

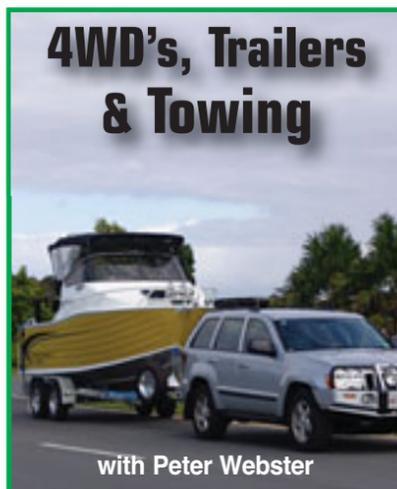
One of the ongoing debates in the minds of many trailerboat owners concerns the best technique for launching and retrieving their boats on and off the trailer. Broadly speaking, there are two basically different techniques, and both are equally popular.

The techniques include backing the boat and trailer down into the water until the boat almost floats off, burying the trailer wheels in the process. Ditto in reverse, when the boat is brought out, the trailer is reversed into the water again until such time as the last keel roller at the back of the trailer is well submerged, and commonly, the next two or three sets of rollers are equally submerged, thus ensuring the boat can be easily driven onto the trailer and well forward, before it really starts coming to rest on the rollers.

This drive-on technique (as it's known) is almost universal with larger boats where the manual winching technique required if the wheels and rollers are to be kept out of the water, imposes quite severe strains on the trailer winch, winch wire, the bow eye and so on, as the drag required to overcome the boat's inertia coming up the trailer rollers which are out of the water, can be considerable.

Umpteen years ago, the writer introduced to Australia the first of the so-called "multi-roller" trailers (1974, for the historically minded) when the Universal trailers were made in Sydney for an apprehensive audience of boat enthusiasts.

Back then, boat trailer choice was pretty stark – keel rollers were enhanced by side



## 4WD's, Trailers & Towing

with Peter Webster

## To Dunk Or Not To Dunk?

bearers on the trailers, whether they were single, twin or triple axles.

The whole idea was to bring the boat up half a dozen centre rollers and then try and get the damn thing off as you got near the water. In those days, the brake and flick technique (as in hurtling the BMT rig down the ramp and then hitting the brakes hard) was the normal technique of getting the bigger trailerboats off what were, at that time, truly horrid trailers.

When the Universal trailer came along with its clusters of 'wobbly' rollers at the ends, it was like a new dawn. We could launch quite big and heavy trailerboats on the hard, even on the level – let alone on a gentle slope down a sensibly designed

ramp. It took about 2 ½ milliseconds for boatowners to work out that with such quality guiding systems available to them (the arms of the multi-rollers automatically self centred the boat if it had been set-up correctly) and from there, the technique of dropping the trailer back into the water and driving the boat up the multi-rollers became the normal practice.

Needless to say, this gave new heart to literally thousands of boatowners because it transformed the whole act of launching and retrieving larger boats.

This practice continues to this very day, and the only real changes that have been made to the technology is that if anything, the popularity of aluminium boats has taken us back to what is really a combination of the original trailers with their centreline keels - but with today's multi-roller clusters under the flatter sections of the hull between the keel and the chines.

This came about because pure multi-roller trailers underneath pressed aluminium boats is not a good combination, as pressed aluminium boats (think Quintrex, Stacer, Savage, etc) require keel support if they're going to sustain their shape and avoid getting a hook in the hull, or 'dimples' in their fairly thin bottom sheet.

So they still need a central set of keel rollers – mostly supported today by clusters of other rollers further out (again) from the keel to the chine.

Even in the big fibreglass rigs today, there is a preference for a central keel roller system, but with GRP rigs, it's not quite as essential as it is with pressed aluminium boats, and there are still many

pure multi-roller trailers without specific keel rollers being manufactured by all of the top trailer builders.

Indeed, if the writer was to purchase a GRP rig from the likes of Haines Hunter or Cruise Craft in the modern 6.5-8.0m range, it would almost certainly involve a pure multi-roller cluster trailer, because this is the weapon of choice in that league - and has now certainly stood the test of time.

### Small Rigs Are Different

But what of the smaller rigs? Trailerboats that are only 4.0-4.5m long, and weigh two fifths of buggie all by comparison to the big fibreglass rigs.

Thinking here of the contemporary consoles such as F&B's Horizon 455 Northerner.

Beautifully built craft that have incredibly good trailers available for them today – as you can see on these pages with some of the additional pictures of the Mackay trailer we photographed a little while ago.

For the benefit of readers who have just joined us, this Mackay trailer is truly close to the clichéd "state of the art" and brings up a number of issues we'd like to discuss in this month's column.

Firstly, back to the headline – to dunk or not to dunk?

The writer would like to make it really clear that with craft under 5.0m LOA, it should be possible to create a trailer situation that enables the average punter to keep his wheels out of the water.

Regardless of the sort of Dura-hubs that have been fitted (or Bearing Buddies, Bearing Mates, et al) all of these systems ultimately rely completely on the integrity of



**Above:** These photos are quite revealing. The Stacer 420 Pro Fish simply doesn't need to be wet-launched (as in the top pic). Properly set-up, it should easily slide off the trailer with a gentle push. In the bottom pic, you can see how the dry retrieve is much easier on the wheel hubs, bearings and brakes (if fitted). Mind you, both situations require a well secured bow line . . .

**Left Below:** This is a great set-up. All it needs is a power winch to make the whole process an absolute pleasure and semi-automatic so Mum and/or the kids can really help - just by operating the winch whilst you work the tail ropes. And yes, check the Mackay trailer's magnificent galvanised mesh walkway.

the rear seal, the one that sits on the stub axle on the back of the bearing cage.

Now, all of the bearing systems rely on gentle pressure pushing in grease or oil from an extra reservoir that increases the capacity of the oil or grease carried within the bearing cage on the stub axle, but whilst this does increase the capacity of the oil or grease carried, it still relies (ultimately) on the integrity of that back seal.

Fortunately, that's the one that is usually the last to go, and that's why you will get genuine stories of trailerboat owners who've had their Dura-hubs increase their bearing life by a factor of five or even ten times, compared to running their bearings without these (grease or oil) hubs.

The modern ones (like Dura-hubs) also have a visual advantage in that you can simply walk past the trailer hubs and actually see how much grease or oil is in the containers at the end of the stub axle

and bearing cage.

This is obviously a huge advantage, and there's no doubt these bearing systems have enhanced the life and usage of trailer bearings since they were invented umpteen years ago.

Now, all of that taken onboard, it's still far cheaper, safer and far less work not to bury the bearings in the first place. And that is the point we'd like to raise in this article.

Why do you need to bury the boat so far that the wheel bearings are completely submerged?

Now the answer to that in most cases is that the trailer sucks, and the only way you can get the boat off the damn thing is to float it off and/or it's just too hard for Dad to push it off because the trailer hangs onto the boat like it's been glued there.

Thus the boat trailer is put 'in' further and further, until such time as Dad or the blokes can push it back into the water.



## 4WD's, Trailers & Towing

We've all seen this countless times on launch ramps.

Well, what we're looking at here today is a system that throws into question that whole *modus operandi*.

The writer does not believe you need to put small boats so far in the water the trailer wheels or bearings are submerged. However, there's a heck of a lot of things you can do to make that whole process more efficient, more easily handled and much safer.

One of the big issues for older folk, and yes, I'm addressing this editorial more to older blokes (like the writer) than the young turks who are prepared to leap around the launchramp.

It really doesn't matter if they go 'A' over 'T' on the slippery surface of the slimy ramp. because they just bounce, get up and keep going.

This is NOT the case when you get a bit older – and as many of us Baby Boomers are starting to discover, even launching a small boat like this Horizon 445 Northerner in question, can be a challenge - especially if your fishing mate or lady is a bit, let me say, "physically challenged" too.

The reality here is as we get older, more Australian blokes and women are getting less physically active and far less agile, so launching even a small boat on a launchramp without a little bit of care and thinking, can be fraught with problems.

Most women for example, are loathe to walk down a slippery launch ramp, and thus it gets to be quite hard for Dad to be

in two places at once, ergo, undo the winch wire, then push the boat off the trailer, before pulling it back to the ramp or the beach, where Mum or the kids can hold the boat in situ while he (or she) goes off to park the car and trailer.

### Making Life Easier

I am totally into an automated world these days. I'm over the heroics of struggling with a stupid 3:1 winch fitted with wire that goes *sproing* in my face when I release it; I'm over clambering down between the chassis rails of a trailer on a slippery ramp to try and put the winch wire in the bow eye; I'm over slip-sliding my way back to the winch post to see that the trailer has now bounced off the keel roller down the end and I have to repeat the whole exercise all over again because it's now out of line with the rollers . . . and as far having my wife Mary do any of that, it's simply out of the question because (A) it's dangerous, (B) it's stupid (C) it shouldn't happen.

So how do we go about getting boats to be more easily handled at the launchramp whether the conditions are slippery, non slippery or steep, shallow, whatever?

First up, I would never have a boat trailer anymore without a walkway. Full stop. As you can see on this Mackay trailer, we have a sensible, safe walkway that enables anybody, young or old to simply walk down the trailer to complete that most fundamental task – putting the winch wire on the boat's bow eye. And you don't have to wait to be down at the end of the launchramp to do this – the winch wire should be run out on the hard, back in the car park right down to where you should have previously worked out you can slot the winch wire hook onto the trailer - so

it's ready when you walk down the trailer walkway, to lean down, pick it up and slip it over the bow eye.

That should be done in such a way the boat is pretty much locked in position until you sanely walk back up the walkway to the winch post.

Now at this point, the boat does not need to be buried in the water – the whole trailer can be out of the water with just the tyres in the water and the boat bobbing gently at the foot of the trailer. Secured by the winch wire in the vee neck.

What next? Well, this brings up my next plea to the older blokes amongst us who want to keep their family, wives or fishing mates boating with them, to invest a few shekels in a power winch – and no, I'm not kidding.

Sure, I'm still strong enough to winch the Horizon 445 Northerner up the trailer pretty safely and quite easily, but in a couple of year's time that may well not be the case. I'm already getting arthritis in my hands, and working the winch is already starting to hurt my thumbs doing it – go forward another 7 or 8 years, and this is obviously going to be increasingly difficult. And I know many of our readers are in a very similar situation.

Okay, I've got some arthritic issues with my hands; other people have them with hips, knees, backs – whatever.

**For big rigs like this 6.2m Seafarer Vagabond, the drive-on, wet retrieve is easily the most common, as the strain on the crew, winch wire, bow eye, etc, is considerable if it is winched on by hand. However, with a powerful 12v electric winch, that need not be the case at all - especially if the trailer was designed for it in the first place.**

Back to the point: **Boating is about having fun and making the system work for you!**

Do you know that right now you can buy a 12 volt power winch for a boat trailer from \$150 bucks? Think about it, \$150 bucks. A spend on a rig that's probably worth every bit of \$30,000-\$40,000 – or a lot more, or a lot less. What price your back? What price painless retrieval? What price being able to give your wife, mate, grandkid whoever, the piece of string and say "now pull this" and have the winch turn on when they pull it so that they can bring up the boat on the trailer in seconds with no more effort than pulling on a piece of string, or flicking a switch, or pressing a remote button – but doing the job for you.

And of course, if you're working on your Pat Malone it's even easier to do it this way, because you can then concentrate on keeping the tail of the boat from swinging around if you're on a bad river or tide situation, because you can have the switch in your left hand and the tail rope in your right or visa versa.

Either way, it's sensible, practical - and works.

### Save The Bearings

Why am my so concerned about dunking the wheels? Well, as I get older I'm getting sick of changing the wheel bearings, repacking them and/or having it done professionally for me and writing out what seems to be cheques for cash every time we go on a long trip. Why? Because we are so busy these days I rarely have the time to prepare the boat myself, so I let one of our trusted mechanics do the job for me, but it still costs.

And whilst this doesn't apply to everybody – many of our readers enjoy the process of checking and repacking the wheel bearings (it's just part of the retirement plan and they have time to do it) I would wager as many readers again

wouldn't have the time, the knowledge or the confidence to do the bearing job themselves.

In the world of caravans, nobody even thinks about changing the wheel bearings. Why would they? Caravans don't ruin their wheel bearings - but then, they don't launch caravans into salt water with hot wheel bearings either, so the issue never arises.

So to the writer it doesn't seem like rocket science to suggest that if we want to solve the wheel bearing problem then let's stop launching the bloody things into the briny!

If we don't keep burying the wheels of the trailer then it stands to reason that properly installed wheel bearings with a good quality lithium based grease will last just about forever – and now we're talking about saving quite a lot of money, avoiding the disastrous consequences of a wheel bearing failure on the highway or freeway, and probably most importantly, the nagging worry that's in the back of most trailerboat owners minds as they zoom down the highway at 105 clicks: *"Is that wheel bearing that seemed a bit hot, going to let go any time soon?"*

These are the sorts of things I want to take out of my life and I'm sure most of our readers want to do that too. And it stops and starts (especially with smaller boats) with reconsidering the strategy for launching and retrieving our boats.

If we pull ourselves up and think about this a bit more carefully, you'll find that in many situations there is absolutely no need to launch the trailer that deeply at all – especially if you have the smarts to go and buy one of these new Chinese made power winches that are so cheap there's absolutely no reason to be running round with one of those horrible manual winches any longer.

By the way, for the benefit of our interstate readers and guys out in the bush, BIAS Marine have a terrific range of

winches including the new *el cheapo* Chinese-made winches (which are quite good, I might add) right up to the traditional top name brands which are still made in America but cost the earth.

For my money I'd happily go with one of their \$150 winches because most of us only need to use them 20-30 times a year – and they'll do that on their ear. Besides, they're so cheap now, you can throw them away every couple of years, buy another one, and still be a long way in front of some of the traditional and very expensive winches.

Talk to your BIAS rep – check it out on their website, and you'll be amazed at just how inexpensive some of these new 12 volt power winches can be.

Lastly, don't *bolt* them onto your winch post – a much better idea is to tack weld the winch onto the winch plate. This will ensure that if some mongrel's going to try and knock it off, they'll be working at it for a few hours to get it off the winch plate and by the time they've got it off, they'll have buggedgered it anyway or been arrested.

However, don't trust anybody – make sure a power winch is put on with hot bolts and becomes impossible to move unless you've got conversely, a hot spanner to do it.

In the wiring department, invest in a quality Anderson male and female fitting to join the power winch back to the tow vehicle – and have your local sparkie appreciate you'll need a pretty decent cable to carry the 12v current all the way back from the tow vehicle's battery to the rear bumper bar or towbar where the Anderson clip is usually mounted.

With a good quality trailer, thoughtful roller and side bearer design, a good walkaway, and a power winch permanently mounted, ready to go, you won't know yourself.

And neither will your mates or rellos.

**Left: Modern steel trailers, like this excellent Telwater trailer under our 2010 6.8m Quinnie diesel, are so well galvanised - right down to the leaf springs and the brake assemblies - their life span has been doubled (in most cases) so there's not a lot of need to worry about dunking the trailer (as such). A careful wash down in fresh water afterwards will ensure a very long life. This does NOT apply to the bearings - especially if they are immersed after running at highway temperatures just before launching - a practice to be avoided at all costs.**

**TBM**



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