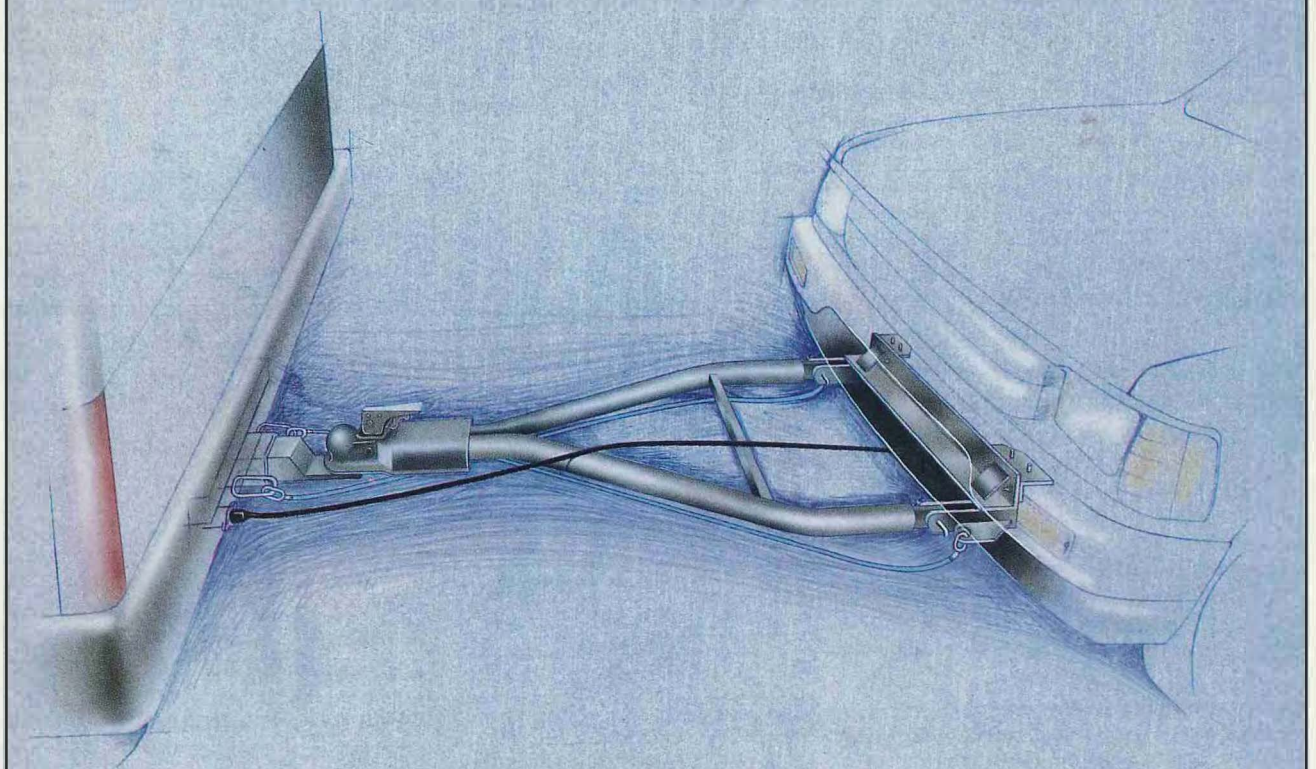


Dinghy Towing '92



Toyota changes directions, Honda is on hold,
but Nissan continues its upbeat position

Brian Robertson

Although towing a small vehicle behind a motorhome seems like a relatively simple procedure, choosing the right car, truck or sport-utility vehicle for towing on all four wheels can be confusing. Manufacturers tend to change directions frequently, making it difficult for prospective buyers to know whether a car can be towed without damaging the drivetrain and/or affecting warranty coverage.

This year, Toyota, a company that has always given the green light for towing the majority of its small cars, has done an about-face and

nixed towing. The company cited liability reasons for the decision affecting 1992 models. A company spokesperson said that it's possible Toyota will issue a mid-year bulletin with a change of heart, after evaluating the situation.

On the plus side, Nissan Motors has stepped in with very positive news regarding its '92 models. The company's entire manual-transmission line of autos and trucks is approved for dinghy towing. After many years of restricting the practice of towing cars behind motorhomes, Nissan issued technical bulletins NTB91-061 and

NTB90-004— approving of dinghy towing—covering 1987 through 1991 models, and, according to Nissan spokesman Jim Wayland, the bulletins also apply to the 1992 models, even though some of the company's manuals may state otherwise.

Nissan's Sentra and Stanza are popular for towing because they offer good fuel economy, are lightweight and can be purchased at reasonable prices. The Maxima will fill the luxury niche, while the 240SX will satisfy those who are in a sporty mood. If you are really

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MOTORHOME'S TOWED-VEHICLE GUIDE – 1992

CARS

Manufacturer/ Model Name	Curb Weight	Speed/ Distance Limits	Manual Transmission	Automatic Transmission	EPA City/ Highway	Base Retail*
CHRYSLER						
LeBaron	2991	none	yes	no	20/27	\$16,801
DODGE						
Daytona	2777	none	yes	no	24/34	\$10,897
Shadow	2615	none	yes	no	24/34	\$ 7,999
Spirit	2801	none	yes	no	20/27	\$11,176
FORD/MERCURY						
Escort	2287	55/none	yes	no	29/36	\$ 8,425
Festiva	1797	55/none	yes	no	35/42	\$ 6,995
Taurus/Sable	3049	55/none	yes	no	18/26	\$14,229
Tempo/Topaz	2529	55/none	yes	no	21/29	\$ 8,629
GEO						
Metro	1620	55/none	yes	no	45/50	\$ 7,250
MITSUBISHI						
Galant	2667	none	yes	no	21/27	\$12,049
NISSAN						
Maxima	3029	70/500	yes	no	20/26	\$19,875
Sentra	2266	70/500	yes	no	29/39	\$ 8,350
Stanza	2788	70/500	yes	no	22/29	\$12,780
240 SX	2657	70/500	yes	no	22/28	\$14,295
300 ZX	3313	60/200	yes	no	18/24	\$28,675
PLYMOUTH						
Acclaim	2789	none	yes	no	24/34	\$11,245
Sundance	2617	none	yes	no	24/34	\$ 7,999
SUZUKI						
Swift Hatchback	1870	55/none	yes	no	39/43	\$ 6,899
Swift Sedan	1720	55/none	yes	no	39/43	\$ 7,699
TRUCKS, SPORT-UTILITY VEHICLES/VANS						
DODGE						
Dakota 4 × 4	3450	none	yes	yes	21/27	\$ 8,683
D-Series 4 × 4	4250	none	yes	yes	16/21	\$10,672
Ramcharger 4 × 4	4265	none	yes	yes	12/16	\$16,789
FORD						
Bronco 4 × 4	5000	none	yes***	yes***	14/18	\$17,999
Explorer 4 × 4	3780	none	yes***	yes***	16/20	\$18,505
F-150 4 × 4	4010	none	yes***	yes***	13/15	\$14,689
Ranger 4 × 4	3120	none	yes***	yes***	18/22	\$12,279
GEO						
Tracker	2567	55/200	yes**	yes**	25/27	\$11,785
JEEP						
Cherokee 4 × 4	3028	none	yes	yes	15/20	\$13,960
Comanche	3175	none	yes	yes, 4 × 4 only	15/21	\$ 8,867
Grand Cherokee	3628	none	yes	yes	15/20	n/a
Wrangler	3080	none	yes	yes	17/22	\$10,199
MAZDA						
Navajo	3780	none	yes***	yes***	16/20	\$18,505
MITSUBISHI						
Mighty Max	3050	none	yes	no	19/23	\$ 7,979
NISSAN						
2WD pickups	3000	60/200	yes	no	21/26	\$ 8,630
4 × 4 pickups	3475	60/500	yes	no	19/22	\$11,780
Pathfinder	3520	60/500	yes	no	15/18	\$19,320
SUZUKI						
Samurai	2465	55/200	yes**	yes**	28/29	\$ 6,299
Sidekick 4 × 4	2567	55/200	yes**	yes**	24/26	\$11,999

* Price without options

** After 200 miles, operate engine 2 minutes w/manual transmission in 2nd, automatic transmission in D

*** With manual locking hub option only

their toll on the fuel economy (as low as 7.99 mpg) we were able to cruise the flat terrain and record almost 10 mpg. Mileage with and without the Explorer in tow didn't seem to change. With the 90-gallon fuel tank, driving range is pretty decent.

Although the Safari was slow in the mountains, overall driveability was good. For the most part, the Cummins diesel felt like it was doing a good job on most highways. The coach is fun to drive and is exceptionally quiet up front. Since the coach lives as good as it drives, the \$112,000 price tag is a good value, considering the available features. □

*Safari Motor Coaches Incorporated,
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feeling your oats, the hot 300ZX is available as a tag-along, although prospective owners may have trouble finding ready-made tow bar and baseplate equipment.

The pickup and sport-utility line includes 2WD and 4WD models that can be towed without drivetrain modifications. The company's Pathfinder is its sport-utility offering, and it tracks nicely behind a motorhome. Nissan has a 500-mile distance limit for all of its cars and trucks (vehicle should be driven briefly at that interval); the 300ZX and 2WD pickups have 200-mile limits.

Honda, of course, continues to be questionable. Even though company engineers have assured us in the past that towing on all four wheels, even with automatic transmissions, is an acceptable practice, the company refuses to put it in writing. Therefore, we must regard Hondas as unsuitable for towing, except on a dolly or with drivetrain modifications. Although many owners tow Hondas on all four wheels without problems, prospective buyers should be aware of

possible warranty problems if a mechanical problem can be attributed to towing.

Chrysler/Dodge/Plymouth

Chrysler Corporation has always supported recreational towing, and offers an exciting line of towable cars, equipped with manual transmissions, for 1992. The only model wearing the Chrysler emblem that's able to tag along on all four wheels, however, is the LeBaron. Three Dodge models are approved: the Daytona, Shadow and Spirit. The Daytona is a sporty 2-door, which is high on performance and equipped with a variable suspension that allows the driver to select the degree of stiffness. The Shadow is available in either 2- or 4-door and should appeal to many with its low base price and high EPA fuel-economy ratings. The Spirit is a relatively economical intermediate-sized 4-door that will seat six passengers.

Plymouth's Acclaim is the sibling of the Dodge Spirit, while the Sundance is cousin to the Dodge Shadow.

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DINGHY TOWING '92

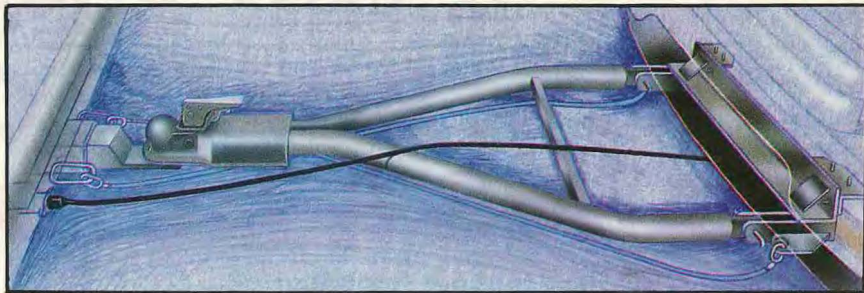
If you prefer towing a pickup, Dodge's Dakota has Chrysler's blessing for towing. A midsize truck, it is the only pickup in its class with an available V-8 engine. The Dakota is towable only if it's equipped with four-wheel drive. Dodge's full-size pickups and the sport-utility Ramcharger are also towable when outfitted with four-wheel drive, although they are very heavy—suited only for towing behind big diesel pushers with high gross combination weight ratings.

Ford/Mercury

Ford offers the broadest line of towable cars, trucks and sport-utilities. The ever-popular Escort heads the list. The Escort has always been one of the most popular towed cars, but after Ford redesigned it in 1991 it was tagged as unsuitable for towing until the company issued a bulletin stating otherwise. The 1992 models, equipped with manual transmissions, continue to be approved for dinghy towing without drivetrain modifications.

Among super-lightweight, economical cars, the manual-transmission Festiva is a prime candidate. It was listed as towable for the first time in 1991. For a bit more room than Festiva, take a look at the Ford Tempo and its sister car, Mercury Topaz.

More luxury in a towed car can be found in the Taurus/Sable, but since Ford/Mercury cars are tow-



able only if equipped with manual transmissions and dealers normally order the Taurus/Sable with automatics, you may have trouble finding this model.

Four-wheel-drive Ford Explorers and Ranger pickups continue as two of the few vehicles under 4000 pounds that can be towed with automatic or manual transmissions. As in previous years, these vehicles can be towed only when they are equipped with manual locking hub option.

New instructions found in the 1992 Explorer sport-utility and Ranger pickup manuals describe a method for towing with Ford's electric shift transfer case. Ford states that you can remove the rear drive shaft and tow with all four wheels on the ground. When at camp, the owner can engage the transfer case in 4WD mode and drive the vehicle for limited distances. This method allows the vehicle to operate in front-wheel drive as long as the rear driveshaft has not been recon-

nected. Ford specifically recommends that operation is limited to good roads with a maximum speed of 35 miles per hour and 50 miles distance—good enough to unhook and park the vehicle and run to the campground store. The company also recommends against quick acceleration and driving on steep grades with the rear driveshaft disconnected.

Mazda offers a 2-door version of the Explorer under its nameplate that can also be towed. It's called the Navajo and has the same requirements as the Explorer.

If you're considering a larger four-wheel-drive sport-utility vehicle or pickup to tow, Ford offers a good selection with either automatic or manual transmissions. Towable models include the full-size Bronco and F-150 pickup, although they are on the heavy side and should only be considered if your motorhome is a large diesel with plenty of towing capacity. As with the Explorer and Ranger, these models must be equipped with four-wheel drive and manual locking hub option.

Geo

Geo models are marketed by General Motors and are the only GM vehicles approved for towing. The Tracker is built by Suzuki and is identical to the Sidekick. Towing recommendations for the Tracker also apply to the Sidekick. The Geo Metro is the economy champ for 1992. It uses a 3-cylinder engine, it's lightweight and yields 50 mpg on the highway. It's also built for GM by Suzuki, and is towable with a manual transmission.

Jeep

Jeep (division of Chrysler) features a lineup of three fully approved models for 1992. The Wrangler is Jeep's smallest sport-utility vehicle and a popular tag-along because of its light weight and all-terrain capability. It's a

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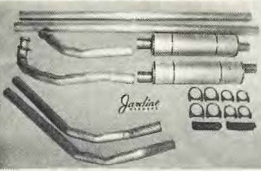
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good choice for sportsmen who desire to traverse the backcountry once the motorhome is parked. It can be towed with either manual or automatic transmission.

The Cherokee is available in 2- or 4-door models and it can be towed on all fours equipped with either automatic or manual transmission. Jeep's pickup offering, the Comanche, can be towed with automatic or manual transmissions when equipped with 4WD or manual transmission in 2WD models.

Jeep's owners manuals are written in clear, concise language and take the reader through step-by-step procedures needed to prepare the vehicle for towing.

Suzuki and Mitsubishi

Suzuki offers several vehicles that are factory-approved for towing. In the automotive line, the Swift is available in either a sedan or hatchback model, and is towable with manual transmission. Both are very lightweight, sport high EPA fuel economy figures and are relatively inexpensive.

For those who want more versatility, Suzuki offers the Samurai and aforementioned Sidekick in 4WD sport-utility configurations. Both of these are lightweight reasonably priced units, with the Sidekick being a bit more luxurious. The Sidekick is available—and towable—with automatic or manual transmission. Suzuki does stipulate that these vehicles be equipped with manual-locking front hubs and that the owner stop every 200 miles, start the engine and put the transmission in gear for one minute in order to circulate oil in the transfer case.

Another Japanese company, Mitsubishi, offers a couple of vehicles than can be towed dinghy-style. The Galant passenger car and the Mighty Max compact pickup truck can be towed on all four wheels, as long as they are equipped with manual transmissions.

The accompanying list of towing recommendations reflect those written in the owners manuals for 1992 models. The few exceptions are those found in bulletins issued by manufacturers. No questions should be raised by dealers regarding warranty coverage and/or drivetrain damage for the vehicles listed in the accompanying towing recommendations. □