

DINGHY-TOWING SPECIAL

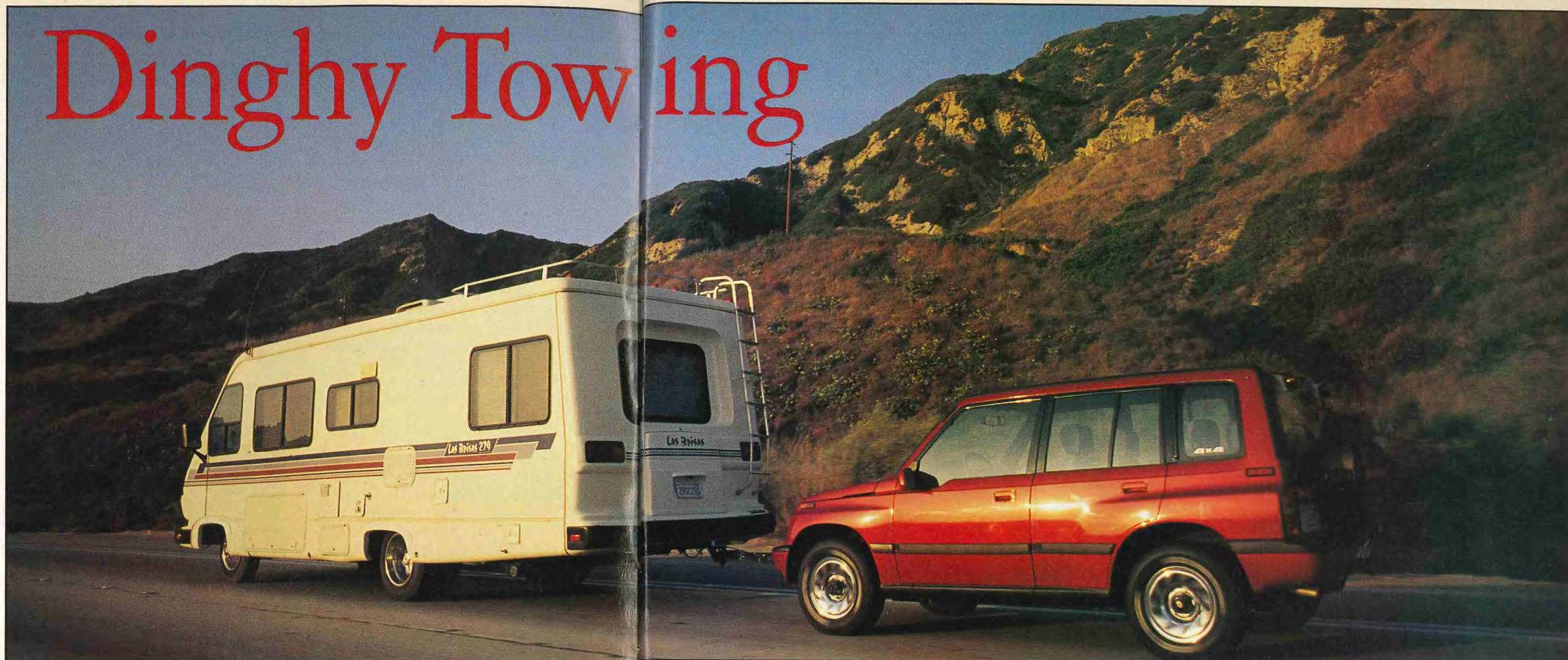


The popular Saturn is approved, and Chevy/GMC return their compact sport-utilities to the 'OK' list

Brian Robertson

Towing a vehicle behind a motorhome—"dinghy" towing—is more popular than ever, and the 1993 model year brings some exciting changes, primarily in the variety of vehicles that are approved by their manufacturers for this very specialized use.

As always, some vehicles that are widely believed to be towable are classified by their manufacturers as not suitable. But the ranks of approved vehicles have grown with the recent addition of Saturn cars to the "yes" category and, a few months



Dinghy Towing

1993 TOWED-VEHICLE GUIDE

CARS

Manufacturer	Curb Weight	Speed/Distance Limits	Manual Transmission	Automatic Transmission	EPA MPG City/Hwy	Base Retail*
CHRYSLER						
LeBaron	2863	none	yes	no	19/28	\$13,999
DODGE						
Colt	2085	none	yes	no	32/40	\$8,976
Daytona	2779	none	yes	no	24/34	\$10,874
Shadow	2613	none	yes	no	24/34	\$8,397
Spirit	2788	none	yes	no	20/27	\$11,941
EAGLE						
Summit	2085	none	yes	no	32/40	\$8,274
FORD/MERCURY						
Escort	2323	55/none	yes	no	30/37	\$8,355
Festiva	1797	55/none	yes	no	35/42	\$6,941
Probe	2815	55/none	yes	no	21/26	\$12,845
Sable	3084	55/none	yes	no	21/30	\$17,349
Taurus	3084	55/none	yes	no	18/26	\$15,491
Tempo	2532	55/none	yes	no	24/33	\$10,267
Topaz	2532	55/none	yes	no	24/33	\$10,801
Tracer	2356	55/none	yes	no	30/37	\$8,577
GEO						
Metro	1621	55/none	yes	no	41/46	\$7,250

* Price without options

1993 TOWED-VEHICLE GUIDE

CARS

Manufacturer	Curb Weight	Speed/Distance Limits	Manual Transmission	Automatic Transmission	EPA MPG City/Hwy	Base Retail*
NISSAN						
Maxima	3129	70/500	yes	no	21/26	\$20,960
Sentra	2266	70/500	yes	no	29/38	\$8,715
Stanza	2788	70/500	yes	no	24/30	\$12,780
240 SX	2699	70/500	yes	no	22/28	\$14,755
300 ZX	3313	60/200	yes	no	18/24	\$30,095
PLYMOUTH						
Acclaim	2784	none	yes	no	25/32	\$11,941
Sundance/Duster	2613	none	yes	no	27/32	\$8,397
SATURN						
SC1 coupe	2304	65/none	yes	yes	28/37	\$10,995
SC2 coupe	2388	65/none	yes	yes	24/35	\$12,795
SL 4-door	2320	65/none	yes	yes	24/33	\$9,195
SL1 4-door	2323	65/none	yes	yes	24/35	\$9,995
SL2 4-door	2423	65/none	yes	yes	26/36	\$11,495
SW1 wagon	2367	65/none	yes	yes	28/37	\$10,895
SW2 wagon	2467	65/none	yes	yes	24/35	\$12,195
SUZUKI						
Swift Hatchback	1936	55/none	yes	no	39/43	\$6,899
Swift Sedan	1779	55/none	yes	no	39/43	\$7,699

* Price without options

1993 TOWED-VEHICLE GUIDE

SPORT-UTILITIES/PICKUPS/VANS

Manufacturer	Curb Weight	Speed/Distance Limits	Manual Transmission	Automatic Transmission	EPA MPG City/Hwy	Base Retail*
CHEVROLET						
S-10 Blazer 4x4	3219	none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	16/21	\$13,944
S-10 Pickup 4x4	3262	none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	16/21	\$9,858
DODGE						
Caravan FWD	3275	none	yes	no	17/22	\$14,501
Dakota	3653	none	yes, 4x4 only	yes, 4x4 only	15/19	\$9,384
D-Series Ram	3944	none	yes, 4x4 only	yes, 4x4 only	13/17	\$10,672
Ram 50	2585	none	yes	no	19/22	\$8,892
Ramcharger	4616	none	yes, 4x4 only	yes, 4x4 only	13/16	\$16,789
FORD						
Aerostar 4x4	3476	55/none	yes, 4x4 only	no	15/20	\$18,674
Bronco 4x4	4566	55/none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	13/17	\$19,401
Explorer 4x2	3679	55/none	yes	no	17/22	\$16,854
Explorer 4x4	3780	55/none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	17/22	\$19,489
F-150 4x4	3843	55/none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	15/18	\$16,233
Ranger 4x2	2918	55/none	yes	no	23/28	\$9,184
Ranger 4x4	3120	55/none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	22/26	\$13,334
GEO						
Tracker 4x4	2365	55/200**	yes** 4x4 only	yes** 4x4 only	25/27	\$11,750
GMC						
Jimmy 4x4	3219	none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	16/21	\$13,944
Sonoma 4x4	3262	none	yes, w/man. transfer	yes, w/man. transfer	16/21	\$9,858
JEEP						
Cherokee 4x4	2985	none	yes, 4x4 only	yes, 4x4 only	19/22	\$16,832
Grand Cherokee 4x4	3574	none	yes, 4x4 only	yes, 4x4 only	16/21	\$19,700
Wrangler	2935	none	yes	yes	18/20	\$13,343
LAND ROVER (Range Rover)						
Land Rover Defender	4840	none	yes	yes	n/a	\$39,900
Range Rover County	4401	none	yes	yes	12/15	\$44,500
NISSAN						
Pickup 4x2	3070	60/200/500#	yes	no	23/27	\$8,995
Pickup 4x4	3167	60/500	yes, man. transfer only***	no	18/22	\$12,830
Pathfinder	3520	60/200/500#	yes, man. transfer only***	no	15/18	\$18,090
PLYMOUTH						
Voyager FWD	3275	none	yes	no	17/22	\$14,501
SUZUKI						
Samurai 4x4	2108	55/200**	yes, 4x4 only**	yes, 4x4 only**	28/29	\$6,699
Sidekick 4x4 (2 door)	2498	55/200**	yes, 4x4 only**	yes, 4x4 only**	25/27	\$12,399
Sidekick 4x4 (4 door)	2773	55/200**	yes, 4x4 only**	yes, 4x4 only**	24/26	\$12,999

* Price without options

** Manual hubs only. After 200 miles, operate engine one minute with manual transmission in second, automatic transmission in D

*** Transfer case must be left in 2H, transmission in N

V-6 engine, 200-mile limit; four-cylinder, 500-mile limit

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Equipment Suppliers

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Roadmaster Incorporated
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Trailex Incorporated
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Canfield, Ohio 44406
(800) 282-5042

earlier, entry of Nissan into the towable category. Also, GM has quietly returned to the ranks with retroactive dinghy-tow approval for the 4x4 Chevrolet S-10 Blazer and pickup and the GMC Jimmy and Sonoma from 1988 to the present.

Whether the vehicle is new or used, the best source for towing information is the owner's manual, which the manufacturer supplies with the vehicle. Carefully read the owner's manual section on towing *before* you plunk down your money.

The accompanying chart on 1993 vehicles lists those that are officially approved in their owner's manuals and/or in service bulletins for towing on all four wheels behind motorhomes. *Only* those vehicles officially approved for dinghy towing are listed. If you don't find a specific vehicle in this chart, the manufacturer does not officially approve of towing it dinghy-style behind a motorhome.

All of the vehicles listed can be towed on all four wheels without the use of accessories such as dollies, driveshaft disconnects or lubrication pumps. Of course, use of one of these devices can often render an untowable vehicle towable.

Be aware that there are usually several printings of owner's manuals, and manufacturers have been known to change their minds in the middle of a model year. The information contained here is accurate to the best of our knowledge at presstime. When shopping for a vehicle to tag along behind your coach, it's up to you to ask for the manufacturer's towing approval in writing. This will go a long way toward preventing a bad case of buyer's remorse.

Chevrolet/GMC

Perhaps the biggest change on the towing scene for the 1993 model year is that Chevrolet and sister division GMC have approved towing of some models. The Chevy S-10/GMC, Sonoma pickup and Blazer/Jimmy are approved for towing on all four wheels in '93 with either manual or automatic transmissions, but they must be equipped with four-wheel drive (4WD) and a manual transfer case. Models equipped with the electric-shift transfer case (there is no neutral position) or two-wheel-drive (2WD) models are not approved. It's significant that GM's approval is retroactive all the way back to the 1988 model year! This means that literally thousands of earlier models are approved for

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towing on all four wheels.

GM manuals take the owner through a specified shift procedure in step-by-step fashion: Connect the car to the motorhome; place the transfer-case shift lever in neutral; shift automatic transmissions into park and manual transmissions into first; release the parking brake; turn the ignition key one notch forward to the "unlocked" position; and you are ready to roll!

Chrysler/Dodge/Eagle/Plymouth

Chrysler Corporation for 1993 features an extensive lineup of cars and trucks, all towable on all four wheels. They are marketed under the Chrysler, Dodge, Eagle and Plymouth nameplates. Chrysler has always supported towing, and the '93 model year looks better than ever. Approved Dodge models include the Colt, Daytona, Shadow and Spirit.

Colt is Dodge's entry-level vehicle, and it offers great fuel mileage and a low selling price. Daytona is Dodge's sporty two-door that should appeal to those who like the performance look. The Shadow is available in two- and four-door, as well as hatchback models. Spirit is an intermediate-size, four-door model that is available this year with a 3-liter V-6 engine that offers more performance than the standard in-line four-banger. The only model wearing the Chrysler emblem that's approved to tag along is the LeBaron, while Plymouth's Acclaim and Sundance are the counterparts to the Dodge lineup.

Chrysler's new LH-series of cars—the Chrysler Concord, Dodge Intrepid and Eagle Vision—is not approved for towing.

Pickup trucks are always popular as tag-alongs, and Dodge's Dakota and Ram 50 are approved. Four-

wheel anti-lock brakes (ABS) are now available on all Dakota models, while the Ram 50 comes standard with rear-wheel ABS. The Dakota is towable only if it's equipped with 4WD, but the Ram 50 can be towed in either 2WD or 4WD configuration. Dodge's full-size pickups and the sport-utility Ramcharger are also towable if they are 4WD models, but these are large, relatively heavy vehicles. It's best to hold dinghy-vehicle weight below 4000 pounds with gasoline-powered motorhomes; the big pusher diesels can usually handle more weight.

Ford/Mercury

Ford's ever-popular Escort is still one of the most popular dinghys available. The lightweight Festiva scores high on the fuel-mileage scale and has a low purchase price. For more passenger room, the Tempo by Ford and its sister car, the Mercury Topaz, are good candidates. The Ford Taurus and its sister car, the Mercury Sable, offer more luxury and spaciousness. Be aware that Ford and Mercury cars are towable only if equipped with manual transmissions; no automatic-transmission models are approved for towing.

If your heart is set on a Ford with an automatic transmission, you will have to look at a sport-utility or a pickup with 4WD. Ford offers a good selection of 4WDs with either automatic or manual transmissions, but they are towable *only* if equipped with the manual-shift transfer case. Most dealers stock vehicles with the electric-shift transfer case; be aware it is *not* towable because there is no neutral shift position.

Towable Ford models are the full-size Bronco, Explorer, F-150 pickup and Ranger pickup. The Bronco and F-150 are relatively heavy. The Ex-

plorer, Ford's hot-selling sport-utility, is popular among motorhome owners. It offers seating for five and plenty of cargo capacity. Ford's popular Ranger pickup can be towed in both 4WD and 2WD configurations. While manual transmissions are approved for towing in all Ranger models, automatic transmissions are approved *only* if they are equipped with 4WD and the manual-shift transfer case.

Geo

Two Geo models are approved for towing on all four wheels. The super-economy Geo Metro is not only lightweight and a snap to tow, its EPA highway rating is 46 mpg. However, only manual-transmission models are towable. The 4WD Geo Tracker, a sport-utility, is towable with either manual or automatic transmission when the vehicle is equipped with manual-locking front hubs. The Metro and Tracker are imported by GM and built by Suzuki.

Honda

Honda's policy has not changed. The company neither endorses nor discourages towing. The owner's manuals read as in the past, hinting that the vehicle may be towable, but not giving the company's blessing. The service department continues to issue a service bulletin that states the cars can be towed without damage. However, this apparently does not obligate Honda to provide full warranty coverage for its cars used in dinghy towing. We would like to see Honda state a specific dinghy-tow policy in its owner's manuals.

Jeep

Jeep Division of Chrysler features a full line of models approved for towing behind motorhomes for 1993. The Wrangler, Jeep's smallest sport-utility, is a popular tag-along, relatively lightweight, with go-anywhere capability and standard 4WD. On 4-liter-engine models, Jeep has added optional anti-lock brakes. Another bonus in the '93 Wrangler is the addition of an all-stainless-steel exhaust system for improved durability.

The Cherokee lineup has changed slightly this year. Jeep's Cherokee is available in two models, the Sport and Country. The Country is fitted with new lower-body treatment consisting of special bumpers, fender flares and sheet-metal trim enhancements. The grille and headlamp bezels are body color, adding a bit

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DINGHY

of class to this popular sport-utility. The Sport has stylish steel wheels, two-tone paint and an anti-scuff, lower-body side molding.

The high-line Grand Cherokee is available with a 5.2-liter V-8 engine that cranks out 220 hp, channeling the power through a new four-speed, all-electronic-controlled transmission. All-terrain tires, skidplates and high-pressure gas shocks make the Grand Cherokee at home on and off the road. Jeep owner's manuals are written in a clear, concise manner that takes owners through a step-by-step procedure needed to prepare the vehicle for towing.

Mazda

Mazda vehicles are not approved for towing. Although the Navajo shares many mechanical components with Ford's Explorer, the Navajo does not have a manually controlled transfer case and therefore is not towable.

Nissan

Although the 1993 owner's manuals do not specifically discuss towing on all four wheels, Nissan has addressed the requirements in bulletins issued in mid-1991. These technical bulletins, NTB91-061 and NTB90-004, cover 1987 through 1991 models and, according to Nissan spokesman Jim Wayland, still apply to the 1993 models. No automatic-transmission cars or trucks are approved for towing, but all models equipped with manual transmissions can be towed.

Nissan's Sentra and Stanza feature good fuel economy at a reasonable price. The Maxima fills the luxury niche, while the 240SX will satisfy those who are in a sporty mood. If you are really feeling your oats, the hot 300ZX is available as a tag-along. Nissan's Hardbody pickups and the company's popular sport-utility Pathfinder with 2WD or 4WD can be towed as well.

For 4WDs, Nissan recommends the transmission be shifted to neutral and the transfer case left in 2H; for 2WDs the transmission is simply shifted to neutral. Nissan has distance limits on all of its cars and trucks: 500 miles for models equipped with the four-cylinder engine and 200 miles with the V-6. The engine should be started for a few minutes or the vehicle driven a short distance when these limits are reached to ensure adequate transmission lubrication.

Toyota

Toyota, a longtime supporter of towing, dropped from view last year, and the company is still out for 1993. However, there is a glimmer of hope for Toyota fans; the company is doing extensive testing on towability and may issue service bulletins later in this model year or have approvals ready for the 1994s, if testing proves positive.

Saturn

All of General Motors' Saturn models are unique since they are towable when equipped with either automatic or manual transmissions. The Saturn owner's manual does not specifically address towing procedures, but it directs you to the dealer and refers to Service Information Bulletin No. 92-I-06 issued in June 1992. This bulletin states that recent testing has verified that all Saturn vehicles with automatic or manual transmissions can be towed on all four wheels on the ground at normal vehicle speeds less than 65 miles per hour without any range limitations. The transmission must be shifted to neutral and the ignition

switch turned to the ACC position.

Saturn offers a wide variety of vehicles ranging from the SL-series four door to the SC coupes and new SW-series wagons. (See our test of the Saturn SL2 in the December 1992 issue of MotorHome.)

Suzuki

Suzuki offers several vehicles approved by the manufacturer for towing on all four wheels. In the automotive line, the Swift, equipped with a manual transmission, is available in either sedan or hatchback models. Both are lightweight and sport high EPA fuel-economy numbers and very low prices. If you're a bit adventuresome, Suzuki offers the Samurai and Sidekick 4x4 sport-utility vehicles. Both are lightweight, reasonably priced units. The Sidekick is a bit more luxurious, and it's available with an automatic transmission. Automatic hubs are standard, but the owner's manual stipulates that the 4x4 vehicles be equipped with manual-locking front hubs. The manual hubs must be retrofitted; they are available from the dealer or aftermarket. □

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