



Road safety advice and driver licensing rules for drawing light trailers

Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre
Road Safety Authority

Road safety advice and driver licensing rules for drawing light trailers

Disclaimer

The contents of this guide are expressed in general terms and are not intended to be a detailed analysis of the law.

This guide does not, and is not intended to, provide legal advice or to represent a legal interpretation of the law. While we have made every effort to ensure the accuracy of the information in the guide, the Authority, its servants and agents assume no responsibility for and give no guarantee about the accuracy, completeness or up-to-date nature of the information and do not accept any liability for any errors or omissions.

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Foreword

To improve the safety of you, your vehicle's occupants and other road users it is essential to have a strong knowledge and understanding of the Rules Of The Road. When driving you need to know them and understand their relevance, as well as possible consequences of not following them.

By fully concentrating on the task of driving and always obeying the Rules Of The Road, you are reducing the risk of danger to yourself and others and demonstrating safe and socially responsible driving.

Whilst all of the rules apply to all road users and must be complied with, some address specific rules about towing. You can find advice and guidance about towing a trailer in Section 5 of the Rules Of The Road.

Introduction

We have produced this booklet to help you to:

- understand what combinations of towing vehicles and trailers you are allowed to tow depending on the category of driving licence you hold.
- identify the towing capacity of your vehicle, and the load-carrying capacity of your trailer.

We also give some information and advice about:

- the safety of towed combinations (car and trailer)
- coupling and uncoupling a trailer
- loading a trailer
- doing the practical BE driving test for towing trailers not covered by category B driving licence.

If you comply with the guidance in this booklet, you can be confident your journey will be safe.

Glossary of Terms

Auto Reverse Functionality:

auto reverse functionality facilitates reversing manoeuvres being carried out by automatically disengaging a trailer's service brakes without the driver of the towing vehicle having to leave his/her seat and do it manually.

Approved Driving Instructor (ADI):

a person who has been approved by the Road Safety Authority (RSA) to provide driver training to learner drivers, and who is officially registered as an approved driving instructor on the online register.

Braked trailer:

a trailer constructed with brakes fitted. Trailers with a MAM (see page 8) more than 750kg or half the laden weight of the towing vehicle to which they are attached require brakes. They must also be fitted with a parking brake and a breakaway brake. Older trailers that don't have a breakaway brake must have a secondary coupling (a chain or wire rope) fitted instead.

Breakaway brake:

a breakaway brake fitted to a trailer is a braking device that can automatically stop the trailer if it becomes detached from the towing vehicle while moving.

Coupling device:

a device used to connect a trailer to a vehicle. Most cars, vans and 4 x 4s use a 50mm ball-type coupling. See Figure 1 on page 7.

Design Gross Combination Weight (DGCW):

this is the weight of a vehicle and trailer including the maximum load each can carry in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications.

Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGWW):

this is the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load it can carry in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications. It is also known as the Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) (see page 8).

Drawing/Towing vehicle:

a vehicle used to tow a trailer; for example, a car, van or a 4 x 4 (a four-wheel drive vehicle).

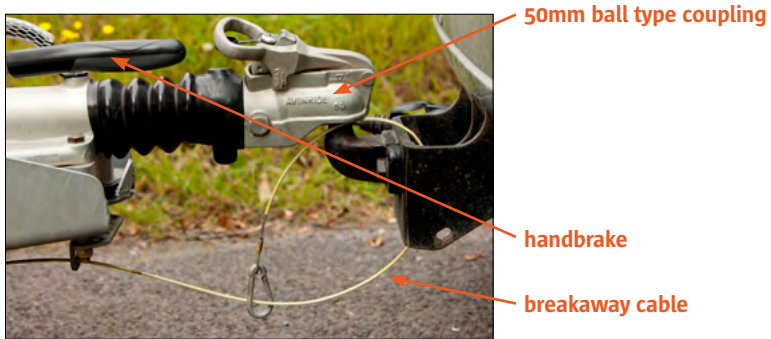


Figure 1: Image of 50 mm ball-type coupling.

Jockey wheel:

a jockey wheel is a retractable height adjustable wheel fitted to the front of trailers to assist in the coupling and uncoupling process. See image below of jockey wheel.

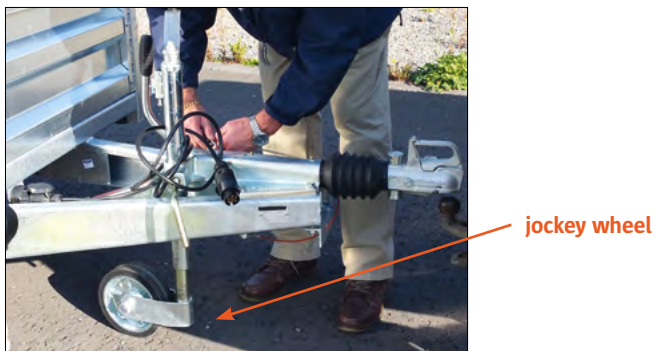


Figure 2: Jockey wheel

Laden weight:

the weight of vehicle or trailer when carrying a load, also known as the Gross Vehicle Weight (GVW).

Light trailer:


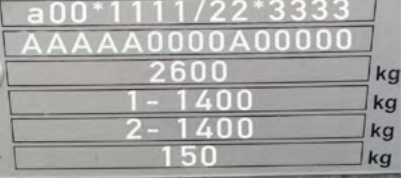
(called simply ‘trailer’ in this booklet) is a trailer with a technically permissible maximum laden mass (see definition below) of not more than 3,500kg. In other words, the trailer and its load when fully laden must not weigh more than that amount. This category of trailer includes anything from small domestic trailers to general duty trailers including flatbed or plant trailers, car transporters, trailer caravans, horse boxes, livestock trailers, and so on.

Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)

this is the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load it can carry in accordance with the manufacturer’s design specifications. It is also known as Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGVW).

Manufacturer’s statutory plate:

a plate fitted to a vehicle by the manufacturer that shows the technical information needed to identify the vehicle, and gives the information about the permissible maximum laden masses. Examples of manufacturers’ plates fitted to drawing vehicles and trailers (along with explanations of the information they display) are shown in Figures 3 and 4 on the next page.

<p>Example of a manufacturer's statutory plate affixed to a Drawing Vehicle</p>	<p>Example of a manufacturer's statutory plate Light Trailers</p>
<p>Figure 3</p>	<p>Figure 4</p>
<p>All figures shown below are in Kilogrammes (kg)</p>	
	
<p>FORD – vehicle manufacturer</p> <p>a11*2222/22*3333 – This is the vehicle's type approval number.</p> <p>*XYXYXYXYXYXYXYXY11111* - vehicle's identification number or VIN.</p> <p>1900 –the technically permissible maximum laden mass, also known as Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGVW) or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM).</p> <p>3100 –the technically permissible maximum mass of the combination, also known as Design Gross Combination Weight (DGCW) or combined Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)</p> <p>975 –the technically permissible maximum mass of the front axle, also known as Axle 1 Design Axle Weight</p> <p>975 –the technically permissible maximum mass of the rear axle, also known as Axle 2 Design Axle Weight</p>	<p>a00*1111/22*3333 – the trailer's type approval number</p> <p>AAAAA0000A00000 - the trailers vehicle's identification number or (VIN)</p> <p>2600kg –the technically permissible maximum laden mass, also known as Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGVW) or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM).</p> <p>1-1400kg –the technically permissible maximum mass of the front axle, also known as Axle 1 Design Axle Weight</p> <p>2-1400 –the technically permissible maximum mass of the rear axle, also known as Axle 2 Design Axle Weight</p> <p>150 –the technically permissible maximum mass at the coupling point, that is, the maximum weight to be transferred by the trailer to the towing vehicle at the coupling point.</p>

Nose weight:

the weight exerted by the trailer drawbar on the coupling device of the towing vehicle

Secondary coupling:

an additional coupling to the main coupling. The secondary coupling is usually a safety chain or wire rope or other similar connection which ensures that a trailer stays attached to its towing vehicle if the main coupling fails or becomes detached. The secondary coupling is designed to prevent the trailer's drawbar from touching the ground and provides some level of steering.

Specified towing capacity:

this is the maximum weight that a vehicle can tow in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications.

Suitably qualified individual (SQI):

a mechanical or automotive engineer, an automotive assessor or a person with similar qualifications who is competent, experienced and independent, and is, therefore, an appropriate person to assess the fitness and safety of a vehicle.

Technically permissible maximum laden mass:

this is the weight of a vehicle or trailer including the maximum load it can carry in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications. It is also known as Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGVW), or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM).

Technically permissible maximum laden mass of the combination:

this is the weight of a vehicle and trailer including the maximum load each can carry in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications. It is also known as Design Gross Combination Weight (DGCW).

Technically permissible maximum mass at the coupling point:

the maximum weight that may be placed on the coupling point of the towing vehicle by the trailer's drawbar in accordance with the manufacturer's design specifications.

Technically permissible maximum mass on the axle:

is more commonly known as **‘Design Axle Weight’** and means the maximum weight the axle can bear based on its construction and design.

Technically permissible maximum towable mass:

is more commonly known as **‘specified towing capacity’** and it is the maximum weight that a vehicle can tow in accordance with the manufacturer’s design specifications.

Towing vehicle:

a vehicle/drawing vehicle that is being used to draw a trailer. A towing vehicle could typically be a passenger car, a van or a 4 x 4.

Unbraked trailer:

a trailer constructed without brakes fitted.

Unladen weight:

this refers to the weight of the drawing vehicle when not carrying a load, or the weight of the trailer when not carrying a load.

Vehicle identification number (VIN):

the alphanumeric (letter and number) code assigned to a vehicle or trailer by the manufacturer to give it a unique identity. This code is usually displayed on both the manufacturer’s statutory plate and in a separate location on the vehicle chassis.



Wheel chock:

or chocks are wedges of sturdy material – for example, wood – placed closely against a vehicle’s wheels to prevent movement.

Figure 5

National Driver License Service (NDLS):

this is the body responsible for issuing learner permits and driver licences on behalf of the Road Safety Authority.

Section 1

The law and driving licence entitlements

Introduction

The driving licence category sets the type of vehicle a person may drive with that licence, while the DGCW determines whether the particular vehicle and trailer combination may be driven.

Whether you tow a trailer for work or for domestic reasons, it is important to know your legal obligations and ensure you do not drive a vehicle or tow a trailer that your driving licence may not cover. You also need to know the following:

- the towing capacity of your vehicle
- the load carrying capacity of your trailer
- the unladen weight of the trailer

You must ensure that you do not exceed these. To find out the towing capacity of your vehicle, consult your owner's handbook or the manufacturer's statutory plate affixed to the vehicle.

To find out the load carrying capacity of your trailer, consult the manufacturer's statutory plate affixed to it for its MAM. You then need to find out its unladen weight. If you are unsure what the unladen weight of your trailer is (as this information is not always contained on the statutory plate), you should consult its manufacturer or their authorised distributor. However, if they can't give you this information, we recommend you contact your Local Authority for a list of approved weighbridges in your area where you can have your trailer weighed. Once you know its unladen weight, you can then subtract this from the MAM listed on the manufacturer's statutory plate to find out the maximum weight of the load you can carry.

If your trailer does not have a manufacturer's statutory plate affixed to it giving its MAM and design axle weights (and the manufacturer or their authorised distributor is unable to provide you with this information), you should get a suitably qualified individual (SQI) to rate the trailer for you and affix a plate to it. This will ensure that you know your trailer's design capabilities. Furthermore, having the plate on the trailer will assist enforcement officers conducting roadside checks.

Remember though, under no circumstances should you load a trailer to the extent that it exceeds the manufacturer's specified towing capacity for your towing vehicle. The RSA has prepared a short video clip to provide you with a step by step guide to trailer towing entitlements. The video is available from: www.youtube.com/RSAIreland.

Category B Driving Licence – Car, van or 4 x 4

A category B driving licence holder can drive a car, van or 4 x 4 which has a MAM not more than 3500 kg and is constructed to carry no more than eight passengers in addition to the driver.

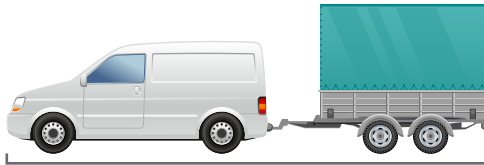
Since 1st August 2014, anyone who gets their first full driving licence must display ‘N’ plates at the front and rear of their vehicle for two years.

A vehicle which can be driven by the holder of a category B licence may tow a trailer:

- where the MAM of the trailer is no more than 750kg,

Towing Vehicle (Car, Van or 4x4) where the MAM is no more than 3,500Kg

Trailer (where MAM is no more than 750Kg)

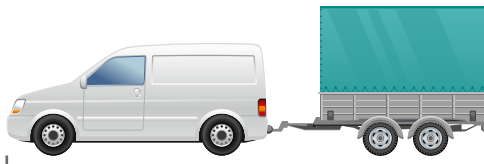


DGCW: 4,250kg maximum, that is 3,500kg in respect of the towing vehicle and 750kg in respect of the trailer.

- where the MAM of the trailer is more than 750kg but the combined MAM of the towing vehicle and the trailer is no more than 3500 kg.

Towing Vehicle (Car, Van or 4x4) where the MAM is no more than 3,500Kg

Trailer (where MAM is more than 750Kg)



DGCW: 3,500kg maximum, that is being the combined MAM in respect of the towing vehicle and trailer.

Figure 6

As a general rule, a category B licence would not entitle the holder to tow a horsebox or a livestock trailer because the DGCW would be more than 3500kg.

Take an example of a drawing vehicle with a MAM of 2010kg and a DGCW of 3680kg - that is a towing capacity of 1670kg. A category B licence would be sufficient to drive this vehicle towing a trailer with a maximum plated MAM of 1490kg as, even though the trailer's MAM is more than 750kg, the combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer combination (2010kg + 1490kg) is not more than 3500kg.

However, if you want to fully use this vehicle's towing capacity of 1670kg (operate at a DGCW of 3680kg) a BE licence is required.

Note: A person must hold a category B driving licence before being eligible to apply for a category BE learner permit (explained below).

Category BE Learner Permit – Car, van or 4x4

You will need a category BE learner permit if you want to learn how to tow a larger trailer with a MAM of up to 3500kg (for example, a general duty, livestock trailer or a horsebox). Once you have your BE learner permit, the Road Safety Authority recommends that you get tuition in towing a trailer from a qualified Approved Driving Instructor (ADI).

Once you hold a BE learner permit, you are entitled to drive a car, van or 4 x 4 with a MAM of no more than 3500kg and you can draw a trailer, provided the laden weight of the trailer being towed does not exceed the manufacturer's specified towing capacity for your towing vehicle. The heaviest trailer that can be towed with a BE learner permit is one with a MAM not more than 3500kg. Therefore, the DGCW of the towing vehicle and trailer must not be more than 7000kg.

BE learner permit holders learning to tow a trailer must be accompanied by a qualified driver who holds a full BE, C1E, CE, D1E or DE licence for at least two years.

Category BE Driving Licence – Car, Van and 4x4

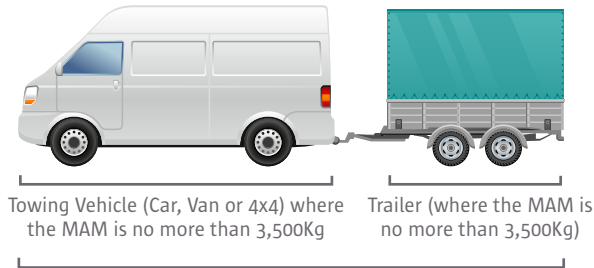
If you hold a current full category BE driving licence (previously an EB licence), you can tow a trailer where the combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer combination is more than 3500kg. However, the laden weight of the trailer (that is, the weight of the trailer and its load) must not be



Figure 7

more than the manufacturer's specified towing capacity for the towing vehicle. The heaviest trailer that a person can tow with a BE licence is one with a MAM not more than 3500kg. Therefore, the combined MAM for a BE driving licence holder must not be more than 7000kg – that is, 3500kg in respect of the towing vehicle and 3500kg in respect of the trailer.

Large van or "4 x 4" and large trailer



DGCW: 7,000kg maximum, that is being the combined MAM in respect of the towing vehicle and trailer.

Figure 8

If your trailer has a MAM exceeding 3500kg, it is classified as a 'heavy trailer' and must be licensed with the Local Authority in which it is ordinarily kept. It must also undergo an annual roadworthiness test at the network of CVR Test Centres. To tow a heavy trailer, you will need a category C1E, CE, DE or a D1E driving licence depending on the type of vehicle used to draw the trailer.

Light trailers – that is, those with a MAM not exceeding 3500kg – are not required to undergo a compulsory roadworthiness test.

Please note that for BE licence holders, it is permissible to tow a trailer designed to carry more weight than the specified towing capacity of the drawing vehicle provided the combined weight of the trailer and the load being carried does not exceed the specified towing capacity of the drawing vehicle.

Take an example of a vehicle with a MAM of 2015kg and a towing capacity of 1800kg drawing a trailer with a plated MAM of 3500kg. You need a category BE driving licence to drive this vehicle combination as the trailer's MAM is more than 750kg, and the combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer combination (2015kg + 3500kg) is more than 3500kg. Note, however, that the laden weight of the trailer cannot exceed the towing capacity of the drawing vehicle – in this example, 1800kg.

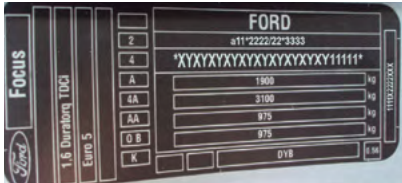
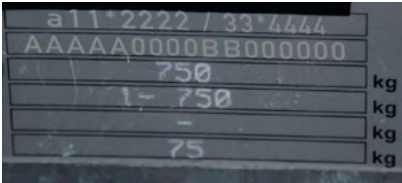
Finally, if you need to tow another vehicle with your vehicle using a rope or strap – for example, a broken down vehicle – you should only do so to the nearest convenient safe place of repair, **and the driver of the towing vehicle must be the holder of a BE driving licence.**

What Driving licence do I need?

Example 1: A category 'B' licence



All figures below are expressed in kilogrammes – kg.


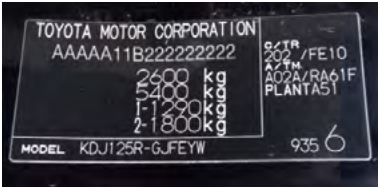

Manufacturer's Statutory Plate Affixed to the Car	Manufacturer's Statutory Plate Affixed to the Trailer
<i>Figure 9</i>	<i>Figure 10</i>
	
<p>1900kg = the vehicle's MAM 3100kg = the vehicle's DGCW 975kg = Axle 1 Design Axle Weight 975kg = Axle 2 Design Axle Weight Specified towing capacity = 1200kg (3100kg minus 1900kg)</p>	<p>750kg = the trailer's MAM 1-750kg = Axle 1 Design Axle Weight 75kg = the technically permissible maximum mass at the coupling point. That is, the maximum weight to be transferred by the trailer to the towing vehicle at the coupling point.</p>

Q. What driving licence is required to drive this vehicle combination and why?

A. A category B licence is sufficient to drive this vehicle and trailer combination as the vehicle's MAM does not exceed 3500kg and the trailer's MAM does not exceed 750kg.

Note that a trailer with a MAM exceeding 750kg could be drawn with this towing vehicle by a category B licence holder provided the MAM of the vehicle and trailer combination is not more than 3100kg and that the manufacturer's specified towing capacity of 1200kg (3100kg minus 1900kg) is not exceeded.

Example 2: BE Licence

	
<p>Manufacturer's Statutory Plate Affixed to the 4x4</p>	<p>Manufacturer's Statutory Plate Affixed to the Trailer</p>
<p><i>Figure 11</i></p>	<p><i>Figure 12</i></p>
	
<p>2600kg = the vehicle's MAM 5400kg = the vehicle's DGCW 1290kg = Axle 1 Design Axle Weight 1800kg = Axle 2 Design Axle Weight Specified towing capacity = 2800kg (DGCW 5400kg minus MAM 2600kg)</p>	<p>3500kg = the trailer's MAM 1750kg = Axle 1 Design Axle Weight 1750kg = Axle 2 Design Axle Weight</p>
<p>Q. What driving licence is required to drive this vehicle combination and why?</p> <p>A. A category BE licence is required as the trailer's MAM is more than 750kg and the combined MAM of the vehicle (2600kg) and trailer (3500kg) combination is more than 3500kg.</p> <p>However, as the towing capacity of the 4x4 (2800kg) is less than the trailers MAM (3500kg) the operator must ensure that the trailer, when laden, does not exceed 2800kg.</p> <p>Note however, that if the MAM of the trailer was 900kg (instead of 3500kg) a driver with a B licence could draw the trailer since the combined MAM of trailer and vehicle would not be more than 3,500kg.</p>	

Section 2

Roadworthiness

If you're towing a trailer, it is your responsibility as the driver to ensure that both the towing vehicle and trailer are:

- safe and mechanically sound,
- fit for purpose, and
- legally compliant with all relevant Road Traffic legislation.

Remember, to be fully compliant, your towing vehicle must be taxed, insured and have passed its roadworthiness test – that is, the NCT or Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness Test (CVRT) as appropriate.

Before attaching a trailer, bear in mind that the trailer you are about to tow may or may not be your own, and it may have been parked or stored by someone else. In any case, there are a number of things that you should do before towing the trailer away.

Firstly, you must ensure your vehicle is safe to drive before setting off on any journey. After you've checked the drawing vehicle, carry out a walk-around check of the trailer. Make sure you do the following checks:

- Check that all windows and mirrors are clean, properly adjusted and in good condition so that you have a good view to the rear. If the mirrors are not adequate, you should fit 'extension' mirrors – these are towing mirrors to be used when the trailer is wider than the towing vehicle.



Figure 13. Extension Mirrors also known as Towing Mirrors

- Ensure that the tow bar or towing device is in good condition.
- Ensure the trailer hitch is intact.
- Test the safety clasp to ensure it can open and close freely.
- Ensure the breakaway brake is working properly, or that the safety chain is correctly attached.
- Check that the lighting cable is not damaged.
- Ensure all lights and reflectors are the right colour, clean, and working correctly.
- Make sure all wheels are in good condition and that the wheel nuts are correctly tightened. Check that all tyres are free from cuts, bulges and have adequate tread – the legal requirement is a minimum of 1.6mm. For further information on tyres, please refer to the Road Safety Authority’s ‘Tyre Safety’ booklet.
- Check that the tyre pressure is correct. All tyres (including the spare, if there is one) should be at the same pressure. It is also important that the tyre specification is suitable for the axle weight and is capable of bearing the weight of the load you’re going to carry.
- Check that mudguards (if fitted) are in a satisfactory condition and are securely attached.
- Check that the correct number plate is fitted – the registration displayed on the trailer should be the same as the towing vehicle.
- Make sure the brakes (including the handbrake if one is fitted) are functioning correctly.
- Finally, make sure you display your ‘L’ plate if you are a learner driver accompanied by a fully qualified driver or ‘N’ plate if you got your first full driving licence since 1 August 2014 at the front and rear of your vehicle and trailer combination.

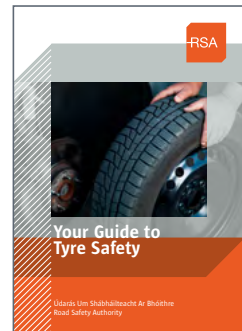


Figure 14

Trailer brakes

All trailers with a MAM exceeding 750kg as specified by the manufacturer must have brakes fitted – that is, they must be equipped with a service brake, a handbrake (parking brake) and a breakaway brake.

New trailers manufactured since 1 June 2011 must be braked on all wheels with auto reverse functionality, and those with a MAM exceeding 1.5 tonnes must be fitted with a breakaway brake. A secondary coupling is sufficient (instead of a breakaway brake) for older trailers with a MAM exceeding 750kg, and also those manufactured since 1st June 2011 provided the MAM does not exceed 1.5 tonnes.

Note that it is not appropriate to equip light trailers with both a secondary coupling and a breakaway brake as the former will prevent the latter from moving if the trailer separates from the towing vehicle. Furthermore, it is not appropriate to replace a broken breakaway brake with a secondary coupling as Road Traffic law places an onus on vehicle owners/operators to maintain original braking systems (including a breakaway brake where fitted) in efficient working order.

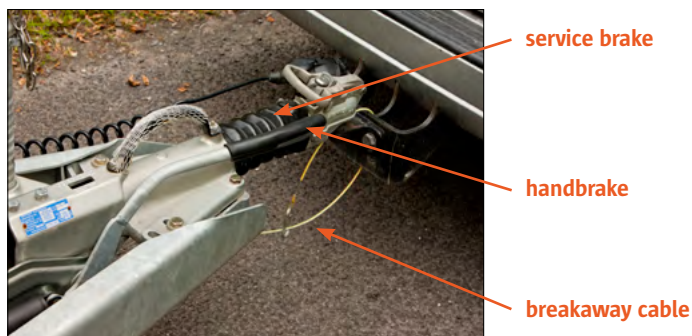


Figure 15. Shows brakes

Older trailers that don't have a breakaway brake can have a secondary coupling (a chain or wire rope) fitted instead.

For more information on trailer roadworthiness, visit www.rsa.ie.

Trailer lights

Trailers attached to vehicles that are used in public places must be equipped with:

- functioning white side lamps,
- red rear lamps,
- red stop lamps,
- amber directional indicators,
- identification mark lighting, and
- rear red reflectors.



Figure 16.

Any cracked or broken lenses must be replaced. Always make sure that your trailer lights have been connected, are clean, working properly and clearly visible.



Figure 17

Important note:

The driver of the towing vehicle has the responsibility for the safe operation of the trailer.

The RSA has prepared a short video clip to provide you with a step by step guide to roadworthiness of your trailer. The video is available to view at www.youtube.com/RSAIreland

Section 3

Coupling and uncoupling your trailer

‘Coupling’ a trailer means connecting it to a towing vehicle. ‘Uncoupling’, therefore, is the opposite – disconnecting the trailer from the towing vehicle.

There are a number of important factors to consider when coupling or uncoupling a trailer. (The advice provided below may not be applicable to all trailers and will depend upon the fixtures and fittings of each particular trailer).

These include:

- the safety of the driver and anyone else who is present or helping;
- the safe attachment of the trailer to the tow ball on the towing vehicle;
- connecting the lighting cable securely.

Before coupling a trailer, make sure you read the relevant sections of your vehicle and trailer’s owners’ handbooks. Do not try coupling or uncoupling a trailer on your own until you are fully familiar with all the steps and can complete them safely.

All drivers towing trailers are responsible for learning how to couple a trailer safely. As with any manual handling task, proper training and instruction, along with common sense and using proper techniques, will reduce the risk of personal injury. For example, should you load the trailer before or after you hitch it to the drawing vehicle? If possible, it makes sense to hitch an empty trailer to the drawing vehicle.



Figure 18. Coupling a trailer

Coupling a trailer

First of all, make sure the area is safe and that the trailer appears secure and is parked on level ground. Reverse slowly and safely in a straight line, keeping your vehicle in line with the trailer using your mirrors for guidance.

Then:

- Reverse until you are close to the trailer hitch, leaving about half a metre between the tow ball and the trailer hitch.
- Before stepping out of the vehicle, make sure it is completely stationary by putting on the handbrake and turning the engine off. The vehicle can be left in gear for extra security in case the handbrake fails.
- Check that the level of the tow ball ‘ride height’ on your vehicle is relatively level with the trailer hitch. The ride height is the space from the ground to the underside of the chassis or tow hitch.
- Check that the trailer’s parking brake is on and that the trailer is secure. If there is no parking brake, then use wheel chocks or wedges.
- Adjust the trailer height if necessary using the jockey wheel’s winding handle.
- Reverse the vehicle until the trailer hitch is directly above the tow ball.
- Connect the secondary coupling or breakaway brake/cable. Make sure that the breakaway brake/cable or secondary coupling is undamaged and connected correctly to the coupling device of the drawing vehicle.
- Open up the safety coupling, rotate the winding handle so it starts to lower onto the tow ball. Watch for the safety hitch locking onto the tow ball.
- Gently release the trailer handbrake and replace the wheel chocks if necessary.
- Now use the lock or padlock on the coupling handle, ensuring it is in its ‘locked’ position.
- Then, turn the winding handle so that the trailer starts to rise. If the combination is properly coupled, then the back of the drawing vehicle will start to rise as well.



Figure 19

- Next, keep turning the winding handle until the jockey wheel is fully raised off the ground. The safety pin on the jockey wheel can now be opened to raise the wheel into its highest unused position. Raise any corner steadies (such as those often found on caravans) or prop stands are fully wound up and secure in the ‘up’ position before moving off.
- Connect the lighting cable.
- Make sure that the jockey wheel locking mechanism securely holds the jockey wheel well clear of the ground.



Figure 20: pin lighting connector

- Make sure the trailer handbrake is off and remove any wheel chocks or wedges used.



Figure 21: wheel chocks

A final ‘walk around’ check should also be carried out to ensure that:

- all doors on the trailer are closed and the side boards are in a locked position,
- your registration plate is secured and matches that of the towing vehicle,
- your lights including indicators are intact, of the correct colour, are clean and working properly.

The most important thing to remember is to never take any risks or skip any steps when coupling a trailer. Safety checks are critical to ensure you travel safely when you are towing a trailer and that the trailer is securely hitched. If in doubt, seek expert help.

Uncoupling a trailer

To uncouple your trailer, choose level, solid ground in a safe place where your trailer and vehicle will not cause any obstruction, inconvenience or danger to others.

- Stop the vehicle and trailer in a straight line. Apply its handbrake and then switch off the ignition. The vehicle can be left in gear for extra security in case the handbrake fails. Get out of the vehicle and put on the trailer's handbrake. If the trailer doesn't have a handbrake, then use wheel chocks or wedges.
- Disconnect the electric cable and put it away safely.
- Next, lower the jockey wheel to ground and lock into position.
- Open the lock or padlock on the coupling handle.
- Then open the safety clasp and lift the safety handle.
- Now use the jockey wheel-raising mechanism – this is normally a rotating handle - to raise the trailer away from the tow ball, usually by about 50mm. Then, disconnect the safety chain or breakaway cable and put it away safely.
- Double check to make sure everything is disconnected. For example, check the safety chain and the electrics.
- Return to your vehicle, start up and move away slowly – about half a metre. Stop your vehicle safely and use the handbrake to ensure it is secure. Do a final check that all is in order with the trailer.
- If appropriate, remove the number plate from the trailer.

The most important thing to remember is to never take any risks or skip any steps when uncoupling a trailer. If in doubt, seek help.

For more information on both coupling and uncoupling a trailer, visit www.rsa.ie.

The RSA has prepared a short video clip to give you a step by step guide to loading or unloading your trailer. The video is available at: www.youtube.com/RSAIreland

Remember!

Don't assume that everything is OK – always check.

Section 4

Loading and unloading your trailer

Loads must be safely distributed and securely tied down. You should avoid carrying loads that extend over the side of the trailer while it's being towed. Loads may project over the side and rear of trailers provided the following limits are not exceeded:

- Loads (other than poles intended for use by telephone or electricity services) must not project more than 3 metres beyond the rearmost part of a trailer.
- Loads overhanging to the rear by more than 1 metre must be marked during the day with a red flag or cloth which is at least 300 millimetres square (about 12 inches square). However, at night time, overhanging loads to the rear must be fitted with a red reflector and a red light.
- Loads (other than loose agricultural produce which is not baled or in crates) must not project more than 300 millimetres over the outermost point of either side of the trailer. The vehicle width, together with its load, must not exceed 2.9 metres. At night time, such loads must be fitted with lights showing a white light to the front and a red light to the rear. These lights must be placed as close as possible to the outermost point of the load.
- If possible, loads should be evenly distributed across the trailer and positioned in such a way as to keep the nose weight (that is, the weight exerted by the trailer drawbar on the coupling) within the recommended limits for the drawing vehicle. Consult the owner's handbook for further details. If you have to carry a load that cannot be evenly distributed, make certain it is properly restrained and that individual axles or the drawbar are not overloaded. You might have to reduce the overall load to achieve this.

The greatest risks associated with poor loading are as follows:

- In an emergency stop situation, the drawing vehicle might fail to stop if it gets pushed on by an overloaded trailer.
- Loading either behind or in front of the centre of gravity can affect the steering and the overall control of the combination. The trailer could fishtail or sway if loaded behind the centre of gravity; loading in front of the centre of gravity could cause excessive nose weight and strain on the tow bar. With these situations, steering is less effective and overall control is reduced or lost completely.

- The load is unstable because it is loaded too heavily on one side or the other.
- There is a serious loss of stability when loads are loose and move around.
- There is a danger of loads falling off the trailer.
- There is a danger of the load shooting forward when the vehicle combination brakes. This is a particular risk if the load consists of planks, bars, and so on, laid in line, front to back.
- There is a very significant risk (with open trailers) of light items being lifted out of a trailer by the slipstream. All items must be appropriately secured.

Therefore, when you're loading a trailer you should:

- make sure the load is properly secured,
- distribute the weight of the load evenly,
- keep to the recommended nose weight.

Important note:

It is an offence to carry an insecure load.

Therefore, when your trailer is loaded, ask yourself the following:

- Is the load evenly distributed and securely tied down, that is, not too much or too little weight distributed to the front or rear of the trailer.
- Should the trailer be equipped with brakes? Remember, if the trailer MAM is more than 750kg, it should be fitted with brakes, including a parking brake.

Further information is available in the Load Security information sheet (available on www.rsa.ie) which has been produced by the RSA together with the Health & Safety Authority and An Garda Síochána.

The RSA has prepared a short video clip to give you a step-by-step guide to loading or unloading your trailer. The video is available from: www.youtube.com/RSAIreland

Section 5

Road Safety tips for towing a trailer

How your vehicle handles when you're towing a trailer – either loaded or unloaded – can be quite different to how your vehicle handles without a trailer. You need to take special care and drive more defensively, anticipating the effect of the trailer. For example, you need to ask yourself has your stopping distance increased – in most cases, the answer will be yes.

Keep the following safety tips in mind when drawing a trailer:

- Anticipate hazards earlier than normal.
- Remember that if you are drawing a trailer, you are not entitled to drive in the outside lane of a motorway, as the maximum legal speed limit for a vehicle drawing a trailer is 80km/h. However, an exception to this rule applies if there are places where the speed limit is 80km/h or less, or there is a temporary obstruction, such as a road vehicle breakdown, forcing you into the outer lane.
- Pay particular attention when you're accelerating and braking, especially when approaching bends.
- Apply your brakes earlier and lighter than normal (this is sometimes referred to as 'progressive' braking).
- Make sure your driving action is smoother and more gentle than normal. Avoid any unnecessary sudden braking or steering.
- Avoid braking sharply on a bend as this could possibly cause the trailer to jack-knife. Instead, reduce your speed before the bend and select the appropriate gear for the speed you are doing. Then, gently accelerate out of the bend.
- Leave more distance than usual between yourself and the vehicle in front. Apply brakes early and gently. Allow plenty of extra time and space if you are merging with moving traffic.
- Allow extra time and distance if you are overtaking other road users, but remember the upper speed limit of 80 km/h. Make sure you are well past the other road users before moving back to the left-hand side of the road.

- Be careful when driving in wet, foggy or extremely bright conditions. Be especially careful driving in high winds.
- If possible and if it is safe to do so, consider pulling over regularly to allow vehicles behind you to overtake.
- Never let passengers travel in a trailer when you are drawing it (this includes a caravan), as it is illegal to do so. All passengers must always travel in the drawing vehicle, with their safety belts securely fastened.
- If possible, reverse vehicle and trailer combinations into parking spots (with someone else acting as a guide). This allows you to drive straight out of them and makes it easier to see pedestrians and other motorists who may be approaching.
- Never reverse a trailer from a minor road on to a major road.
- Plan plenty of rest stops to avoid fatigue. Remember that the only cure for fatigue or tiredness is sleep.

Remember...

The addition of a load on your trailer will affect your vehicle's performance. In particular, remember that:

- moving off, particularly on hills, can be much more difficult;
- you will need to allow a greater distance to bring your drawing vehicle and trailer to a stop;
- driving around sharp bends and corners, and driving down hills requires extra care.

General driving safety tips

- Always carry a high visibility vest(s), warning triangle, torch (with working batteries), fire extinguisher, first aid kit, spare wheel or puncture repair kit in your vehicle in case of emergencies. Fire extinguishers should be securely stowed in the boot of your vehicle.
- Have all relevant emergency helpline numbers handy, including those for emergency services, breakdown assistance and your insurance company.

- ICE your phone – In case you are involved in a collision or need urgent assistance, choose a responsible person to be your ‘In Case of Emergency’ (ICE) contact person and enter their telephone number with ‘ICE’ as the contact name. If you choose to have more than one ICE contact, put a number directly behind the word ICE in each one to prioritize them for the emergency responders. For example: ICE1 – Tom, ICE2 – Dad, and so on. Emergency responders are familiar with this system and if they need to contact a close family member/next of kin they will examine your mobile phone for ICE numbers.

Speed limits

The additional weight of the load on the trailer must also be considered when you are deciding what speed is safest for your journey. Always drive at a speed that is appropriate to your experience as well as the road and traffic conditions. Be aware that the maximum legal speed limit for a vehicle drawing a trailer on any road is 80 kilometres per hour unless a lower speed limit sign is posted. These speeds apply even if the towing vehicle is a 4 by 4.

What if I break down on the road?

If you break down on your journey, park as near to the left as you can. If you cannot do this, try to warn other drivers by, for example, switching on your hazard warning lights.

- Be seen

Always carry a high visibility vest or jacket in your vehicle, and put it on at the first available opportunity. If possible, passengers should also wear hi-viz vests or jackets, and they should leave the vehicle by the left-hand side to avoid exiting into oncoming traffic. Hi-viz jackets are available free of charge and can be ordered online from the RSA on www.rsa.ie.

- Warn others

If your vehicle is equipped with a warning triangle, carefully place it on the roadway to the rear of your vehicle, but always make sure you are safe. Do not attempt to place the triangle if you happen to break down on a motorway.

- Phone for help

Once you are parked, use your mobile phone to get help. State your exact location. If you breakdown on a motorway, use the roadside phone to contact the emergency services so that they can quickly determine your location. If you cannot use this phone, use a mobile phone to call, but be prepared for the emergency services to ask you about your location. Many motorways in Ireland now have location markers sprayed on the hard shoulders in white paint. These help you to find the nearest emergency phone by showing you which direction to walk in. They also give you information about your precise location.

- Find a safe place to wait

Be mindful of your own safety while you are waiting for help to arrive. Stay inside the barrier and off the road on an embankment away from your vehicle. Do not wait in the vehicle.

Remember, never try to do repairs yourself in circumstances which could be dangerous to yourself and other road users.

Section 6

Security – keeping your trailer safe

If possible, you should store your trailer on a property or in a building with security features close to your house.

You should keep a record of the vehicle identification number (VIN): the alphanumeric (letter and number) code assigned to a vehicle or trailer by the manufacturer to give it a unique identity. This code is usually displayed on both the manufacturer's statutory plate and in a separate location on the vehicle chassis.

You should also consider putting your own unique marking on your trailer to help you identify it if it is stolen. This can be an effective deterrent.

You should:

- Photograph your trailer – if possible, you should be in the photo.
- Keep a record of the manufacturer's make, model and vehicle identification number (VIN). This is best achieved by taking a digital image of the manufacturer's plate and saving it in a secure location. You may also wish to take images of any unique features on your trailer.

Trailer insurance

Insurance rules and policies can vary when towing trailers. We strongly recommend that you consult your motor insurance policy documentation or contact your insurance provider to find out if your policy covers towing trailers, and whether any limitations are specified.

Section 7

Preparing for your trailer driving test

If you do not hold a full category BE licence and you wish to tow trailers with a MAM of more than 750kg or vehicle combinations where the combined MAM of the vehicle and trailer is more than 3,500kg, you will need to pass a practical driving test. If you have never passed a theory test, you will need to pass one before you can apply for your BE learner permit.

Before you apply for a driving test, get plenty of training and practice with an RSA Approved Driving Instructor (ADI).

Once you have your learner permit, you should visit www.rsa.ie to find an ADI who provides category BE training. Names and contact details are available from the section called 'Find an Instructor'.

Your ADI will assess your knowledge and skill and will develop a training plan to help you to practise and to prepare for your practical driving test.

Ask your ADI to go through the following topics before taking any training:

- Driver licence requirements
- Roadworthiness of the trailer and drawing vehicle
- Coupling and uncoupling
- Load security

Your training plan should include practice, first with an empty trailer, and then a partially loaded one before you practise with an almost-fully or fully loaded trailer. It is important for you to get a feeling for the effects of towing a trailer on the handling of your drawing vehicle before you move on to towing a load.

Be guided by your ADI as to when you should apply for your practical driving test. Bear in mind that you won't have to wait six months for your test appointment – it could quite possibly be scheduled for the week following your application.

Get plenty of practice – do not rush into taking a driving test you are not fully prepared for. You can save a lot of time and money in the long run by ensuring you are ready to take the test.

Check that the vehicle and trailer you will be using for your test are ‘representative of class’. For example, if you are taking a test for a BE driving licence, then the trailer must have a total weight of at least 800kg. You will be required to load the trailer for the test and details of this will be sent to you in your test appointment notification. Only then can it be considered a representative vehicle for the BE licence. The Driver Tester can then assess your ability to tow a loaded trailer.

Like your first driving test, the car and trailer test starts off with some questions on the rules of the road, followed by some technical checks of the vehicle. Your ADI will prepare you for all aspects of the test including the theory and technical aspects. Before the practical side of the test begins, your Driver Tester will offer you a choice of reversing into a roadway either to the left or to the right. However, during your practice and preparation, you should prepare to be tested on both. The test will cover about 10 km in distance and will include a question on coupling and uncoupling your trailer.

When you are ready to apply for your test, you can do so by visiting www.rsa.ie and applying online. Alternatively, you can get an application form at your local Garda station, driving test centre or library. Your ADI may also carry some application forms.

Important note

Until you get a full BE licence you **must** always be accompanied by someone who holds a full BE driving licence for towing trailers and who is experienced. You should practise towing your trailer on different types of roads in different conditions, including driving at night. **Do not**, though, practise on motorways.

After the test

Once you pass your practical driving test, you are eligible to hold a category BE driving licence. You will need to exchange your pass certificate for your full licence at your local NDLS centre. Once you do this, you are entitled to drive without the need to have another full licence holder with you. However, be sure to check with your ADI or Driver Tester to see if you are required to display ‘Novice’ or ‘N’ plates. Novice plates were introduced on the 1 August 2014 as part of the Graduated Driver Licensing system, and the N plate rules may apply to you.

If you do not pass your driving test, your Driver Tester will have given you feedback that will help you to prepare for further practice sessions with your ADI. This feedback will also help you to prepare for your next driving test.

The RSA has prepared a short video clip to give you a step by step guide to preparing for and taking your trailer test. The video is available from:
www.youtube.com/RSAIreland

Appendix A

Frequently asked questions

The following questions have been put together to assist you with any questions you may have. If your question is not shown, please ask your approved driving instructor or visit www.rsa.ie for more information.

Can I tow a trailer on a car licence?

If you have a category B driving licence to drive a car, van or 4 X 4, you can tow a small trailer such as a grass box trailer. If you want to tow a larger trailer, you must have category BE on your licence. See examples in this booklet. For information on licence categories, visit www.rsa.ie

Apart from the category of licence, what else affects my right to tow a trailer?

Even though your driving licence entitles you to tow a trailer, the weight of the trailer you can tow depends on your vehicle specification. The owner's manual will generally set out a 'towing capacity' – sometimes called Towing Weights or Maximum Trailer Weights – for the vehicle. Some small cars might not be allowed to tow any trailer, while larger vehicles have restrictions set by their manufacturer on the size of trailer that can be towed. In all such cases, the size of trailer you can tow will be the lesser of that allowed by your driving licence or the towing capacity of your vehicle.

What trailers does my category B licence cover?

You can tow a trailer:

- with a MAM no more than 750kg, or
- where the trailer's MAM is more than 750kg but the combined MAM (vehicle and trailer) is no more than 3500kg.

As a general rule, your category B licence would not allow you to tow a horsebox or a livestock trailer.

What trailers does my category BE licence cover?

You can tow a trailer:

- where the MAM of the vehicle and trailer combination is more than 3500kg but not more than 7000kg.
- where the MAM of the trailer is no more than 3500kg. (However, note in the previous question that, in certain cases, a category B licence will allow you to tow a trailer over 750kg.)

However, the driver should always have due regard for safety, stability, manufacturer's guidelines and legal limits of any combination

How do I get a car, van, 4x4 and trailer licence?

- You must hold a current full driving licence in the category B (car).
- You must first pass a driver theory test in the category BW – work vehicles and land tractors – if you haven't already passed this to obtain a category B licence.
- Apply for a learner permit in category BE in an NDLS centre.
- After passing a driving test in the car or 4 x 4 and trailer, you can then apply for the category BE to be added to your full driving licence.

What is the penalty for towing a trailer whose laden weight exceeds the manufacturer's specified towing capacity for the drawing vehicle?

The Road Traffic (Construction, Equipment & Use of Vehicles) Regulations, 1963 (S.I. No. 190 of 1963 as amended) prescribe that loads carried on vehicles and trailers must not exceed a reasonable weight, having regard to the engine capacity, brakes, tyres and general construction of the vehicle.

Furthermore, loads must be of such a weight and size and so distributed, packed, adjusted and attached to the vehicle that, so far as can reasonably be foreseen, no danger is likely to be caused and that there is no interference with the stability of the vehicle.

Loads must also be carried in such a manner that they are not liable to fall onto the road, or to drag on the surface of the road, so as to cause damage to the road or to be liable to cause danger.

If you don't comply with these provisions, you could receive a court summons if stopped by a Member of An Garda Síochána. If you're convicted, you could be fined (up to €2,500), be given a prison sentence, or both. With the exception of where it can be shown that the use of the vehicle is unauthorised, both the owner of the vehicle and whoever is driving it when the offence is recorded can be fined.

Finally, if detected using a vehicle and trailer combination whose axles or laden weight exceed those specified by the vehicle or trailer manufacturer respectively, you are liable to receive 1 penalty point and a €200 fine if paid within 28 days, rising to €300 if paid within the subsequent 28 days, or 3 penalty points and a fine not exceeding €2,500 if convicted in Court.

Is there a weight limit for a vehicle?

The vehicle owner's manual will generally set a limit on the total weight of the vehicle and its load. This is known as the maximum authorised mass (MAM) and is also sometimes known as Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGWV). It covers the weight of the vehicle, passengers, fuel as well as any load carried on a roof-rack. The manual will also give the unladen weight of the vehicle – that is the weight of the vehicle without any passengers or load.

To know the load which can be carried on your trailer, subtract the unladen weight from the MAM. If, for example, the MAM is 2,010kg and the unladen weight is 1,535kg, then the load which can be carried is 475kg.

How can I find out more about towing capacity?

Consult the owner's handbook for your vehicle. This will contain information on the weight of the trailer that can be towed depending on whether or not it is fitted with brakes. If you are having difficulty locating the owner's handbook, you can look at the manufacturer's statutory plate affixed to the vehicle. These plates are usually located near the driver's door or in the engine compartment. The towing capacity can be calculated by subtracting the Design Gross Vehicle Weight (DGWV) or Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM) from the Design Gross Combination Weight (DGCW). Worked examples are completed in Section 1 of this booklet on pages 16 and 17.

Why is it important that you tow the correct trailer for your vehicle?

If the weight of your trailer exceeds the manufacturer's specified towing capacity for your vehicle, you are not safe on the road. You are putting yourself and other road users at risk. For that reason, you should take time to understand what size trailer you

can safely tow with your vehicle. Furthermore, you need to check that you hold the correct driving licence to tow it. Failure to comply with these requirements is an offence.

How should the load on the trailer be positioned?

Loads should always be placed in a safe and secure position. If possible, loads should be evenly distributed across the trailer and positioned in such a way as to keep the nose weight (that is, the weight on the trailer drawbar on the towing bracket) within the recommended limits for the towing vehicle. Consult your owner's manual for this figure.



Figure 22: Image of a correctly loaded trailer.

Further information

Where can I get further information?

If you need further information, please contact the RSA on 096 25000 from 8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

Driver licensing queries should be directed by email to licensingqueries@rsa.ie or by phone on 1890 41 61 41 or 096 25000.

Queries relating to braking and lighting requirements for trailers should be directed to Vehicle Standards by email to VehicleStandards@rsa.ie or by phone on 096 25014

For further information on how to prepare for your category BE driving test, please visit www.rsa.ie

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Working to Save Lives

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Údarás Um Shábháilteacht Ar Bhóithre Road Safety Authority

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