



Winch Quality Matters

We had occasion to pull *Far-Away*, our 4.5 tonne 8.2m cruiser out of the steep ramp here at Runaway Bay last month. After backing down the big tri-axle trailer into the "spot" we've now established is the perfect point to retrieve *Far-Away*, I watched as Ruth brought the cruiser into the notch that forms the back end of the trailer.

Skillfully, and with just the right amount of horsepower, she urged the Honda 150's forward, so the boat slid up the trailer as all good little 4.5 tonne boats are supposed to slide, coming to rest about 600mm or so from the winch post.

At this point most of the little old ladies and gents watching the show (retrieving this boat always seems to attract a small crowd) nodded their heads approvingly and the little L.O.L.'s pointed out to their husbands that it was a woman driving that boat so skillfully . . .

That she was, but we still had about 600mm to go, and we long ago realised that the best technique is not to build up more horsepower

and push the boat up the last couple of feet when by simply snapping home the winch hook into the bow eye, winding the 10:1 winch (with the engines still running and pushing gently forward) makes short work of the last couple of feet.

I also prefer this as it means that I can make sure that the boat comes up and snugs into the narrow, 100mm wide bow roller. If the boat was to come up even a couple of degrees off dead centre, it could easily miss such a narrow target.

Well, I confess I'm a bit paranoid about it, too. In truth, I suspect that if the trailer is in the correct depth of water, and the boat thus has to centre itself on its run up the trailer, then I doubt it would miss . . . Still, it's not something I want to find out the hard way, and I do prefer in any of these drive-on situations to wind in the last couple of feet.

Similarly, on our cat, where we have two 75mm veed nylon bow blocks, it's quite easy for the cat to



slither off centre on the nylon skids - it only needs to come up 75-100mm crooked, and because it's not, strictly speaking, a self aligning trailer like we have under *Far-Away*, the cat is able to move around quite a bit on the trailer until it is

snugged home.

Again, rather than drive it right up to the veed bow blocks, I much prefer to hand winch it over the last couple of feet. Invariably, the cat is slightly off centre, but it only takes a shove against the bows one way or the other to bring it back into line, at which point it can be winched home, hard up against the bow chocks.

In the third tier of this exercise, we also have our Trailcraft 475 Profish. In this case, using a dedicated Trailcraft multi-roller trailer, another situation applies - here, we don't like to drive the Trailcraft onto the trailer as that requires the single axle wheel bearings to be fully immersed in the salt water.

Although we've fitted Dura-Hubs to the wheel bearings, we still prefer to keep the bearings right out of the water as part of a long-term experiment to see just how long we can sustain these bearings.

And I have to say the results are overwhelmingly in favour of keeping the trailer wheels and their attendant bearings, out of the water. This is hardly a surprise, but it is hard to (otherwise) get objectively researched facts on issues like this, unless we do it ourselves.

In this case though, it's just the way we like to do it. We bring the winch rope down to the bow eye, getting our feet wet in the process, or clambering down the trailer as we've done for the last 30 or so years.

It's a bit old fashioned, and I'm sure it would be bloody dreadful at Lake Eucumbene about now, but it is possible to clamber down the trailer quite safely, and if we did have to do the Eucumbene/Jindabyne exercise fairly often, we'd

have a walkway down the Trailcraft trailer quicker than you could say "Shoot, it's bloody cold!"

Winch Quality

The common denominator in the three situations is the use of the winch - even with the Salty 27, a mechanical winch is still the preferred option.

Sure, we can drive the boat straight up to the winch post but even if that was the case, it would still need the manual winch to secure the boat hard up against the winch post. Otherwise, on steep ramps like the one here at Runaway Bay, the minute the power is taken off the throttles, the boat simply slides lickity split back into the water. All of our boats launched here are set-up in such a way they have to be driven forward before we can unhook the winch strap.

Given that they do come off the trailer so easily, we also learnt a long while ago that there's no way you can trust a poorly made winch with the snatch load that occurs when you engage drive or first gear in the tow vehicle.

I don't need to use low-range 4WD with the cat (3.1 tonnes usually) but I do as a mechanical precaution with the big rig. When we do take off, such is the massive torque coming through the F250, you have to be a bit careful not to throw too big a load back on the trailer and specifically, the winch strap and safety chain.

Yes, we always use a safety chain as well as the winch strap, but the first line of defense, before you attach the safety chain, is the winch strap ie, for a few moments, the whole thing is hanging on the winch ratchet pawl.

After we had over-riden several pawls from lesser quality winches which we



In either plate, pressed ally or fibreglass, the idea of using wear pads on the boat's stem(s) has real merit, and can save a lot of paint and scoring down the track. Even though the boat is back-chained to the winch post - the post itself still moves as the trailer flexes underneath it.

suspected were made in Taiwan or China, we scared ourselves sufficiently to invest in some more expensive but significantly higher quality AL-KO boxed (or framed) winches which feature, amongst other things, a fair dinkum stainless steel ratchet pawl.

I'm not suggesting that it can't be over-ridden by the load, but certainly it is significantly stronger than the ratchet pawls we've used on lesser quality winches.

Tests we've done with our huge tow bar multi-grips (the 600mm long jobbies) showed that we could bend the inferior winch's ratchet pawl like it was made of soft butter - but we couldn't budge the AL-KO ratchet pawl using exactly the same procedure. Obviously, it was of a vastly superior grade of metal.

Power Winches

We're often asked by readers to recommend a power winch, but here's something that I'm almost embarrassed to admit - it is so long since we've used a power winch, I honestly

can't recommend one brand from another.

The use of power winches on boat trailers I think was largely circumvented by the development of the modern drive-on and drive-off technique.

Whilst the drive-on, drive-off technique still has a lot of people against it, for most boatowners, a properly set-up multi-roller trailer from one of the top yards such as Mackay, Tinka, Oceanic (etc) usually works so well that it doesn't take long before Mum or young Johnny can drive the boat up the trailer whilst Dad brings down the 4WD and the big multi-roller trailer. Conversely, it might be Mum that brings down the trailer whilst Dad drives the boat up the rollers. Either way, the outcome is similar - it really is hard to justify a power winch today when it's so easy to drive big boats on and off the trailers.

In our own case(s) not only do we not need the power winch for the last couple of feet, it would actually be a nuisance having to hook up the power

cables to it - although we have seen some very good clip-on systems over the years, that use Anderson clips for the power supply mounted under, or on top, of the bumper bar.

However, with one of these modern AL-KO type winches, with a choice of 5:1, 10:1 or even 15:1 ratios, it seems unlikely that anyone would need a power winch, unless they were going to stick rigidly to the principle of keeping their trailer wheels out of the water.

I'm not about to argue against that, because frankly, it has a lot of merit. Unless you're of a mechanical bent, then replacing or even servicing wheel bearings can be a very expensive, annual proposition that can be completely avoided by keeping the trailer wheels out of the water.

In that situation, there's no doubt a very strong case to install a good quality power winch, because it's just too hard for people to hand winch a boat of maybe 5.0m and above, all the way from

the bottom of the trailer up to the winch post.

Boating is supposed to be fun - and believe me, it's no fun winching up a one and half tonne boat, 6.5m up and over a trailer to the winch post.

There is one other alternative - that big strong 18 year old teenager that plays front row forward in the NRL, you could just take him fishing with you pretty regularly, and have him winch it up for you! Either way, the best investment you can make is a good quality manual winch, and make sure it's got a toughened steel ratchet pawl.

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*