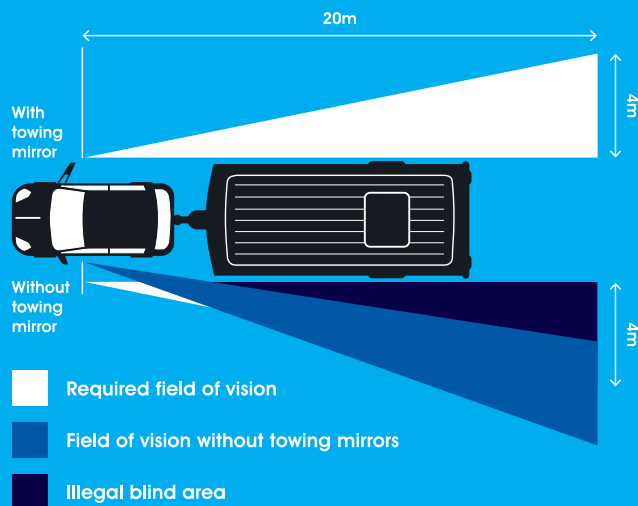


In 2019 roadside checks the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) found **50 per cent** of light trailers (this includes caravans) non-compliant with road safety standards. Of these, **29 per cent** had such dangerous defects they were unsafe to be on the road and given immediate prohibition notices.

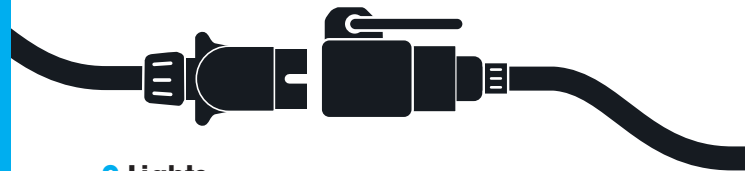
Whilst caravans are MOT exempt it's still essential to keep them roadworthy. If you plan to take a caravan on the road, all components must be in good working order.

Regular servicing and maintenance will help prevent accidents and keep you and other road users safe. They will lengthen your caravan's lifespan and help avoid large repair bills.

Staying roadworthy will also keep you on the right side of the law and steering clear of a fine, points on your licence or prosecution.



Find out more by visiting www.gov.uk/guidance/tow-a-trailer-with-a-car-safety-checks



9 Lights

Working lights are essential along with a number plate and reflectors that should be fitted no more than 40cm from the outermost point of the caravan.

LED replacement lights can be less susceptible to failure caused by road vibrations, have a longer life expectancy and provide a sharper light. However they come as a sealed unit which means should the lens crack, the whole unit will need replacing.

Generally speaking, 80 per cent of lighting issues are caused by corrosion of the plug so check there first for problems.



10 Tyres

Tyre depth for the caravan depends on the towing vehicle, it is required to be the same as the legal requirement of the towing vehicle at the time. Between 1mm and 1.6mm, commercial vehicles towing only require 1mm. Tyres age and fall apart on caravans, rarely wear out, check for cracking or distortion.



**DORSET
POLICE**

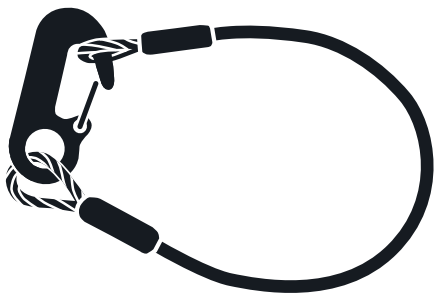
**KEEPING
YOUR CARAVAN
ROADWORTHY
AND LEGAL**

SERVICE

A service is vital as there is no MOT requirement to ensure it is fit for the road. Service costs are very low, defect rates are very high.

SELF-MAINTENANCE

If you plan to maintain your caravan yourself, here are 10 trouble spots to check before you take to the road.

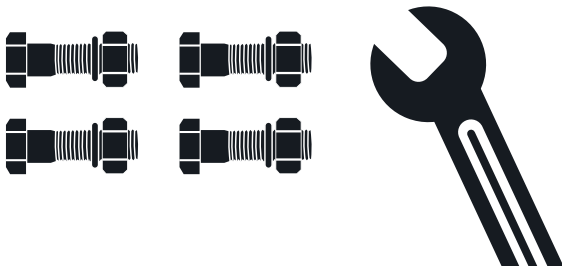


1 Secondary brake cable coupling

Check it's in place and connected and looped through an eyelet on the vehicle chassis, not wrapped around the ball. Ideally keep a spare with you, in case it snaps while unhitching.

2 Bolts

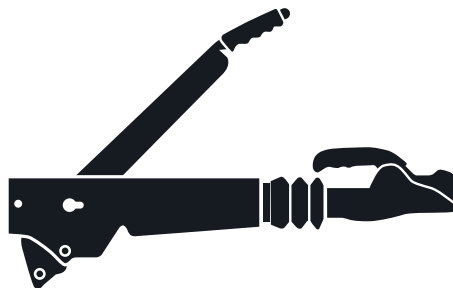
Ensure the four bolts holding the hitch assembly in place are pinched tight. If you feel any movement between the assembly and A-frame when you lift the hitch head on the tow ball, it needs tightening up. The head should be able to twist smoothly to cope with undulations.



3 Gas ram

Fitted in the hitch head, the gas ram should ensure smooth take-up of the caravan brakes as the towing vehicle slows down and cushion any sharp movements. If the caravan smacks against its stops when you brake, the damping ram has failed. This is often due to lack of brake adjustment so help prevent this by lubricating the grease nipples on top of the assembly several times a year.

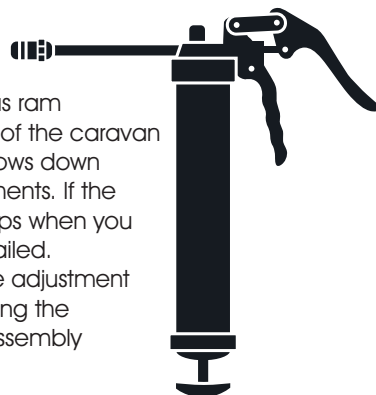
If partially seized, brakes will be slow to engage and release. Check by applying the caravan handbrake and reverse the towing vehicle a few inches. The strut should return the vehicle to the starting position, when vehicle brakes are released and neutral is selected.



4 Hand brake

A gas strut keeps the hand brake locked on once it's applied, so if you pull the arm upwards and it flops back down, the gas strut needs replacing. Once engaged, that arm should sit at a 45 degree angle. If it points to the sky then it needs adjusting or the brakes need changing.

As a test, the handbrake should be strong enough to stall the towing vehicle if it tries to pull away with no throttle.



5 Hitch assembly

If two or three parts of the hitch assembly become worn out, it could make more sense to replace completely.

6 Balance bar

A rod within the hitch assembly controls the brake cable, which runs from the front A-frame to a balance bar mounted on the chassis. From there, separate sprung stainless steel cables are directed to each of the wheel hubs, where they operate the brake shoes. The balance bar and rockers should sit square to the cables – if they don't, there's a good chance the brakes won't be engaging evenly.

Check the condition of the cables. Although they are hidden inside metal sleeves with a plastic coating they can rub on the chassis and suffer from water ingress, which will eventually cause them to rust and seize.



7 Brake shoes

Brakes don't adjust themselves automatically, so tweak them from time to time.

8 Loading

Ensuring the correct nose weight is imposing on the tow bar of the drawing vehicle. Commonly a loss of control stems from being poorly balanced or the maximum permissible mass exceeded, common with single axle caravans.