Safety Alert - trailer oscillations when towing

Recently an accident occurred in which a trailer went into oscillations causing the towing vehicle to overturn. The vehicle and trailer became separated and the boats were damaged. Luckily there were no fatalities, and whilst the vehicle's passengers were unharmed, the driver suffered injuries that required hospitalisation. Thankfully the driver has since made a full recovery.

Prevention

Having a driver trained to tow trailers will help to reduce this risk.

Actions to make "snaking" less likely include ensuring that:

- the trailer is loaded correctly so that there is sufficient weight on the towing hitch (about 7% of the loaded trailer weight should be supported on the towing hitch)
- there is uniform side to side weight distribution on the trailer
- the trailer is not overloaded
- the loads are securely strapped to the trailer
- trailer brakes (if fitted) are working correctly
- trailer tyre pressures are correct
- trailer tyres are in good condition
- centre of gravity of the load is as low as possible

Fitting a proprietary anti-sway device can help but it cannot compensate for a badly loaded or badly maintained trailer. It is also important that the breakaway cable is properly set.

Once snaking has started due to the vehicle-trailer combination being unstable, it can be difficult or impossible to control. The following may help in the event of mild oscillations:

- lift off the accelerator and allow the vehicle to slow to a stop
- do not brake to reduce speed rapidly. If you have to brake then do so very gently
- try to keep the vehicle in a safe position on the road but…
- do not attempt to steer to compensate for the movement of the trailer

Review the Trailer Towing guidance in Row How at http://www.rowhow.org/course/view.php?id=108

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