

**W**hen do you most need trailer brakes? This is one of those contentious issues that never really goes away, because there are so many ways it can be looked at.

For many readers around Australia, especially where beach launchings are involved, most readers will not even contemplate putting brakes on their boat trailer as it's a sure fire way of ending up with rusty, inoperative, impossible to maintain discs, let alone drum brakes which of course, are totally useless.

Now just ignoring for a minute the legal requirements for boat trailers to have brakes when the combined mass of the boat and trailer exceeds 750kg, most of these readers ignore that ruling and carry on using the assumption that nobody is really going to stick their head under the trailer and work out that they do not have brakes fitted, much less require a braking test to be carried out.

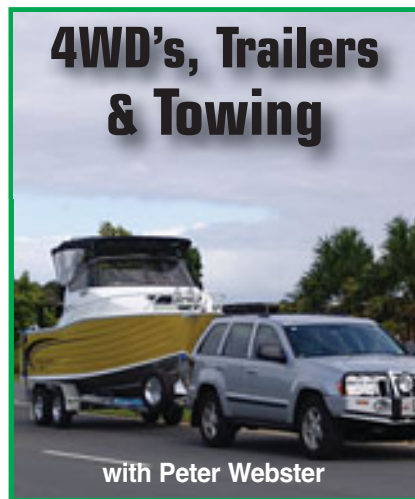
The writer is aware there are many parts of Australia where you just can't get away with this; we even have a couple of Registry Offices left which require a formal brake application test, but frankly, these are few and far between.

In the writer's experience in recent years in Queensland, the only people who even look at a trailer and try to determine whether it has or hasn't got brakes fitted to it, much less whether they work or not, are the very good ladies at the various registry offices we attend who are almost exclusively preoccupied with the issues they can more readily judge ie, the width of the trailer and the distance between the axles and so on. All of this they understand and can handle quite efficiently.

But with respect to these people, and this applies to registry offices pretty well all over Australia, they wouldn't know whether the braking system worked or not just by looking at it, much less how effective they were under the rig, or whether they were activating properly as required by the specifications.

I'm not trying to be a smart-arse about this, just realistic.

In fact, I feel very strongly that boatowners have a responsibility to themselves, their families and their fellow road users to make damn sure they can pull up that boat trailer –



## Reaching The Braking Point

and in 99% of the cases today, that means that the boat trailer will require brakes, and very often, it will require brakes, even if they're not required by Law.

For example, there's an increasing trend amongst small cars to fit tow bars and tow pressed tinnies – and that's perfectly okay to do without brakes, providing the weight stays under 750kg. However, as we all know, the next thing that happens is that tinny is loaded up with all the camping gear, the esky, the tackle box (etc) and before you know it, that BMT package is way over 750kg and heading up to a healthy 1.1-1.2 tonnes. It is incredible how easy it is to overload a tinny – especially the larger volume models around 4.2m LOA.

In their raw, brand new condition from the dealer's Showroom, they'll all be under 750kg – but by crikey, it doesn't take much to push them way over that limit.

Now, if they're going to be towed by smaller vehicles – including the new crop of compact SUV's such as Toyota's Rav, the Great Wall 240, let alone any of the new smaller saloons, then a BMT package that weighs between 750kg and a tonne behind the tow vehicle, is going to put an enormous strain on the brakes - and that assumes that the tow vehicle will maintain its directional stability when it's getting this great big push up the bum in an emergency stop situation.

This is where I believe the Law is an ass, and there is a really strong case for boatowners to use their brains and put a set of mechanical disc brakes on their trailer, even if they have to retro fit it.

Coming down the freeway the other day from Brisbane, I followed a 4.5m Brooker tinny on a well known brand trailer without brakes and silly little 12" wheels. The Brooker was obviously heading out on holidays because it was beautifully loaded, covered and strapped down on the trailer with a very secure cover over the whole load that was obviously inside the Brooker.

The trailer was competently assembled and maintained with excellent new lighting that worked; the whole thing suggested a very competent owner who had gone to no little trouble to get the rig ready for the highway and the fishing he could practically taste.

There was only one teensy problem – as we pulled back from the transom of the Brooker we could see that the trailer's little single axle was already bent, to the extent that it had dropped nearly 60-70mm in the centre from horizontal and was forcing a very unhappy camber on the trailer's wheels. In turn, they were not running on the core centre of the tyres as the tyres are designed to do – but were scrubbing along at a very uncomfortable angle induced by the little axle literally bending under the load.

I don't know how far they got, and I certainly hope they made it safely to their destination, but it just reminded the writer about the issue: I'd wager this rig weighed heaps more than the designated 750kg.

### Not Robinson Curuso

The writer is no saint in this regard.

I still have nightmares about our trip in 1982 when Mary and I, the four kids, our border collie and the old blue and white LandCruiser headed off for Exmouth WA from Sydney, NSW towing our 21' SharkCat on the world's stupidest and most dangerous trailer. It actually had brakes on the front axle only and although it was a tri-axle, it was fitted with the 6 x 9 cherry picker wheels that we dropped in ever increasing numbers, before we even got down to Wagga.

It was the trip from hell, and taught us many critical lessons about long distance towing, towing without brakes and yes, would you believe, not only was the SharkCat (a 3 tonne load) plus we did put all of our camping gear, ice chests, the dog (etc) in the boat so that the kids had more room in the back of the Landcruiser. No, we didn't have seat belts for the kids. No, they didn't each have their own seat, nor DVD's to watch, nor did we have air conditioning or for that matter brakes, because the old drum brakes on the back of the Landcruiser gave up about half way across as well.

How we got there and back still mystifies the writer, and has been the subject of countless BBQ debates in the intervening years.

And that was just one example – so it would be extremely hypocritical of me to suggest that this is not something I am deeply aware of and something that we've done ourselves over the years in too many boats and trailers to remember.

But we didn't have the tow vehicles that we've got now, nor did we have the highways, freeways and quality boat trailers.

Boat trailers now can be very good – and we've got a couple of beauties at the moment to demonstrate this very point.

Last month, we featured the magnificent Mackay trailer and we'll be featuring the Oceanic trailer under the Trailcraft next month. These trailers are part of the evolution of boat trailer manufacturing in Australia which today has dragged itself into the 21st century.

But the Law is an ass, and it's very easy to get around the rules as far as braking is concerned. Most boatowners don't know or care whether their brakes do or don't work.

This is obviously a very worrying situation.

Hopefully the readers of this magazine and column, will be in a slightly different class because at least they're interested enough to keep on the pace and think about the subject very carefully.

## Brake Tests

Interestingly enough, it's just come up again – with the Mako Craft people in Melbourne patching us into



Lo-res 'happy snap' from the family album of the Sharkcat / Brooker / Mercury "Black Max" combo the writer towed from Sydney to Exmouth in 1982. The trailer only had brakes on the front axle and they'd stopped working before we reached the outskirts of Sydney. The old Landcruiser was magnificent, with a heart as big as Pharlap's. We came back half-way across Australia on five cylinders, no brakes and a lifetime of memories. Do it all again tomorrow - but not with that useless s x@#!# t of a trailer.

a Dunbier trailer that does not have brakes. Why? Because as it stands, the 440 Frenzy we are purchasing, will theoretically not need brakes on the trailer. It should weigh (as a brand spanking new rig) under 750kg – especially if we go and weigh it, using the age-old trick of leaving it on the tow ball when you weigh it at the public weighbridge.

Interesting – so we've had an idea about how we can "test" this situation.

What we're planning to do, is to conduct our own tests out in the sugar cane fields up near Steiglitz, where I have carried out many braking tests in the past. As it happens, for a period of about 3-4 weeks, we're going to have two almost identical craft (the 455 Northerner and the 440 Frenzy) on two trailers – one with extremely good hydraulic brakes (the Mackay) (see pic above - Mackay's superb marinsed disc brakes) and one (the new Dunbier) without any brakes at all.

This is going to be a very interesting afternoon, and we look forward to bringing you the results of what happens when we tow these two vehicles behind Ruth's Commodore which we will be using as the test tow vehicle because it is the bog standard, albeit modern Commodore.

It's going to be interesting, isn't it?

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