

Trailer Essentials for Etchells

When buying an Etchells, not a lot of thought goes into the trailer. Here is a list of considerations that everyone should be aware of.

Proper boat storage between races can eliminate a lot of problems and make life a lot simpler.

- Always store the boat with the hitch down low. This assures proper draining of the boat and eliminates a build up of water that “soaks” around the keelson.
- Trailer jacks; spend the bucks for the best. Get a jack/tire that has a rubber tread on the wheel. Makes moving ‘on the hard’ a lot easier. If it is not feasible, lower the tongue of the trailer onto a cement block taking load off the plastic wheel. This will prevent a flat spot from developing on the wheel making movement by hand impossible!
- Drain plug extension...if your drain plug is “captive”, and cannot be physically removed from the boat, cut it off (get spares because you will lose it!). Install a 6” pipe nipple or hose barb with 6” of hose so drain water will not stain the side of the keel.
- Rig tension is usually wound-up for most regattas. This puts a stress load on the hull. Back off on the shrouds after races.

Moving in the parking lot, has it’s own hazards. Here are few details to remember.

- Vehicle tailgate; avoid the temptation to leave it down while moving in the parking lot. When the vehicle goes up/down a ramp, the tailgate will scrape on the trailer tongue.
- Tire pressure; *Buy a 12V inflator! It will be the best investment you make.*
- Watch you mast! I have seen two masts come down as a result of trees! The same holds true for shrouds. Because most boats are towed backwards, tree branches hitting shrouds can pull the spreader brackets away from the mast.
- Understand how surge brakes work. If you back up a hill, they want to engage. There is a hole in the hitch to place a bolt (or socket extension) through to enable the brakes.

Getting ready for a road trip? Taking your boat to another territory for a regatta is extremely rewarding. New competition, new friends and overall better skills are the result. Here are some helpful hints to make the trip easier and as everyone knows, good preparation results in fewer fatalities!

- Once the rig is down, remove the shrouds. This does two things. First, you can inspect all clevis pins and keepers as well as the shrouds themselves. Buy plastic tie wraps (usually in the electrical department)...easy way to keep them coiled and protected. Second, this keeps the shrouds from beating up the mast but mostly it protects the deck. No matter how hard you try to secure them, they will come loose and chafe on the deck.
- Pull the halyards to the top of the mast. Keeps wire and rope sections from beating up the mast.
- Two bolts and the spreaders are off! One heck of a lot easier than cleaning the bugs off! On older boats, the spreaders may be foamed in to take up slop. If so, leave them on and grease up the spreaders to make bug removal easier.
- Once I removed my masthead fly and to protect it, placed it by itself on the dash board. The heat through the windshield melted it and it took on a permanent curve! *Buy a spare!*
- Use an old jib bag to cover the leading end of the mast. Store your halyards in side and it keeps the bugs out! For the trailing end, get your local sail maker to make up a heavy red canvas cover and put reflective tape on it. *You’ll understand why the first time a tractor trailer pulls up behind you!*

- While going down the road, the one item that will keep popping into your mind...“Is the mast secure?”. Since you can’t see it while driving, don’t trust anyone to secure it. Do it yourself!
- Hold down straps done properly are a big bonus. First, get the ratchet portion to mount as close to the trailer as possible. This keeps it from beating against the hull. Do this by either shortening the strap or looping it through the clip/bracket on the trailer and attaching it back to the ratchet. Next, on some occasions, the straps will “flutter” while driving down the road. This will cause the strap to work its way right through the clip and eventually saw through it. Putting a twist in the strap usually gets rid of this.
- Some use a retainer or hold back strap that goes around the keel to keep the boat from lurching forward on “crash stops”. It is a fact, even without emergency stops, that the boat will work its way forward. These hold back straps, if they get tight enough, can damage the trailing edge of the keel. If you use one, keep it loose and for emergencies only! Keep in mind that it will move so give it room to do so.
- Road debris can damage your most important foil, the keel. Some wrap it and some have custom covers built. Try a heavy-duty screen mounted between the frame of the trailer. *Also a great place to dry out sheets, etc!*
- The rudder is one of the biggest concerns. It “flutters” and works while driving down the road. First, do a first-rate job at tying off your tiller. This will stop most rudder flutter. Second, take a length of 6” PVC and rip it in half (lengthwise). Mount it just aft of the rudder between the two stern supports of the trailer. Make it adjustable and easy to remove. *Remember, the boat will move and close the gap between the rudder and the deflector!*
- Brakes, bearings and lights? Since most boats don’t travel frequently, the bearings, brakes and lights are an unknown quantity until they fail. Strong suggestion...drop the boat in the water and take the trailer to a reputable shop and have them go through it!
- Tires...big category! There is no doubt that most “road stories” come from this category. When they fail (and oh do they fail!) it is sidewall failure. A result of too much load and stress induced by heat. The belts separate and when they come apart, mass damage to fenders, lights, tags and flying steel belts can also damage the keel/hull. ***It is important to note that when this occurs, the boats track nicely and does not go “out of control”.*** The tires on 15” wheels on the single axle trailers are basically at their limit. Here is input from Goodyear’s engineering department. First, forget hot versus cold air pressure. If you were filling a steel vessel, then it would be important. But you are not...it’s rubber so when the air gets hot and expands, so does the rubber tire. Air pressure remains essentially the same. So, hot or cold, fill it to the max! Why the max? For every one-psi you are off the max, you have reduced the load carrying capability by 10 lbs per tire. Filling to only 55psi reduces your load capability by 200 pounds! Also understand that with increased speed and hot road conditions, the stress loads do not increase arithmetically. It is geometric. Going from 30 to 40mph has insignificant changes. Going from 65 to 75mph significantly changes the loading on the tires. If you travel at 65mph, you will probably never see a problem. However, that all changes at 75mph! So what do you do if you are a “high speed” road warrior? Maximum air pressure; keep out of potholes and for the faint at heart, don’t look in your side view mirror at the tires! The sidewalls do pump and it is understandable why they fail. It is not uncommon to expect 1500 to 3000 miles out of a set of tires. We understand that Goodyear has changed the design and hopefully, this will increase the life.
- Soap up the transom (rear towing boats) and let it dry and cake on. A lot easier to get those small road kills off!

- **Always** pack some short pieces of 2 x 6 boards. Not just to block the wheels but you may need them under the car tires to elevate the vehicle to get the trailer off...*don't ask why, it just happens!*
- **Please** check your lug wrench on your vehicle and make sure it fits the lug nuts on the trailer.
- **Flash light, flash light, flash light, flash light, flash light, flash light, flash light**

Traveling on the road with the boat in tow is amazingly easy! You will be pleasantly surprised how well Etchells tow. In fact, after an hour or so, you can even forget it is there! Remember, mast, hull, rigging and safety gear is only about 3700 pounds and 2200 of it is in the keel. Over 60% of the weight is down low. As a result, it trailers great and you can easily find your speed creeping up. So be aware and remember the following:

- Have surge brakes? Give yourself lots of room to stop. **Epecially in town with traffic lights.**
- The mast tip extends a good 5-7 feet beyond the hull and when you turn, it creates a wide sweep. More than one convenience store sign has been destroyed as a result! When in close quarters and maneuvering, have someone outside calling the clearance.
- Backing into a parking place? Remember the mast tip! Sometimes you will have the mast tip overlapping a tree or fence in a parking lot. Remember, when you jack it up off the hitch, that tip moves considerably.
- Check everything after the first few miles. Stop and check the hitch, straps and bearings. Every stop, check these again and pay particular attention to the bearings as well as the boat location assuring it has not moved too far forward. If bearings were not properly greased or with the wrong grease, they can overheat. Always keep an eye on the hitch and the ball making sure it is secure. More often than not, sailors don't travel with tools large enough to tighten the ball. *Make sure you are not one of them!*
- Have sail boxes on your trailer? At high speed, even locked shut, the lids will want to lift off. Tie a line and around them to better secure them. It also keeps rain out!

All of these items (and more) are not “adders” to your “get ready” list. They are items that have to be done anyway. When you understand the consequences, you are more apt to do them right the first time! Take the time and be prepared...be prepared to have fun!