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## MOTORCARAVAN GUIDE



# NCC MOTORCARAVAN GUIDE



Coachbuilt



Low profile



Campervan



A Class

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# WHAT'S COVERED BY THE GUIDE

As ownership and the use of motorcaravans is increasing, this guide has been produced to assist users in both loading and driving their vehicles correctly and legally to ensure the safety of both the vehicle and its occupants.

Covering all types of motorcaravans including:

- A-class
- Coachbuilt
- Low profile
- Campervan.

This guide outlines everything that needs to be considered when preparing a vehicle for a trip to ensure that you get the most out of the adventure that is 'a motorcaravan holiday'. This guide can equally be applied to those vehicles which have been converted to be used as a motorcaravan but retain the description on the V5 as a 'van with windows'.

Motorcaravans come in all shapes and sizes, each with specific loading considerations that need to be addressed when loading your motorcaravan.

This guide provides simple and easy to understand advice on:

- maximum loads and the importance of not overloading axles (as indicated on the manufacturer's type approval plate)
- loading considerations, from the storage of heavy items to checking the weight of roof boxes and bike racks
- what you can legally and safely tow, so you can inform your insurance company
- checking your driving licence entitlement to ensure you are legally entitled to drive your motorcaravan
- national speed limits for motorcaravans
- security device options.

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# DEFINITIONS

## 1. Maximum Technical Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM)

This is the legal maximum weight of your motorcaravan when it is fully loaded.

**Note: It is illegal to exceed this load rating.**

## 2. Mass in Running Order (MRO)

This is the mass of your motorcaravan as delivered by the manufacturer. This figure includes the mass of the recommended gas cylinders, any fresh water the manufacturer states can be carried whilst driving, fuel tank(s) filled to at least 90% of capacity, and 75kgs for the driver.

## 3. Conventional Load (CL)

This is a load for each passenger seat fitted to your motorcaravan and is set as 75kgs per seat by European Regulations.

## 4. Maximum Axle Load (MAL)

This is the maximum load that can be carried by the specified axle and must not be exceeded.

**Note: It is illegal to exceed this load rating.**

## 5. Train Weight (TW)

The maximum permitted combined weight of the towing vehicle and trailer as set by the towing vehicle's manufacturer.

**Note: It is illegal to exceed this load rating.**

## 6. Actual Laden Weight (ALW)

This is the weight of the vehicle when it is on the road and varies dependent upon what is loaded into the motorcaravan.

**Note: The ALW must never exceed the MTPLM.**

## 7. Unladen Weight (ULW)

The weight of the vehicle as delivered from the factory with the fuel tank empty. It does not include any LPG cylinders, water in the water tanks, personal possessions or driver and passengers.

## 8. User Payload

Payload relates to the mass of all items carried in a motorcaravan and is the allowance for additional equipment, including any fitted by the dealer.

# GENERAL INFORMATION

Know your limits, ensure you are aware of the maximum width, height and weight of your motorcaravan to avoid problems when driving towards low bridges, height barriers and weight restricted bridges.

If you are new to the world of motorcaravans, it is advisable to stay local on your first trips to enable you to get used to the motorcaravan's equipment.

Make sure you know your vehicles speed limits, as some heavier motorcaravans and van conversions may have lower speed limits than the national speed limit.

## Be careful not to exceed maximum loads or overload any of the axles

Whilst a larger motorcaravan may enable you to carry more load, it is *where this load is placed* that is critical to ensuring that the motorcaravan remains stable on the road and safe to drive. All motorcaravans will have a **maximum loading capacity** which must not be exceeded – it is also important you do not overload any of the axles.

These maximum masses will be stated on the motorcaravan manufacturer's type approval plate usually found in the engine compartment or the cab door pillar.

Where there are differences between the motorcaravan manufacturer's approval plate and the base vehicle and/or chassis manufacturer's approval plate, the motorcaravan manufacturer's approval plate takes precedence.

The **maximum load for each axle** will be stated on the motorcaravan manufacturer's type approval plate. This will normally have four masses stamped on it.

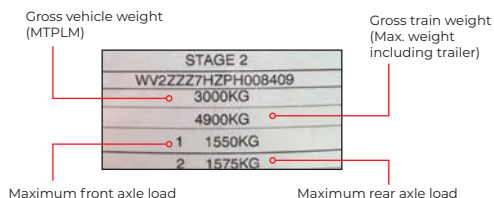
**Note:** Where only three masses are stated, the vehicle cannot tow a trailer.

- Where four masses are quoted, the highest figure will be the train weight
- Where only three masses are quoted, the highest figure will be the vehicle's MTPLM (which would be the second highest figure on a plate containing four masses). This is the legal maximum weight your motorcaravan can be when it is fully loaded.

## These weights must not be exceeded.

To do so is illegal and will invalidate your insurance.

The next two loads will be the front and rear maximum axle loads normally shown with a 1 before the front axle and a 2 before the rear axle. (Motorcaravans with three axles will have the maximum third axle load shown with a 3 before the load)



Sample of a vehicle type approval plate

# FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOADING AND DRIVING

## 1. Storage of heavy items

Always consider where in your motorcaravan heavy items are stored - the heavier the item is, the lower it should be stored within the motorcaravan. The high-level lockers should be kept for light items and, when travelling, it is essential to ensure the doors on these lockers are correctly closed and secured.

Wherever possible, heavy items should be placed on the floor near to an axle as this will aid the handling of your motorcaravan.

Heavy items should be secured for travelling so that they cannot move while in transit.

## 2. Water

Motorcaravan manufacturers will specify the amount of water that can be carried while travelling. Whenever possible, travel with your vehicle's water tanks empty and fill them when you arrive at your destination. This will save 1kg for each litre of water that you do not put in your tank whilst on the road. Large amounts of water moving around in the tanks whilst travelling may affect the handling, and even the braking, of your motorcaravan.

## 3. Passengers

Passengers should only travel in designated passenger seats and should always wear a seat belt.

Note: The manufacturer has only taken account of 75kgs per passenger when advising you of your payload, so you will need to take account of any passengers over this weight as it will reduce your payload for other items. Line 8.1 of your V5 registration document 'Number of seats including driver' will state the number of persons that may be carried in the vehicle. To exceed this is illegal and may invalidate your insurance.

## 4. Pets

If you travel with pets on board your motorcaravan ensure they are always safely restrained or contained. Their weight must be considered as part of your user payload.

## 5. Bike racks and roof boxes

If racks or boxes were not fitted by the manufacturer, then the weight of these and any items inside needs to be considered as part of your payload. If the manufacturer has fitted these items, then they should have made an allowance for the weight of items placed on the rack, or in the box. You should check the manufacturer's allowance before loading these items.



# FACTORS TO CONSIDER WHEN LOADING AND DRIVING

When a carrier is fitted to the rear of a vehicle, it is important to consider that this weight, being so far behind the rear axle, could induce a rear axle overload. (See Item 8 garage areas).



## 6. Towing

If you wish to tow with any motorcaravan you should:

- First check that you have a licence that allows you to tow with it (see Driving Licences).
- Confirm with the manufacturer that the motorcaravan has been approved for towing and, if so, any towing limit for the vehicle. Some vehicles have a reduced towing limit when they are converted to a motorcaravan. It is essential that you check the manufacturer's type approval plate for their published towing limit.
- Only fit an approved tow bar to your motorcaravan. By law it must be marked with the UNECE R55 approval number (this will carry an approval marking that includes the type approval and the loading limits).

## 7. Towing with an A-Frame

Although use is permitted by the Department of Transport whilst in the UK, such use is considered as unlawful in many countries across

Europe. Please ensure that you confirm it is legal to use in those countries you intend to visit as failing to meet their rules may lead to your equipment being confiscated.

## 8. Garage areas

For motorcaravans with a large 'garage' area at the rear, it is important to consider how this area is used. As this storage ('garage') is to the rear of the vehicle, it could be very easy to induce an overload of the rear axle.

**Note: Loads placed behind the rear axle, e.g. 4, 5 & 6 above, will transfer weight from the front axle to the rear axle, and therefore the load imposed on the rear axle will be greater than the extra weight of the load itself. Great care must be taken not to overload the rear axle.**

## 9. Food

It is recommended that you buy food once you have arrived on the site to which you are travelling rather than travel with food on board to ensure you keep your vehicles loaded mass within the vehicles MTPLM.





## OPTIONAL EXTRAS

If you have optional extras fitted, either by the manufacturer or by a dealer, then the mass of these options must be considered when loading your motorcaravan.

The additional mass added by the optional extra must be considered as part of your user payload, as it is not included in the manufacturer's stated MRO.

Below is a list of the typical masses for these extras, but you should check the masses when the option is fitted to ensure you do not overload your motorcaravan.

Optional extra	Mass in Kg
Bike rack	8
Electric step	5
Solar panel (flexible)	7
Solar panel (rigid)	11
Tow bar	35
Oven and grill	13
LPG tank empty	14
Sidebars	14
Roof bed	60



# DRIVING LICENCES

- If your motorcaravan has a MTPLM above 3,500 kgs, you need a C1 driving Licence, otherwise you are not legally entitled to drive the motorcaravan.
- If you passed your driving test after 1 January 1997, you will not have been given the Category C1 automatically and would need to pass a C1 driving test.
- When you reach 70 years of age, your driving licence entitlement will expire. If you have a motorcaravan over 3500 kgs you should make a request to the DVLA to retain your C1 category. In order to meet their requirements, you will need to take both a medical and an eyesight test every two years.
- Towing with a motorcaravan will require a B+E licence if the combined MTPLM of the motorcaravan and the towed vehicle exceeds 3500kgs. This may not be shown on your licence but since December 2021 this has been granted to B licence holders. However, if you wish to travel to Europe and then tow, you will need to have your licence updated to show the B+E category.
- If your motorcaravan has a MTPLM above 3500kgs and your trailer's maximum weight exceeds 750kgs, then a C1+E licence is required.



# MOTORCARAVAN SPEED LIMITS

- The maximum speed limit at which you can drive your motorcaravan will be determined by the body type as shown in section D5 of your V5 registration document.
- A motorcaravan with a body type in section D5 specified as “motorcaravan” can travel at the national speed limits.
- If your motorcaravan has a body type “van” or “van with windows” specified in section D5, the limit is up to 30mph in built up areas, 50mph on single carriageways, 60mph on dual carriageways and 70mph on motorways.
- If you are towing with your motorcaravan, then your speed limit is limited to 60mph.
- You cannot travel in the third (or outside) lane of a motorway when towing.

## NATIONAL SPEED LIMITS

Vehicle type	Built up areas MPH (km/H)	Single carriageways MPH (km/H)	Dual carriageways MPH (km/H)	Motorways MPH (km/H)
Motorcaravans with an unladen weight of 3500 kg or less	30 (48)	60 (96)	70 (112)	70 (112)
Motorcaravans with an unladen weight greater than 3500 kg	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	70 (112)
All Motorcaravans when towing a trailer	30 (48)	50 (80)	60 (96)	60 (96)

The speed limits given are national speed limits for motorcaravans being used for their intended purpose. Be aware that if the motorcaravan is being used to carry goods for exhibition and sale, or used as a workshop or for storage, then it is classed as goods vehicle and goods vehicle speed limits will apply, irrespective of the unladen weight.

# SECURITY

- Fit a security device to your motorcaravan when leaving it unattended. If you use a steering wheel lock, ensure it is one with a long arm. The NCC recommends the use of Sold Secure security products.



- When parked, the steering wheel should be turned to full lock, either left or right, to prevent 'dragging' away.
  - Other products to consider are an On-Board Diagnostics (OBD) lock (a strong protective cap that prevents access to the OBD port and therefore prevents electronic bypass of the ignition system), a clutch claw (locks pedals together) and a wheel clamp (check wheel size).
- Consider installing VIN CHIP® to your motorcaravan as a theft deterrent and recovery aid. VIN CHIP® consists of covert and overt markings and identification technology, all designed to combat vehicle crime. Individual RFID chips are programmed with the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) and can be hidden within your motorcaravan. Some premium motorcaravans come with VIN CHIP® installed by the manufacturer. Find out more by visiting [www.vinchip.co.uk](http://www.vinchip.co.uk).



## The best by a distance

- If considering an after-theft recovery device, check if your insurer has a preferred product – that may lead to an insurance benefit.
- Systems should be multi technology – GPS / GPRS at least!
- You must ensure the subscription is paid up for monitoring.
- If your motorcaravan is left in storage, it is still the owner's responsibility to check it.

# MOTORCARAVAN TOP TIPS

## Handy hints to help you get the most out of your new leisure vehicle.

- Check your driving licence to ensure you are legally entitled to drive the vehicle.
- If your motorcaravan has a MTPLM (Maximum Technical Permissible Laden Mass) above 3,500kgs check you have a C1 driving licence, as if you do not you are not legally entitled to drive the motorcaravan and would not be insured to do so!
- Read the motorcaravan manual to familiarise yourself with the features of your vehicle.
- Be careful never to put fuel in the freshwater tank - the water connection to the freshwater tank will be identified by a blue label.
- Always plan your route.
- Advise your insurance company if you wish to tow with your motorcaravan.
- If possible, weigh your motorcaravan (including driver and passengers) in 'holiday mode' to ensure you have not exceeded any maximum weights.
- Load the motorcaravan with care ensuring heavy items are low down in the motorcaravan and secured safely.



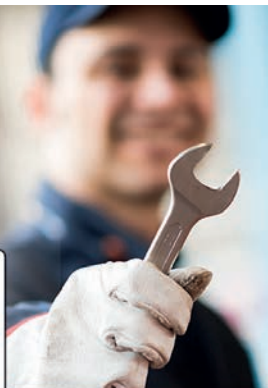
- Don't travel with water in the water tanks whenever possible. If you do travel with water on board, remember the mass of the water you carry may reduce your available user payload.
- If your motorcaravan is not designed to have gas appliances - such as a space heater - working when the motorcaravan is in motion, you must turn off the gas supply when travelling.
- Always check all your road lights are operational before setting off on your journey.
- Always check tyre condition and pressure before travelling.
- Check your tyres for age and wear regularly and replace if tyres have been in use for more than five years or are over seven years old.

## MOTORCARAVAN TOP TIPS

- Dispose of litter in bins, recycling where possible, and/or take rubbish home with you.
- Dispose of the contents of the toilet cassette in the correct manner at the appropriate chemical disposal point.
- Ensure all locker doors, windows and rooflights are closed and secured before travelling.
- Do not overload any individual axle.
- Have your motorcaravan engine and running gear serviced annually (or potentially twice yearly if you do a very high mileage).
- Have the habitation area serviced annually by a member of the Approved Workshop Scheme (AWS).  
[www.approvedworkshops.co.uk](http://www.approvedworkshops.co.uk)



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The NCC Badge of Approval on the outside of a motorhome or campervan, with the certificate in the user's handbook, is a symbol of a manufacturer's commitment to the safety of its products and its customers.

It means the motorhome or campervan – its gas and electrical installations, furnishings, cooking equipment, ventilation provision and much more – meets the requirements of British and European Standards.

**Be safe – buy the badge.**



## Acknowledgements

The NCC gratefully acknowledges the help and advice from:



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CARAVAN SAFETY & SECURITY GROUP

**Caravan Safety and Security Group**

[www.cssginfo.co.uk](http://www.cssginfo.co.uk)

While every effort has been made to ensure the advice is correct at the time of going to press (February 2024) none of the above accepts any responsibility for the accuracy of the contents of this publication.

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