

TOWBAR TYPES & CAPACITIES

Towbars are broadly divided into 2 categories encompassing 4 classes.

CLASS 2 (encompassing Class 1 & 2), and

CLASS 4 (encompassing Class 3 & 4).

CLASS 2 towbars are generally distinguished by having a bolt on tongue, and having a towing capacity from 400kg to 1600kg, with the most common average being between 1000kg & 1250kg.

CLASS 4 towbars are generally distinguished by having a removable ball mount with a square shaft, and having a towing capacity of 1500 to 4000kg.

All towbars must carry a compliance plate showing maximum capacity and ball weights.

NOTE: These ratings are covered by ADR62, and are aligned with manufacturers' specifications.

TOWING EQUIPMENT

Probably the most misunderstood piece of towing equipment on the market is stabiliser bars.

Call them level-riders, load equalisers, stabiliser bars, anti-sway bars, weight distribution hitches etc; very few people understand what they do and how they work.

When towing a caravan or trailer, the ball weight plus more is placed on the rear wheels of the vehicles. So attaching a caravan pivots the weight on an axis and raises the front wheels, making steering lighter and braking less effective. With front wheel drive vehicles, traction can also become an issue.

Use of overload springs, pump-up shocks etc to raise the rear end may make the whole vehicle ride higher, but they have no effect on weight distribution whatsoever.

NOTE: Just because a towing unit is level, do not assume it is necessarily going to tow correctly and safely.

Fitting a weight distribution device of the correct size and type means that the tow vehicle becomes level – weight is transferred back to the front wheels of the tow vehicle, and some weight is transferred back to the caravan wheels, thereby minimising steering, braking, traction and sway problems.

MIRRORS: The law, states that you must be able to clearly see down both sides of what you are towing. Consequently, some form of mirror is necessary on nearly all tow vehicles on both sides.

A large variety of clip-on, door, guard and bonnet mirrors are currently available from caravan accessories outlets.

TOWBALLS: The Australian Standard for towballs is 50mm and the rating of the towball must be stamped on the ball. Rating of towballs 50mm in diameter can range between 750kg and 3500kg. Always check the marking upon the ball to verify the towing weight capacity of the ball.

ELECTRIC BRAKE CONTROLLERS: A number of different brake controllers are available, some of which contain pendulums, and must be mounted level and some which are transistorised and can be mounted at any angle.

NOTE: There is also a "Self-Activating" Controller on the market which is fitted to the "A" frame of the trailer and wired to the brake lights of the vehicle. These are not recommended for caravan towing as they cannot be adjusted or manually activated in the case of an emergency from the driver's seat.