May I borrow your horsebox?

by Arrie

I am in a desperate situation and I need to borrow or rent a horsebox during the last weekend in June, in order to move my horse from Pretoria to his new home in Gauteng. I have a Golf pick-up with a tow bar and will do the driving myself. Would appreciate any assistance. Please contact Jo if you are in a position to assist (particulars attached).

We have all seen ads like these. More often we may even consider assisting Jo because, after all, we are horsey people, and we know the awkwardness of a situation such as this, we have a horsebox that is not used that often and it is about time that we are nice to our neighbours. Well, things are not quite that simple.

Laws and regulations
I have thoroughly researched the effect that the promulgation and the enforcement of the National Road Traffic Act, 1996 (Act 93 of 1996)/Regulations/GNR.225 of March 2000, Regulation 2000/151, pending SANS 20013:2009 ECE R13:2008, Compulsory Specifications VC 8026 and VC 8065 and the related laws and specifications pertaining to vehicles in category 01 and 02 will have on towing horseboxes.

I have had interviews with the relevant parties involved in regulating and enforcing these laws and believe that I understand...
the implications and would like to share information with you.

If you are reading this article, you will probably be involved with horses in some way or at least have an interest in horses. You will then understand that in order to move a horse you need the following:

- A driver.
- A tow vehicle.
- A trailer.

The driver

You may have a valid driver's licence but in order to drive a tow vehicle towing a trailer with a gross vehicle mass (GVM) of more than 750 kg but less than 3 500 kg, you must have a valid category EB driver's licence. If you are still legal at this stage.

The tow vehicle

Most horseboxes are towed by a tow vehicle that falls within the category of a vehicle with a GVM of less than 3 500 kg.

Tow vehicles that fall within this category, capable of towing horseboxes, must by law inevitably have an unladen weight (tare) of as close to 2 500 kg as possible to be able to tow a two-horse box.

Inspect your tow vehicle, look at the licence disk and find the GVM and tare. Are you still within the bounds of the law?

The horsebox

You will probably have or make use of a two-horse box, as there is little difference in cost and it makes economic sense to buy the double.

However, the average horsebox that falls within this category has specifications with a GVM of around 2 500 kg and a tare of around 1 000 kg. If you have a horsebox, verify the information on your horsebox's licence disk.

Having now collected all the information we are ready to determine whether we are operating within the law.

Answer the following questions:

- Are you driving with a legal driver's licence?
- Does your tow vehicle conform to all the laws and regulations?
- Does your horsebox conform to the laws and regulations?
- Does your tow rig as a unit conform to the laws and regulations?

Duties and responsibilities

We need to understand that it is the owner's duty and responsibility to make sure that the above information relating to the GVM and tare of both vehicles, as they appear on the licensing disk is in fact correct. This information must reflect the information as it is indicated on the registration documents of the vehicles. Should there be any discrepancies it is and remains your responsibility to ensure that your licensing authority rectifies the documentation, which should be available from the manufacturer of the vehicle and/or horsebox.

You may have been towing your horses blissfully unaware of the legal implications. The enforceable law applicable in this situation states in Part II/151, 1(b)(ii): “It is illegal if the vehicle being towed exceeds the tare of the drawing vehicle unless the trailer is equipped with a parking brake and a service brake.”

Having said that, let's go back to the information pertaining to your situation. I will use my detail and check the boxes with you:

1. I have a licence with a category code EB without any restrictions.
2. The information of the vehicle I will be using, for argument sake, is a brand new Nissan Navara 4.0i V6 4x2 double cab as advertised. The GVM of this vehicle is indicated at 2 805 kilograms and licensing mass (tare) as 1 892 kg with a towing capacity of 2 000 kg.
3. The information I am going to use is that of a brand new two-berth Venter horsebox trailer as advertised. The indicated tare is 1 180 kg and the GVM is 2 800 kg.

Capacity issues

Normally, one would have hooked the trailer, boxed the horse of around 500 kg and thought you were acting as a responsible driver within the limits allowed. You would think you are under the towing capacity of the vehicle and well within the GVM range of the vehicle and trailer. However, this is no longer true and applicable, gauged against the present enforceable law. So what is wrong with this towing rig?

- The law dictates that should the GVM of the trailer (2 800 kg) exceed the tare (1 892 kg) of the tow vehicle, the trailer must be fitted with service brakes. Overrun brakes are not acceptable. Even if we install a service brake system on the trailer.
- The law further dictates that the manufactures approved gross combined mass (GCM) or vehicle tow limit of the complete towing rig must be conformed too.

And here we have an insurmountable problem.

The towing capacity of my tow vehicle is 2 000 kg and the GVM of my trailer is 2 800 kg. Don't think that the weight of the horsebox will be taken as the weight of the trailer plus the weight of the horse 1 180 kg plus 500 kg = 1 680 kg, which would be within the tow vehicle's limit.

Do the math

Before installing a service brake system to your trailer make the calculations on the complete rig. The accepted rule of thumb concerning responsible towing, is that the weight of your loaded trailer should not exceed the loaded weight of your tow vehicle.

The real challenge is therefore not so much the issue of having a service brake on your horsebox, but rather a combination of prerequisites that have to be adhered to, such as personal licensing, the best suitable tow vehicle and best suitable horsebox. Determine your need by identifying the appropriate horsebox for your needs and then the appropriate tow vehicle. The driver's licence is and remains the easiest to realign.

So what happened to Jo, you wonder? Unfortunately, he had to hire a carrier to move his beloved friend.

(References used in the research of the articles can be accessed on the internet, but a comprehensive list will be available through the editor)