



**FALMOUTH HARBOUR  
COMMISSIONERS**



**A GUIDE TO LAUNCHING AND  
RECOVERING BOATS FROM TRAILERS**

## **Use of Slipways - some hints and tips**

Many would-be trailer boaters are put off by the potential difficulties of launching and recovering a boat, their fears no doubt reinforced by watching some poor soul make a complete hash of putting his boat in the water in front of an appreciative crowd around the slipway. However launching and recovering does not have to be a stressful experience. The following tips will ensure a smooth start and finish to your day.

The first tip is to plan ahead. The slipway is your start and finish point of your journey and therefore needs to be just as much of your passage plan as any other part of the journey.

When you get to the slipway, park up out of the way and take a look around, don't be in a rush to get into the water. This will give the trailer wheel bearings a chance to cool down before going in the cold water. If not, the contraction of the warm air in the bearings will suck salt water deep into the bearings and cause serious long term damage. I always check the wheels on the trailer whenever we stop the car and if I have been using the brakes a lot, they can be hot to the touch. Now is a good time to sort out who will do what and where you are going to park the car and trailer and how will the person parking the car and trailer get onto the boat. Walk over to the slipway and have a look around. If someone else is launching, go down and have a look, you may pick up some useful tips.

Get everything ready before you get onto the ramp. Take off trailer board and prop bag. Remove safety straps off the rear of the boat if you use them. Take the outboard off the tilt support lever. Put all your gear into the boat, put the keys in the ignition and the kill cord in place. Check fuel and oil if necessary and prime the fuel pump, check the GPS and 'radio. In short, you should be ready to go to sea before you put your boat onto the ramp. One last check that everything is ready and only then head off to the ramp.

Reversing a trailer down the ramp is not something you can learn about in books, you just have to try it, but don't let a crowded ramp on a Sunday morning be your practice ground. Try reversing in an empty car park or driveway. If you have an off-road vehicle with low ratio, this is a good time to use it. Going slowly and not having to slip the clutch makes life a lot easier.

Reverse the trailer until the transom is in the water and, if you are a power boater, lower your engine and get it started. If there are any problems with the engine you can abort your trip without having to get your boat back onto the trailer. Assuming the engine is running fine, switch off and bring the engine back up. That way, if there are any unseen obstructions in the water you won't damage your engine when you launch.

Now you should be ready to launch and there are as many different ways to get a boat off a trailer as there are trailer boaters. The important thing is to use a method that is safe and that you feel comfortable with. What follows are methods that have worked well for me over the years launching a variety of boats off different trailers and the details will change for different boats and different trailers.

If you have a roller trailer, it should be possible to roll your boat off the trailer into the water, keeping your precious trailer wheel bearings out of the water.

As you may be launching into a cross current, a more controlled approach is best and you should lower your boat into the water by means of the trailer winch. In this case, keep the boat attached to the trailer winch and with one person pushing, the other can tower the boat on the winch. Once the boat is in the water, but being held with the winch, one person can get aboard, get the engine going and be ready to go. However, be extremely careful when using the trailer winch. If you lose your grip on the handle and it starts to spin, DO NOT try to catch it. You will not be able to stop it and more likely than not, you will end up with a broken wrist. Just let it run.

If your trailer does not have rollers, but has carpet bunk pads instead, a different technique is required. Get everything ready as before and take off all the trailer straps and either attach a long rope between boat and trailer or put someone in the boat. Then, starting with the trailer wheels just in the water, smartly reverse the car and trailer until the rear of the car is at the water's edge and hit the brakes. Your boat should glide off the trailer. If not, it is probably still attached to the trailer. You won't believe how many people attempt to launch a boat while it is still strapped onto the trailer!

To recover the boat on to a roller style trailer, reverse the trailer until the trailer wheels hubs are just above the water and slowly drive the boat up to the trailer arid, with the engine ticking over in forward gear, clip the trailer winch strop onto the boat. Turn the engine off and winch the boat onto the trailer. With a carpet type trailer, put the trailer deeper into the water and drive the boat onto the trailer. You may want to experiment with the best speed for your approach, but I have found that a couple of knots above tick- over speed is best for getting the boat onto a carpet style trailer. As soon as you have got the boat onto the trailer, attach a safety line in case the winch strop breaks. We use a length of chain with a snap shackle. Boats have rolled off the back of trailers as they are pulled up the ramp causing damage and injury. Park up away from the ramp and get your boat and trailer ready for the road.

**Extracts from “Successful launch and recovery makes for a great day out” with permission of Geoffrey Campbell, [www.boatlaunch.co.uk](http://www.boatlaunch.co.uk)**

## Do's & Don'ts

Do Plan Ahead. ✓

Do be sure that your car is capable of launching/ recovering your boat safely and that your trailer is fit for purpose. ✓

Do prepare your boat BEFORE reversing on to the slipway. ✓

Do keep to one side of the slipway to allow space for other users. ✓

Do ensure that your vehicle is in gear and its handbrake is on before leaving it to deal with your boat and trailer. ✓

Do check your engine works before you launch. ✓

Do be aware of other boats approaching the slipway. ✓

Do use the shore linked pontoon for boarding and landing passengers not involved with the launching operation ✓

Do be aware of commercial shipping when leaving the slipway area. ✓

Do abide by any instructions given by Harbour Staff. They are for your safety and convenience. ✓

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Do not allow unsupervised children or pets on to the slipway at any time. x

Do not stand behind the trailer whilst it is on the slip or the approach incline. x

Do not swim from the slipway or pontoons. x

Do not try and catch a winch handle which has spun out of control. x