

The Art of Trailering

How getting hitched can lead to divorce and other hazards

Back in 1952, a guy by the name of Milo Psinsky hooked up a trailer to his car, and all the trailer lights worked. Milo was briefly considered for sainthood, but alas, sainthood requires two miracles and not just one.

Outdoorsmen are about the only people nowadays who still use trailers—utility, camping, boat, mountain bike and snowmobile. At the moment, I am down to only three trailers: two boat and one utility/camping. The lights don't work properly on any of them. That doesn't bother me too much, because I know that's the nature of trailer lights.

A highway patrolman stopped me recently and told me that my boat-trailer signal light had indicated a left turn, and I had made a right turn.

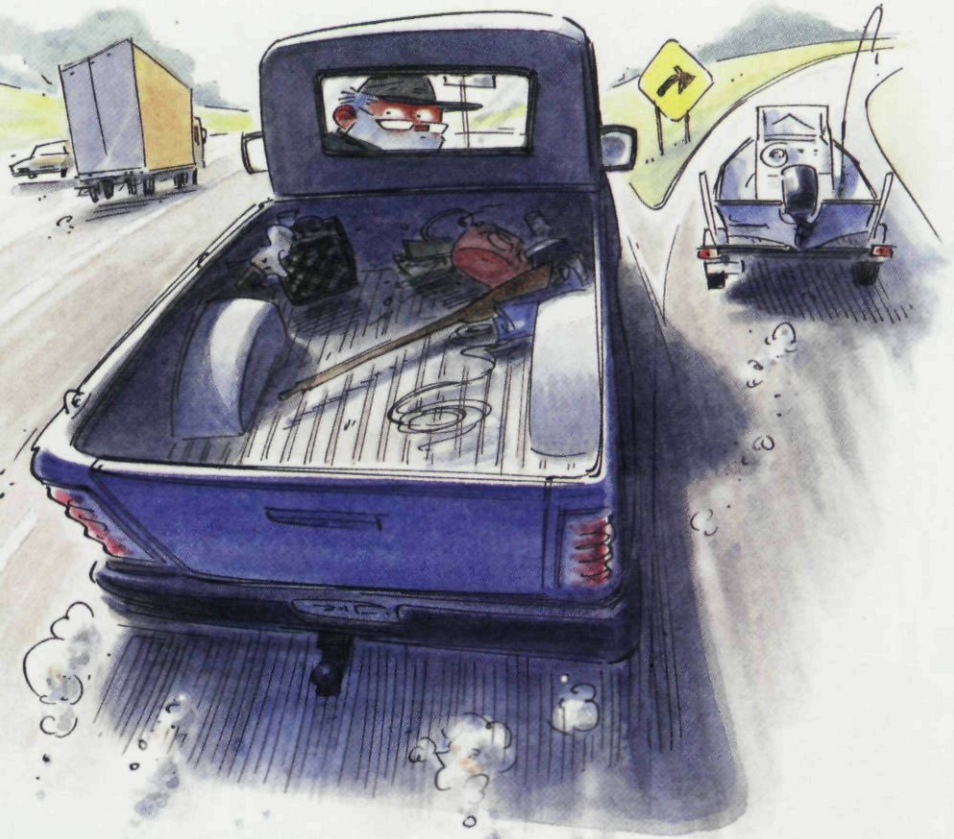
"What's your point?" I said.

"I just thought you might be interested," he said. "I have a boat trailer that does the same thing."

"The turn signals on all boat trailers work that way," I said. "If you see a trailer signaling left, you know the driver is going to make a right. It's practically a law of physics."

"Really?" he said. "I didn't know that. Here's a ticket."

I'm not sure if trailer lights are still a major cause for divorce in this country. I believe that was the case at one time, when trailers were generally in common use. The grounds for divorce developed like this. The husband hooks up a trailer, and of course the lights don't work. Typically, there are four wires: yellow, green, brown and white. If there are more than four wires, you should immediately walk away from the trailer and call either a



mechanic or a bomb-disposal unit. People have been institutionalized after attempting to hook up trailer lights with more than four wires.

Now, even though there are only four wires involved, the number of combinations in which the wires from the car can be connected to the wires from the trailer is somewhere in the neighborhood of 4,500. To find the right combination, one simply employs the process of elimination. Most of the time, the right combination turns out to be Number 4,499.

The process of elimination requires two people, typically a husband and wife. The wife is usually the one stationed behind the trailer, in the position of observer. The husband either crouches or lies on his back near the respective light plugs of the vehicle and trailer. Then he begins working his way through the various combinations of wire connections.

"Okay," he shouts to his wife. "Did the left rear signal light go on?"

"No," she replies. "But the right rear signal light went on."

The man mutters something under his breath and then shouts, "Is the left light blinking now?"

"No," she shouts back. "But the right rear brake light went on."

They continue in this manner for a couple of hours, by which time the husband begins to suspect that his wife is lying to him, out of sheer malice, about which light went on. Soon their conversation degenerates into name-calling and they eventually end up in divorce court. Trailer lights are not to be taken lightly.

The first trailer I ever bought had been fashioned by a backyard madman out of the rusty rear half of a pickup truck. He had painted it blue, with house paint. It was not attractive. Still, // Cont'd on page 95

I figured it might work as a camping trailer. The madman I bought the trailer from was not the madman who had built it. He was a different madman. I was the madman who tried to get a license for it.

"What's the ID number of the trailer?" the licensing lady asked me.

"It doesn't have one," I said.

"Who was the manufacturer?"

"Milo Psinsky," I said.

The lady said she couldn't give me a license for a trailer built by Milo Psinsky. Every time I went back to the courthouse to license the trailer, I got the same lady. She seemed to enjoy my torment and perhaps thought she could keep her ruse going for another four or five years. Then one day I went into the courthouse and got another lady. She had me sign a couple of forms and gave me a trailer license.

"Do you know how to fix trailer lights, too?" I asked her.

"No," she said. "Neither did my ex-husband, the fool."

Many people have trouble backing up trailers. The procedure is really quite easy. Simply remember this bit of advice: You put your hand on the bottom of the steering wheel, then move your hand in the direction you want the trailer to turn. Or maybe you put your hand on the top of the steering wheel. I think it's the top. No, wait, it's the bottom. I'm sure it's the bottom. The main thing is to pay attention to what you are doing while backing up. Ignore all crunching sounds and those people who are screaming at you. Remember to remain calm.

There are some show-offs who like to back up their trailers with a bit of flair. One day while I was waiting to launch my boat at a Puget Sound ramp, a show-off whipped his pickup truck around and backed his boat trailer down the ramp. I should mention that his pickup truck probably cost more

than my house. His boat was almost as big as my house. The maneuver was so quickly and expertly done, I developed an instant hatred for the guy. His boat slid effortlessly off the trailer and floated up against the dock. He had two beautiful babes with him, whose function, I believe, was to hold the boat against the dock while he parked his pickup. The man then roared back up the ramp—with his boat bouncing along behind him. He had forgotten to untie his boat's bowline from the trailer! Ha! His mishap produced smiles all along the line of us boaters waiting to launch. That, of course, was before we realized how long it takes to remove a large boat that has been dragged halfway up the only launch ramp.

Trailer hitches are basically pretty simple affairs, at least if you have a modicum of mechanical skill and knowledge. My hitch, for example, has a ball-like doohickey bolted onto a steel whatsis about a foot long. You slide the whatsis into a whatchamacallit under the middle of your rear bumper. Then you line up the holes in the whatsis and whatchamacallit respectively—this takes scarcely more than an hour or two—and then you shove a thingamajig through the aligned holes and fasten it in with a zimp, simple as that.

A word of caution: Sometimes the clamplike thing that is supposed to go over the doohickey and connect the trailer to the towing vehicle, well, sometimes this won't go over the doohickey. That's because the doohickey is too big for the trailer hitch. You have the wrong-size doohickey bolted to the whatsis that goes into the whatchamacallit. This is not a rare occurrence. In fact, if you happen to have several trailers of different sizes, as I do, it will happen 98 percent of the time. Change the doohickey to the proper size. Do not—I repeat, do not—jump up and down on the trailer tongue in an effort to make the hitch parts connect. It won't work. Take my word for it.

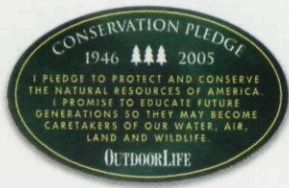


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Also, always fasten your safety chains securely to the towing vehicle. This will prevent your trailer and boat from passing you on a busy expressway, one of the least pleasant sights you may encounter during your lifetime.

Another word of warning: Inside the whangdoodle on the trailer tongue are a pair of glimps that are supposed to clutch onto the doohickey. The glimps resemble little steel jaws, as I tend to think of them. Sometimes the jaws jam when they come into contact with the doohickey. Here is the warning: Do not stick your finger up between the whangdoodle and the doohickey in an effort to unjam the jaws. Otherwise, you can forget about any future career as a brain surgeon. And don't get the idea that that's why I'm not a brain surgeon. If I were a brain surgeon, how would I find the time to deal with three trailers? 🌲🌲🌲

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