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Trailer Brakes Are More Critical When Towing With Smaller, More Fuel Efficient Trucks and SUVs –

IDA GROVE, Iowa — Recent spikes in the price of gasoline have put the brakes to the sales of larger tow vehicles. However, boaters are still committed to visiting their favorite lakes this summer, and many have downsized to smaller, more fuel-efficient trucks and SUVs.

ShoreLand'r, a leading manufacturer of boat trailers, recommends that consumers who own mid-size trucks and SUVs double check the tow ratings of their vehicles before hitching up and hitting the road. More than 40 states have laws requiring boat trailers with gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) of 3,000 pounds or more to be equipped with hydraulic surge or electric brakes.

Trailer brakes can enhance the towing capabilities of smaller tow vehicles by giving them an ability to stop more easily and safely, particularly in a panic situation. A trailer equipped with hydraulic surge or electric over hydraulic brakes not only improves safety, it also makes towing less stressful.

ShoreLand'r has been installing hydraulic surge brakes as standard equipment on all of its trailers rated at 3,000 lbs. or higher since 2000. Electric over hydraulic brakes are standard on the company's trailers with carrying capacities over 9,500 pounds.

If you own an older trailer, it's a good idea to make sure it is properly equipped prior to towing. Even if your trailer is outfitted with hydraulic surge brakes, take some time to inspect and service the brakes before the boating season gets underway. "Many boat owners don't realize how difficult it can be to stop their trailer and tow vehicle in an emergency stop without trailer brakes," says Kim Zobel, Sales Manager for ShoreLand'r.

“The small cost of adding trailer brakes protects the much larger investment in their boat, trailer and tow vehicle. Even more important is added protection and peace of mind you get for your family and your passengers.”

Hydraulic surge brakes are fairly simple in their design, requiring no special trailer-to-car hook ups, or hand controls inside the car. The heart of the system is the surge actuator located in the hitch coupler on the trailer tongue.

When the tow vehicle applies its brakes and slows down, the forward force of the trailer against the hitch activates a hydraulic cylinder that transfers pressure to the trailer brakes. Many larger trailers feature electric over hydraulic brakes. With this type of system, an actuator applies the trailer brakes whenever the brake pedal is pressed. There is also a manual control inside the vehicle that allows the driver apply only the trailer brakes and control the amount of braking. This is particularly helpful when backing down a ramp, or in the event of a panic stop, the driver can use the manual controller to maintain safer operation.

Brake maintenance is easy to do yourself, or it is usually an inexpensive service offered by your local dealer. Here is what the experts at ShoreLand'r recommend for basic maintenance:

- On drum brakes, inspect the brake lines and wheel cylinders for leaks or cracks. If any are found, they should be repaired by a qualified repair facility. Also check the brake shoes for wear and replace them if needed.
- On disc brakes, check the disc rotors and brake pads for scoring and wear. The rotors can be removed and turned down by any local brake shop.
- On both styles, drum and disc, you need to regularly inspect the brake fluid level in the master cylinder reservoir, located in the surge actuator. Keep it filled to within 1/2-inch from the top. Be careful not to overfill because brake fluid can damage the paint on your trailer.

Once this basic maintenance is complete, take the whole rig (boat, trailer and tow vehicle) out for a test drive. Find an open and level stretch of road or a big parking lot. Drive at a slow rate of speed and apply the brakes lightly to see how well the trailer brakes work in unison with your tow vehicle. If things seem to work fine, try it again at a higher rate of speed. When you are confident that the brakes are working well, try a panic stop at a moderate rate of speed. Not only will this test your hydraulic trailer brakes, it

will give you an idea of what to expect in an emergency. During the braking tests, if any problems arise or you feel the trailer brakes are not working properly, have it checked immediately by your dealer or a qualified mechanic. The brakes may just need an adjustment or the hydraulic lines might need to have any air removed. The good news is that both operations are simple and inexpensive.

These maintenance tips are good advice regardless of the size of your tow vehicle. Make the most of this summer's boating season by getting your boat trailer ready now.

ShoreLand'r offers a complete line of trailers for every boating need from PWCs to offshore cruisers. For more information, visit www.shorelandr.com, or contact Midwest Industries, 102 E. State Hwy 175, Ida Grove, IA 51445, Phone: 800-859-3028, Fax: 712-364-3361.