



Freeway Speeds Demand Quality Tyres

Coming back from Brisbane to the Gold Coast recently on the huge eight lane freeway between the two cities - said to be the busiest road in Australia - I was following a nicely kept Savage runabout towed by a near new, current model Falcon, as we swept into the open straights south of the famous Yatala Pie Shop, and entered the 110km zone.

We were already sitting on 100-105kph in any event, but the traffic flow perceptively increased speed, as we moved into the faster speed zone. Within minutes, the traffic was flowing at a comfortable 110-115km. Sitting in Lane Three of four, keeping up with the surrounding mix of trucks, cars and semis, we were regularly passed by cars streaming towards the Gold Coast at 115-120 k/ph. The odd flyer went down Lane One (normally reserved for the brave and the pros) touching 120 or more.

It was a very typical Wednesday afternoon. The Savage sat comfortably behind the Falcon and

although it was on Lane Two, and 200 metres or so ahead of me, I was mentally admiring the rig and thinking how well it was sitting behind the Falcon, even at this speed.

To the owner's credit, it had all the hallmarks of a very well set-up rig, from someone with no little experience in trailering. The tie-downs were particularly good, it had a superb road cover coming up from the bow over the windscreen and back down over the top



of the outboard, and secured back in against the boat with safety belt-type webbing and clips. Hella waterproof lights complemented the set-up nicely, and he had installed additional trafficators in the form of an old style light bar across the top of the rig for good measure.

It can be done - boat trailering on today's freeways and highways is another world from a decade or more ago when to "cruise" at speeds of this nature would have been utterly unthinkable.

I know from towing our own rigs that with the powerful F-250, if I don't use Cruise Control when I'm towing the black cat (3.1 tonnes) then I can all too easily find the rig travelling way beyond the speed limit with near sublime comfort, safety and ease.

As far as the F-250 is concerned, it barely

distinguishes the difference between towing boats at 2.0 tonnes and 4.0 tonnes, and quite literally, has to be kept in check if you're going to stay within the limits on freeways such as the motorway between the Gold Coast and Brisbane.

As its torque curve peaks between 1800-1900 revs, it loves to sit around 105kph - which is terrific, providing you're not in a 90kph zone!

Towing the big rig, the 4.5 tonne *Far-Away* is not that much different - in normal

freeway conditions, the rig, with a combined weight approaching 8.0 tonnes (depending on the load we have in the Ford) still sits on the freeway around 90-100kph, with the 8.2m, 6 wheel trailer humming along behind quite peacefully.

The key to this big trailer are the magnificent 14" heavy duty marine disc brakes on each wheel, powered by the Sens-A-Brake power boosting system driving through hydraulic lines to each of the brakes, on each wheel.

Activated by the Ford's brake light circuit (set off when I touch the foot brake) the brakes are truly superb. Depending on the setting I'm using in the dash controller (from low power through to high) I can actually set-up the brakes to slow the rig down faster than I can just using the Ford's brakes alone to stop

itself.

This is because the brakes are actually adjustable on the trailer, whereas they're not on the Ford - and no, I'm not being critical of the Ford's brakes.

In fact, I think for a 3 tonne 4WD truck, the brakes are excellent. But the AL-KO set-up, which has 6 wheel brakes under the 4.5 tonne load, power boosted by the Sens-A-Brake power brake system, provides genuine six wheel braking power - something we could never achieve with the old style PBR vacuum brake system. Four brakes, yes - but six? Never, well, not in my experience.

Combined with the Ford's own strong brakes, the Sens-A-Brake and AL-KO disc power brakes offers the driver exceptional control and the ability to stop as quickly with a big load onboard as you would without it.

Changed Times

Back on the freeway, I couldn't help but wonder whether many of our readers have taken onboard the difference we have today in the way boat trailers are being used - and the strains that are now being put on boat trailer tyres. In the situation I was following down the freeway last week, this was a lightly laden, very competently set-up rig, but the tyres on that boat trailer were travelling at between 110-115kph, speeds that were unthinkable not so long ago.

This was a near new rig so I was reasonably sure that the tyres would be as well thought out as the rest of the rig - it usually follows that when you see a really nicely set-up boat, the owner has had a great deal of experience and has learned the hard way that it's better to get the best of everything, rather than try to

skimp and save on some of the really vital issues such as tyre quality.

But it hasn't always been that way. I've had stand-up rows in tyre shops when well meaning tyre resellers have virtually insisted that I'm wasting my money putting good quality tyres on a boat trailer when I could easily get "away" with retreads or semi-worn tyres.

"How many miles are you going to do in your boat trailer, mate?" Is often the excuse they use to justify putting on shoddy tyres.

It worries me that many of our readers with older trailers have still got older tyres with a much lower speed rating under their trailers which they are now using on today's freeways and highways, at speeds up to and over 100kph.

At this speed, boat trailer tyres heat up dramatically if they do not carry the correct speed rating and are not inflated correctly.

This is not a place to save money - the trailer, indeed the whole trailerboat rig is only as safe as the tyres it is running on - and in many cases, those tyres are completely inadequate.

How do you check?

Easy - get down on your hands and knees and carefully study the kerbside walls of your tyres on the boat trailer, where you will find embossed the load rating at the pressure suggested for each tyre. Commonly it will be something like "650kg at 50psi" or some such, and depending on where the tyre came from (and when) you'll get a mixture of tyre pressure ratings and weight ratings which might be in either pounds or kgs.

You should already know the fair dinkum weight of your boat/motor and trailer rig. If you don't, I urge you to find your nearest gravel pit or quarry, council tip (go

to the yellow pages if all else fails and look up under WEIGHBRIDGE for the address of your nearest public weighbridge) and get a certificate that will tell you within 5-10kg the true weight of the BMT rig.

Prepare yourself for a double shock.

Firstly, I'll darn near guarantee the boat is way heavier than you thought possible, and secondly, I'll wager that if the trailer is more than 3 years old, the tyres will be grossly inadequate to carry the BMT weight of the rig.

The tyres - at the very least - should have a 10% - 15% true safety margin ie if the BMT rig weighs 1850kg all up (don't guess, or trust the dealer's "calculations" - weigh it!) the tyres combined capacity should be at least 2,127kg or thereabouts.

At that point, you have a couple of fundamental decisions to make, but

whatever you do, don't kid yourself that inadequate tyres will do the job.

Having popped, blown, busted, cracked, split and blistered more tyres than just about anybody on the planet on the highways and byways of this great land, I promise you, you will not get away with it - and worse, it will come back to bite you on the bum when you least need it to happen.

For your family's sake, get real, get honest - and enjoy trailerboating to the max.

F&B

***Peter Webster has been at the forefront of boat trailer development and research for many years, and currently tows SEA Media's 4.5 tonne 8.2m Salty 27 on a tri-axle trailer, F&B's 3.3 tonne 6.85m camera boat (a CCC cat) on a tandem alloy trailer with Sea Media's Ford F-250. For more information about the latest trends, legislation and regulations affecting boat trailers, readers are reminded the definitive publication **Trailers, Towing & Rooftopping** is available on-line through www.seamedia.com.au*

