flat trailer tires. Now, flats happen to everyone, no matter how careful you are, but these boats had been left on the side of the road overnight. By not being prepared the owners made a simple inconvenience into perhaps a weekend or vacation ruining problem. Here are a few tips regarding trailer tires to help you prevent and be ready for a trailer tire issue.

- 1) Buy the right trailer---When I was selling boats, I always encouraged my customers to buy a bigger trailer or at least bigger tires. Most boat packages come with the minimum trailer for the boat it holds. Ask your dealer about upgrading to a larger trailer or tires that will carry a heavy load. Think about this. There are 8760 hours in a year. If you fish 8 hours a day for 100 days a year you have fished 800 hours which means your boat is still on the trailer for almost 8000 hour a year!!! Don't skimp on your trailer. A fully rigged fishing boat weighs a LOT more than the boat by itself. Be sure your trailer and tires can handle the weight of your gear.
- 2) Don't overload the trailer---I see it every weekend...boats on trailers loaded with furniture, bikes, lumber etc. Your boat trailer is NOT designed for the extra weight. Carrying more than the weight limit for your trailer and tires is unsafe and asking for a problem.
- 3) Carry a spare---only one of the boats I passed that morning had a spare tire, which is unthinkable to me. For the past 15 seasons I have been driving a boat with a dual axle trailer and have always carried TWO spares. My thinking being that if I run over something to ruin one tire, it probably ruined both! Check your spare often and be sure it is inflated properly.
- 4) Check the bearings---launching and loaded play havoc on trailer bearings. Using a commercial bearing saver on your hub is a great idea, but they still need to be checked before and after every trip, and should be checked by a professional every season. After trailering for any distance, bearings may be warm but should not be hot to the touch.
- 5) Have the proper jack and lug wrench---head outside when you have a few free minutes. Now try to jack your boat up with your car jack and check the lug wrench in the car on the trailer lugs...betting you might have trouble changing a trailer tire with these tools! I carry a 6 ton bottle jack for my trailer and have a ½" ratchet with extension and socket for my trailer lugs. They work for my trailer and are a lot easier to get to than digging out the car jack.
- 6) Inflate properly---according to a friend in the tire business, under inflated trailer tires are the number ONE cause of failure, flats and blow outs. Always check the pressure in all the tires before a trip including the spare(s).
- 7) Keep them moving---another tip from my friend, if your trailer sits in the same spot for more than 3 weeks, take it for a short drive or use jack stands to get the tires off the ground. Sitting in one place for an extended period, especially if your tires are at maximum load, will damage trailer tires and sometimes cause a "flat" spot on the tire. Simply taking the trailer for a quick spin than re-parking it will help. Tires off the ground for long term storage will eliminate a lot of issues.
- 8) Watch your speed---most trailer tires are rated for 65 mph or slower speeds. If you don't need to drive faster with your trailer, be safe and slow down a little.
- 9) They don't last forever---even when not used often, trailer tires do not have the same life expectancy as regular car tires. At about 5 seasons, even if you only trailer a few times a year, it may be time to replace the tires. Treads can "peel" off; rotting from sitting and overloading all cause trailer tires to have a shorter life than regular tires do.
- 10) Have the right insurance! Be sure your boat insurance has 24-hour roadside assistance for your trailer and your contents are covered properly just in case you need to leave your trailer to get help. Sonar, trolling motors and other items "attached" to the boat are covered differently than fishing tackle and gear are. Check your insurance and be sure you are covered properly for a breakdown!



I hope these tips help you have a safe and problem free fishing season!