

# Driving Licensing Requirements *for* Towing Trailers *in* Great Britain

This leaflet contains information about **changes in entitlement to tow trailers** which were required by the **Second EC Directive on the Driving Licence (91/439/EEC)**.



These changes came into effect on 1 January 1997.

## Important Note

### Construction and Use

This leaflet relates to driver licensing matters only. For details on Construction and Use requirements regarding weights and dimensions for trailers please contact:

Vehicle Standards Engineering (5) division,  
Department for Transport, Zone 2/01,  
Great Minster House,  
76 Marsham Street,  
London SW1P 4DR.

The telephone number is 020 7944 2064

### Maximum Authorised Mass (MAM)

Throughout this leaflet reference is made to the maximum authorised mass (MAM) of vehicles and trailers. This should be taken to mean the permissible maximum weight, also known as the gross vehicle weight.

## 1. Car Licences Held Before 1 January 1997

All drivers who passed a car test before 1 January 1997 retain their existing entitlement to tow trailers until their licence expires. This means they are generally entitled to drive a vehicle and trailer combination up to 8.25 tonnes MAM. They also have entitlement to drive a minibus with a trailer over 750kg MAM.





Drivers who hold subcategory C1+E

– limited to 8.25 tonnes

MAM, may  
apply for  
provisional  
entitlement to the  
new subcategory

C1+E, in order to take and pass the test which will increase their combined vehicle and trailer entitlement to 12 tonnes MAM. It is not necessary to gain subcategory C1 entitlement first but drivers have to meet higher medical standards, and pass both the category C theory test and the subcategory C1+E practical test.

## **Large Goods Vehicle and Passenger Carrying Vehicle Licences Held Before 1 January 1997**

Since 1 January 1997 all drivers who hold category C or D entitlement have been limited to trailers up to 750kg MAM; Category C+E or D+E must be held in order to tow trailers in excess of this.

## **2. Car Driving Licence First Obtained Since 1 January 1997**

Drivers who passed a car test on or after 1 January 1997 are required to pass an additional driving test in order to gain entitlement to category B+E and all larger vehicles. In addition to the new driving tests, drivers of vehicles which fall within subcategories C1, C1+E, D1 and D1+E also have to meet higher medical standards.

### **Category B – Vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes MAM and with up to 8 passenger seats.**

Category B vehicles may be coupled with a trailer up to 750kg MAM (allowing a combined weight up to 4.25 tonnes MAM) OR a trailer over 750kg MAM provided the MAM of the trailer does not exceed the unladen weight of the towing vehicle, and the combination does not exceed 3.5 tonnes MAM.

For example:

- (i) a vehicle with an unladen weight of 1.25 tonnes and a MAM of 2 tonnes coupled with a trailer with a MAM of 1.25 tonnes could be driven by the holder of a category B entitlement. This is because the MAM of the combination does not exceed 3.5 tonnes and also the MAM of the trailer does not exceed the unladen weight of the drawing vehicle.

Whereas

- (ii) the same vehicle with an unladen weight of 1.25 tonnes and a MAM of 2 tonnes when coupled with a trailer with a MAM of 1.5 tonnes would fall within category B+E. This is because although the combined weight of the vehicle and trailer is within the 3.5 tonnes MAM limit, the MAM of the trailer is more than the unladen weight of the drawing vehicle.

Vehicle manufacturers normally recommend a maximum weight of trailer appropriate to their vehicle. Details can usually be found in the vehicle's handbook or obtained from car dealerships. The size of trailer recommended for an average family car with an unladen weight of around 1 tonne would be well within the new category B threshold.

As for towing caravans, existing general guidance recommends that the laden weight of the caravan does not exceed 85% of the unladen weight of the car. In the majority of cases, caravans and small trailers towed by cars should be within the new category B threshold.

*Note – An exemption exists that allows a full category B licence holder (other than category B1 or B1 invalid carriages) to drive a vehicle of a class included in category B + E where –*

- a) the trailer consists of a vehicle which is damaged or defective and is likely to represent a road safety hazard or obstruction to other road users,*
- b) the vehicle is driven only so far as is reasonably necessary in the circumstances to remove the hazard or obstruction, and*
- c) he receives no consideration for driving the vehicle.*

By passing a category B test National Categories F (tractor), K (pedestrian controlled vehicle) and P (moped) continue to be added automatically.

### **Category B+E – Vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes MAM towing trailers over 750kg MAM**

Category B+E allows vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes MAM to be combined with trailers in excess of 750kg MAM. In order to gain this entitlement new category B licence holders have to pass a further practical test for category B+E. There is no category B+E theory test. For driver licensing purposes there are no vehicle/trailer weight ratio limits for category B+E.

### **Subcategory C1 – Medium sized goods vehicles 3.5 – 7.5 tonnes MAM**

Subcategory C1 vehicles may be coupled with a trailer up to 750kg MAM allowing a combination of up to 8.25 tonnes MAM. But unlike category B, the 750kg MAM trailer weight limit is an absolute limit.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to meet higher medical standards and pass both theory and practical tests for subcategory C1.

### **Subcategory C1+E – Medium sized goods vehicles 3.5 – 7.5 tonnes MAM plus trailer over 750kg MAM**

Subcategory C1+E allows vehicles to be combined with a trailer over 750kg MAM provided the combination does not exceed 12 tonnes MAM and the laden weight of the trailer does not exceed the unladen weight of the towing vehicle.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass further tests – subcategory C1 (theory and practical) followed by C1+E practical. There is no subcategory C1+E theory test. It will not be possible to go directly from category B to subcategory C1+E.

*Note – Because EC Regulations limit drivers aged under 21 years to driving vehicles or combinations which weigh no more than 7.5 tonnes MAM, drivers under the age of 21 are not allowed to drive subcategory C1+E vehicles up to 12 tonnes MAM. But 18 year old drivers are allowed to take a test for subcategory C1+E which will allow trailers in excess of 750kg MAM to be towed.*

*Entitlement is limited to a combination weight of 7.5 tonnes MAM until the driver reaches 21 years, at which time the balance of 12 tonnes MAM entitlement automatically becomes effective.*

### **Subcategory D1 – Passenger carrying vehicles 9 – 16 passenger seats**

Subcategory D1 vehicles may be coupled with a trailer up to 750kg MAM. There is no upper weight limit for subcategory D1 vehicles.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to meet higher medical standards and pass both theory and practical tests for subcategory D1.

### **Subcategory D1+E – Passenger carrying vehicles 9-16 passenger seats with trailer above 750kg MAM.**

Subcategory D1+E vehicles may be combined with trailers over 750kg provided the combination does not exceed 12 tonnes MAM and the laden weight of the trailer does not exceed the unladen weight of the towing vehicle. The trailer must not be used for the carriage of passengers.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass further tests – subcategory D1 (theory and practical) followed by D1+E practical . There is no subcategory D1+E theory test. It is not possible to go directly from category B subcategory to D1+E.

### **Category C – Large goods vehicles above 3.5 tonnes MAM**

Category C vehicles may be combined with trailers up to 750kg MAM. The Directive does not impose an upper weight limit threshold for category C vehicles and the national limits will apply.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass theory and practical tests for category C. *(It is not necessary to gain subcategory C1 entitlement first.)*

### **Category C+E – Large goods vehicles above 3.5 tonnes MAM towing trailer over 750kg MAM**

Category C+E vehicles may be combined with a trailer over 750kg MAM. The Directive does not impose an upper weight limit for category C+E and national limits apply.



In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass further tests – category C (theory

and practical) followed by C+E practical. There is no category C+E theory test. *(It is not necessary to gain subcategory C1 or C1+E entitlement first.)*

### **Category D – Passenger carrying vehicle with more than 8 seats**

Category D vehicles may be combined with a trailer up to 750kg MAM. The Directive does not impose an upper weight limit for category D vehicles and national limits apply.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass theory and practical tests for category D. *(It is not necessary to gain subcategory D1 entitlement first.)*

### **Category D+E – Passenger carrying vehicle with more than 8 seats with trailer over 750kg MAM**

Category D+E vehicles may be combined with a trailer over 750kg MAM. The Directive does not impose an upper weight limit for category D+E and national limits apply.

In order to gain this entitlement category B licence holders have to pass further tests – category D (theory and practical) followed by D+E practical. There is no category D+E theory test. *(It is not necessary to gain subcategory D1 or D1+E entitlement first.)*

## **3. Upgrading Entitlement for Trailers**

In general, an additional driving test is required for each category or subcategory of entitlement. But there are certain exceptions to this where drivers have already passed one test which involves trailer entitlement for a larger or equivalent sized vehicle.

This means that passing a test for subcategory C1+E or D1+E upgrades category B entitlement to B+E.

A test pass for subcategory C1+E upgrades subcategory D1, if held, to D1+E. But a test pass for subcategory D1+E does not upgrade subcategory C1 to C1+E because the trailer size required for a subcategory D1+E test is smaller than that required for a subcategory C1+E test.

Passing a test for category C+E upgrades category B entitlement to B+E and also confers entitlement to subcategory C1 and C1+E and, if category D or subcategory D1 is held, these are upgraded to category D+E or subcategory D1+E.

A test passed for category D+E upgrades category B and subcategory D1 to category B+E and subcategory D1+E respectively. But it does not upgrade category C or subcategory C1 entitlements because the trailer size required for a category D+E test is smaller than that required for a category C+E or subcategory C1+E test.

For details of driving tests please contact the Driving Standards Agency at the address and telephone number provided at the end of this fact sheet.

## 4. Provisional Trailer Entitlement

Since 1 January 1997 drivers are no longer able to sit a test in a heavy vehicle/trailer combination (e.g. category C+E or D+E) unless they have first passed a test and obtained a full licence in the corresponding rigid vehicle (e.g. category C or D).

This means that although drivers may have been driving a vehicle and trailer combination legitimately, under "L" plates, they are not permitted to sit a trailer test using such a combination until a test has been passed in a rigid vehicle and a full licence obtained for that category.

### About This Leaflet

This information supersedes that contained in previous leaflets issued by DVLA. It is not intended to be a definitive statement of law but provides details of recent changes.

Other leaflets deal with the driving of minibuses, renewal of car licences, minimum test vehicle requirements, special large vehicles, motorcycles and the rules for driving in GB as a visitor or new resident.

Further information on driver licensing issues may be obtained from DVLA's Customer Enquiries. The telephone number is 0870 240 0009 and the lines are open between 8.00am to 8.30pm, Monday to Friday and 8.00am to 5.30pm on Saturday.

You will be answered by an interactive VOICE system but will be able to speak to an operator during office hours. Some calls are monitored or recorded for quality purposes. Alternatively our e-mail address is [drivers.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk](mailto:drivers.dvla@gtnet.gov.uk) or fax 01792 783071. Minicom users should ring 01792 782787.

**Further information on driving tests or minimum test vehicle requirements only, may be obtained from the:**

*Customer Services Unit,  
Driving Standards Agency,  
Third Floor, Stanley House,  
58 Talbot Street,  
Nottingham, NG1 5GU.*

*The telephone number is 0115 901 2515/6*

**If you have changed your name, address or vehicle,  
please notify DVLA immediately.  
Failure to do this could cost you a £1,000 fine.**

