

TRAILER TYRES

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Now that we are entering the sailing season proper, which for some of us is also the towing season, a note about this important topic may be helpful.

First, towing speeds. It is generally well known, but all too often ignored, that the maximum legal speed for towing in the UK is 60 m.p.h. (And you are also not allowed to use the outside lane on motorways of three or more lanes.)

What is not so well known is that almost all trailer tyres (including the very popular 4.00 x 8 tyres, and also most larger sizes when used on trailers) are rated for a maximum speed of 62 m.p.h.; so, if you exceed that speed, you are not only breaking the law, you are also taking a chance by exceeding the rating of your tyres.

Now, pressures, and ply-rating; and it is interesting how much difference of opinion there is in regard to pressures.

When I returned to GP14s in 2004, after several decades as a yachtsman only, I looked up the correct tyre pressures for my newly acquired combi-trailer. I have no idea now where I obtained the information, but it may well have been a trailer manufacturer's website; at any rate the figure I obtained (for my 4.00 x 8 tyres) was 35 p.s.i., and until very recently I have stuck with that value ever since. However, I now have reason to believe that this may be significantly too low, and an online search this evening gives values ranging generally from 36 to 62 p.s.i., with two lower outliers (contributors to a forum) - one giving 28-32 p.s.i., and the lowest one saying "I run mine about 20'ish. The suspension doesn't do much!"

One site, UK Campsite, quoting Erde (manufacturer) data, gives Normal loading - 2.5 bar (36 p.s.i.) Heavy loading - 3.0 bar (44 p.s.i.), although "Normal" and "Heavy" are not defined.

The consensus seems to be towards the higher end of that range (around 60 p.s.i.) if using 4-ply tyres, and still higher (up to 75 p.s.i.) for 6-ply. However, we don't know what loads these sites envisage, and those high pressures seem to correspond to MGW values that exceed the capacity of most of our trailers.

I normally make a point of checking my tyres regularly, and particularly before a long journey, and have usually been free of trouble; but I have twice been badly caught out. The first occasion, around ten years ago, was a trip to Windermere. Tyres nearly new, and pressures checked before departure from Liverpool. On the return trip the offside trailer tyre blew out on the motorway, while driving at almost exactly the 60 m.p.h. speed limit. So, after that experience I upgraded to 6-ply tyres and had no more trouble - until last September.

Last September I treated the trailer to new wheel bearings, new wheels, and new tyres. My "local" trailer shop - a mere hour's drive away, and the other side of the Mersey - could get 6-ply for me but had only 4-ply in stock. However, they asked what load I would be carrying, and they assured me that for a GP14 I would find 4-ply perfectly adequate, so that is what I bought.

Still believing at that time that the correct pressure was 35 p.s.i. I am certain that I checked the pressures when I fitted them, and I have no recollection of letting air out to reduce the pressure to 35 p.s.i., so I can only presume that that is somewhere around the pressure at which they were supplied. First trip, Liverpool to Southampton, getting on for 350 miles; an hour down the motorway, at my legal 60 m.p.h., and the offside trailer tyre blew out. Spare wheel fitted by the breakdown service - I won't do that job myself on the side of a motorway - and then a most dreary continuation of the journey with a self-imposed speed limit of 50 m.p.h. in deference to the tyres.

I am now once again back on 6-ply tyres! But also, now at a higher pressure; now running on 50 p.s.i., at which pressure I understand that the tyres are rated for 394 kg MGW, which exceeds the MGW of the trailer (300 kg, according to Mersea Trailers). We will see in the fullness of time whether I need to reduce that pressure slightly, which might be suggested if the boat bounces around too much.

In theory these 6-ply tyres can even be taken up to 85 p.s.i. for 670 kg MGW, which is more than double the MGW of the trailer.