

# What The Dealer Meant To Tell You About 5.0 m Boat Trailers, But Forgot . .

Many dealers will not want new boat buyers to read this special report, as Editor Peter Webster shares some of the experience he's gathered after 30 years of trailerboat towing from one side of Australia to the other, in dozens of different boat and trailer combinations.



**B**uying a 5 metre fibreglass cuddy is an exciting project that will involve spending thousands of dollars. Sadly, although the boat will spend its entire life on a boat trailer, most newcomers to boating discover the hard way, that it's the first thing they should have looked at, not the last.

Let's start with the good news. In 1998, you can buy an absolutely first class boat trailer that has been so well prepared it will tow behind the family 2WD let alone a 4WD, so easily, so safely, and so smoothly, the pleasure has been put right back into trailerboating.

There is a catch. Typically, you can't get anything for nothing these days, and there is no more obvious example than a boat trailer.

A good quality boat trailer that really works, costs more money than one with shoddy workmanship, poor engineering, and lighter steel frames. It's much easier to make and sell a cheap trailer, too. The cheapies just rip all the good bits out, and then look for a dealer who only knows how to sell on a "price discount" basis. They don't have to look very far.

This is the dangerous part for the boating consumer. Most people starting out in boating haven't got a clue about boat trailers, or the vital role the trailer plays in the consumer achieving the happiness and success he or she has imagined will arise from the boating project. Why should they? How can they? They've never had a boat before, so they do not realise how important a good quality boat trailer is in the scheme of things. .

Whilst every single dealer in Australia can sell good quality trailers, the most cursory examination of the

trailers he has on his floor will reveal that at least half of them are cheap, inferior brands, poorly matched to the boats they're carrying.

So much so, there's now a ground swell of action by the boat manufacturers themselves who are increasingly insisting that the trailer be properly matched to the hull. Some are actually insisting that a particular trailer is purchased to carry a particular boat.

Seafarer Fibreglass, for example, now offers a 5 year hull warranty with a matched Seafarer Trailer, but a 12 month warranty for one that isn't.

OMC Haines Hunter are about to introduce a similar structure, as they're sick and tired of being blamed for structural or cosmetic problems that emanate from poor quality trailers being mis-matched to their boats.

To prevent this type of situation, Haines Hunter themselves are now starting to package Tinka Trailers

made specifically for their craft. Soon that will be the only way you'll be able to buy a Haines Hunter, and many other boats produced in Australia in both aluminium and fibreglass.

**Need To Know:** The obvious question that arises is this: If a boat buyer is going to buy something other than a Seafarer or a Haines Hunter, how does he know if the new boat is matched to a good quality trailer? How do you know what to look for? Over the next few paragraphs we'll examine some of the key issues you need to know.

**Brakes:** They come in 2 types. Hydraulic or cable actuated, where 'actuated' means how they actually work.

As the tow car starts to slow down, or brakes, a piston in the tow bar coupling senses the trailer moving onto the car, and thus pushes back a hydraulic cylinder under the pressure



**Another 'must'. A top quality gal steel trailer lock that works - the "Locked-It" system.**

of the weight of the trailer over-running the car. Alternatively, the force activates a lever by the same motion. It's simple, time proven, and very effective.

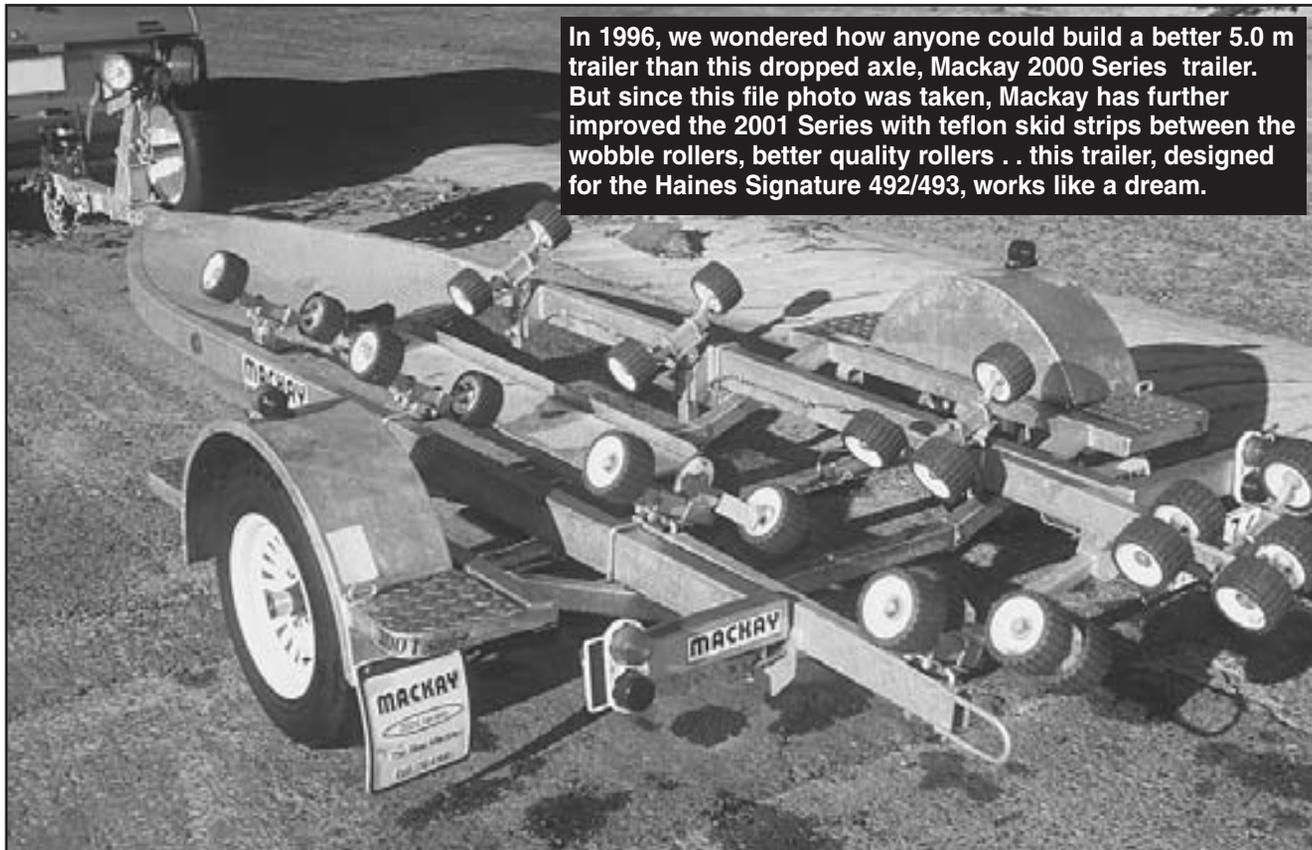
Of the 2 types, both have their adherents. In the ultimate sense, both cable and hydraulic disc brakes can be tuned to offer near identical performance on a test track. In the real world, hydraulic works better in the longer term, and has the advantage of a better hand

brake mechanism. This is important if you have to manoeuvre the boat round the back yard.

Cable activated disc brakes however, require even less maintenance, and cost less. For that reason, they are more popular.

**Galvanising:** Today, not only the chassis or frame of the trailer is galvanised, but in a good quality trailer, you'll find the axle, spread leaf springs, and supplementary parts (on the brakes, for example) are now galvanised too. This is a relatively new development, and very quickly sorts the cheapies from the good ones. Just stick your head down and have a look - if the springs have been galvanised it's a much better trailer than one that's just got black paint on the leaf springs.

**Mudguards:** These are stood-on all the time for loading and unloading the boat. If they can't take your



**In 1996, we wondered how anyone could build a better 5.0 m trailer than this dropped axle, Mackay 2000 Series trailer. But since this file photo was taken, Mackay has further improved the 2001 Series with teflon skid strips between the wobble rollers, better quality rollers . . . this trailer, designed for the Haines Signature 492/493, works like a dream.**

weight in the showroom or boat show without cracking or dimpling, walk on by. Ideally, the mudguard arrangement should incorporate a strong step up to the top of the mudguard which should easily take the weight of a big bloke without problems.

**Waterproof Lights:** Yes, well they are and they aren't. If you use them a lot, they'll last for a dozen or more immersions before the



bulbs start going, no matter who makes them.

Different brands last for different periods of time but none of them really last very long, much less for years at a time. Part of the problem here is not to do with the principle of air surrounding the bulb or wiring mechanism as the trailer

lights are submerged.

They almost all use the 'trapped air principle' (the same principle espoused in turning a glass upside down into water and trapping air in the top of the bottom of the glass) and this concept certainly works.

The problem is more about boat trailers being so crudely sprung. The ride is often so jarring after the boat is launched off the trailer, when the (empty) trailer is pulled out of the launchramp, it can bounce around so much, the light bulbs can be literally shaken out, or broken, and/or the wires ultimately become loosened.

*(A part solution here is to silicone seal all the light fittings into place when the trailer is brand new).*

**Walkway:** I'd kill for a trailer that has a walkway. Once you've had it, you'll wonder why every trailer ever made doesn't have one. It's purely masochism, sadism and heroism that prevents all trailers being fitted with them..

**Quality Tyres:** Most boat trailers have the cheapest, crappiest tyres the trailer manufacturers can find, and 99 out of 100 come from

China. The writer has personally blown out more of these el-cheapo Chinese trailer tyres than anyone else in Australia. *(And you thought all those bits of black rubber on the highway were from trucks. No, they were from all the boat trailer tyres I've blown-out over the years!)*

In fairness to the trailer manufacturers, I am assuming that you *do* want to trailer your boat on the highway, at highway speeds. If this is *never* going to happen, and in fact, you are just going to chug around the corner to the local ramp, don't worry about it. Then, the China-tyre syndrome won't be the problem it is when you're hauling ass across the Hay Plains in summer on roads so hot you can fry eggs on the bitumen.

However, if you do plan on seeing a bit of this magnificent country of ours, insist on having the trailer fitted with quality light truck, or steel belted radials of the Bridgestone, Goodyear, Dunlop kind. The additional investment will pay off handsomely.

Don't believe what the dealer tells you about the tyre quality. If it's made in China, odds-on it will be rubbish.

And besides, if, in the dealer's opinion, it is such a good quality tyre, he should have absolutely no trouble swapping it over at the local tyre dealer's place for a Goodyear, Bridgestone or a Dunlop, right?

*Yeah, right . . .!*

**Coupling:** The towbar coupling in these 5 metre trailers is usually pretty right, but it still pays to kneel down and have a look at the imprint on the side of the coupling head. There, stamped for all the world to see will be the capacity of that coupling - if it's less than one tonne, you've got a

problem.

**Winch Wire:** Don't have one. They're horrible. They spike your fingers, go *sproing* in your face and have long since been replaced by the safety belt type webbing straps on the winch, by experienced boatowners.

**Spare Tyre:** You'll have to go down on bended knees to get one, but with the aforementioned notes about rubbishy tyres, believe me, the next most important feature on your trailer should be the spare wheel and tyre. All trailer manufacturers offer them as options, and some of the good ones, notably Ian Mackay's 2001 range, offer them as standard equipment.

**Bearing Mates:** There are half a dozen types of so called 'Bearing Mates' 'Bearing Buddies, etc on the market, and if you believe the blurb written about them, your wheel bearing problems are gone for ever more.

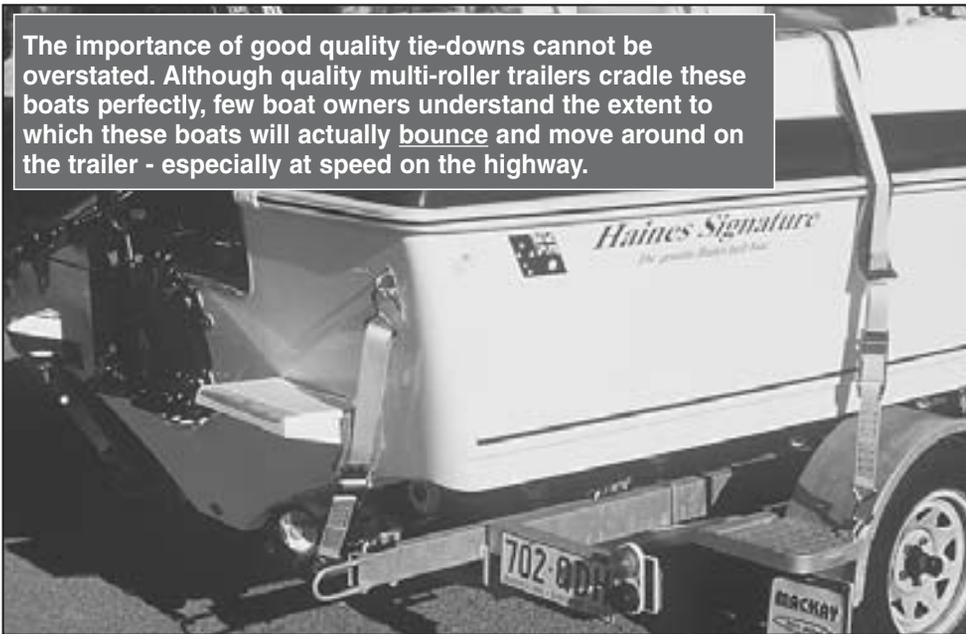
That too is one of the great furrphies in the trailerboat world. These 'grease pressure systems' do a very worthwhile job of keeping the grease up to the wheel bearings and to a limited extent, the water out. They definitely enhance the life of the trailer wheel bearings, of that there is no doubt. However, that noted, they **do not prevent wheel bearing failure**, as so many



**"Thar she blows!" And when it happens on a single axle trailer at highway speeds, the results can be very unsettling, not to say quite dangerous.**



The importance of good quality tie-downs cannot be overstated. Although quality multi-roller trailers cradle these boats perfectly, few boat owners understand the extent to which these boats will actually bounce and move around on the trailer - especially at speed on the highway.



people seem to believe.

Most water still enters the stub axle area by virtue of the car arriving with very hot axles and bearings which are then plonked into the water, forcing a quick contraction of the metal. This action allows the water to seep in through the wheel bearing seals to start eroding the quality of the grease inside the hub.

The best way of preventing wheel bearing failure is still, in the writer's opinion, a combination of four things:

1. I'd always have the original Bearing Buddy or Bearing Mate device on the end of the stub axle.

2. Then, I'd insist on one of the really good quality lithium greases developed for the mining industry that have been used with such success in the best quality trailers. Again, it's not coincidence, but this is the grease Ian Mackay uses on Mackay Trailers as standard equipment.

3. Thirdly, one of the oldest tricks in the books is to always engineer a cold launch. In other words, only launch when the wheels (and bearings) are still cold or at best lukewarm. It's not nearly as hard as you think,

to do that.

4. *Keep the wheel bearings out of the water!* On most ramps, with a well set-up multi-roller trailer, you shouldn't have to go in much deeper than the rims of the trailer wheels.

#### Multi-Roller Dilemmas:

There is now widespread acceptance of multi-roller trailers despite recent concerns that multi-roller trailers are (again) leading to situations involving serious hull damage, resulting in very expensive repairs and occasionally, litigation.

Multi-roller trailers are a terrific invention and have absolutely revolutionised boat handling on and off the launchramp. But . . . if the boat trailer isn't set up for the boat, they can be diabolically wrong for that boat and really frustrating to use. If the arms and wobble rollers are not set-up correctly for the chines or strakes on the boat, 9 times out of 10 that boat will come up crooked to the extent that it will actually lay over on its side within the trailer.

I've seen some shockers on the launchramp - and felt so sorry for boatowners who

have obviously never been shown or had their trailer set up properly in the first place. This is where your dealer is critical. It's the dealer's responsibility to set the boat trailer up for you so that your boat literally glides on and off the trailer. If it is not gliding on and off the trailer then the dealer (not the trailer manufacturer, usually) has a problem.

**Strap It Down:** That said, it is not the dealer or the trailer manufacturer's responsibility to strap the load down - and anybody that tows with a multi-roller trailer where the boat is just sitting loosely on the rollers, is just plain asking for trouble.

Ensure the boat is

strapped down with a good quality webbing ratchet strap across the transom, and is also fitted with a turnbuckle on the bow eye to the trailer, thus locking the boat in place for either fore and aft travel, as well as side to side movement.

If the boat is thus secured, and the trailer has been properly set-up for that boat, then you can travel countless thousands of miles without so much as a blemish appearing on the hull of a fibreglass boat.

If the boat is not strapped down in this way, it will quite literally bounce on the rollers everytime the trailer goes over a bump. The results can be catastrophic and it's nobody else's fault but your own.

**Summary:** In closing, could I urge readers to rethink their position on trailers. A good quality trailer can extend the life of your boat by years, and quadruple the enjoyment and satisfaction you get from it.

It's taken us years of badgering, pleading and arguing to do it, but Australia now has an extremely high standard of good quality, well engineered trailers available. Take advantage of this situation and make your trailerboating a real pleasure.

F&B



A galvanised walkway like this is a fantastic help, especially for older folk, or in situations where the ramp is slippery - or where you just don't want to get your feet wet !!!!