

DINGHY TOWING '95

DODGE NEON



FORD EXPLORER



HYUNDAI ACCENT



SATURN SW2



SUZUKI SWIFT



New sport-utilities, compact trucks and cars expand the model selection while most minivans are no longer viable

Brian Robertson

Anywhere I go, it seems that at least two-thirds of the motorhomes I spot are pulling dinghies. It's no wonder because the freedom of movement that the extra vehicle provides adds so much to the versatility and enjoyment of motorhome travel. Whether you are a full-timer or only take a trip or two a year, dinghy towing can increase your travel pleasure immeasurably.

The 1995 model year brings changes that will enhance this situation; several new models have come upon the scene, while a few others have bid farewell.

Essential homework in preparation for buying a dinghy vehicle is perusal of the owner's manual that each manufacturer supplies with the vehicle. We strongly suggest that you carefully read the manual's section on towing *before* you plunk your money down. All the vehicles listed in the accompanying data table are approved by the manufacturer to be towed on all fours without the use of accessories such as dollies, drive-shaft disconnects or lubrication pumps. We still receive far too many letters from readers who took the word of a salesperson or mechanic that the vehicle can be towed on all four, only to find later that the information was incorrect!

Be aware too, there may be several versions of owner's manuals, and manufacturers have been known to change policy in the middle of a model year. The information contained here is accurate to the best of our knowledge at the time of printing.

Chevrolet/GMC

General Motors Chevrolet division remains much the same as last year. The Beretta, Cavalier and Corsica are still towable provided they are fitted with the manual transmission. The Cavalier underwent the most design changes this year with sleeker styling, a wider track, more interior room and a redesigned chassis

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that offers increased stiffness for better ride and handling. Standard power is provided by a 2.2-liter, four-cylinder engine with the 2.3-liter Quad 4 engine as an option. The owner's manuals for these cars include

instructions that the front wheels must be clamped in the straight-ahead position for towing. This instruction should be ignored, since the car will not track behind a motorhome with the front wheels locked.

The Chevrolet/GMC truck lines are approved again in '95 for recreational towing with either manual or automatic transmissions. They must be equipped with four-wheel drive (4WD) and a manual transfer

TOWABLE CARS

MANUFACTURER	CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MAN TRANS	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS	EPA MILEAGE CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
Chevrolet						
Beretta	2756	none	yes	no	25/32	\$12,995
Cavalier	2617	none	yes	no	25/37	10,060
Corsica	2745	none	yes	no	25/32	13,890
Dodge						
Neon	2384	none	yes	no	29/38	9,500
Eagle						
Summit 2-dr	2085	none	yes	no	33/39	9,319
Summit 4-dr	2195	none	yes	no	26/33	10,892
Summit Wagon	2734	none	yes	no	28/32	13,114
Ford/Mercury						
Aspire	2004	55/none	yes	no	36/42	8,240
Contour/Mystique	2769	55/none	yes	no	24/35	13,855
Escort	2316	55/none	yes	no	30/38	10,435
Probe	2690	55/none	yes	no	26/33	14,180
Taurus (SHO only)	3395	55/none	yes	no	18/26	18,140
Tracer	2418	55/none	yes	no	26/34	11,260
Geo						
Metro	1808	55/none	yes	no	44/49	8,085
Hyundai						
Accent	2057	legal/none	yes	no	29/38	n/a
Elantra	2500	legal/none	yes	no	22/29	10,199
Scoupe	2176	legal/none	yes	no	28/36	9,995
Sonata	2864	legal/none	yes	no	21/29	13,399
Nissan						
240 SX	2753	70/500	yes	no	22/28	17,499
300 ZX	3300	60/200	yes	no	19/24	35,009
Altima	2853	70/500	yes	no	24/30	14,799
Maxima	3001	70/500	yes	no	22/27	19,999
Sentra	2346	70/500	yes	no	30/40	12,759
Plymouth						
Neon	2384	none	yes	no	29/38	9,500
Saturn						
SC-series	2284	65/none	yes	yes	27/36	10,995
SL-series	2324	65/none	yes	yes	27/36	9,195
SW-series	2380	65/none	yes	yes	28/40	10,895
Suzuki						
Swift Hatchback	1856	55/none	yes	no	30/34	7,769

TOWABLE SPORT-UTILITIES AND PICKUPS

MANUFACTURER	CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE WITH MAN TRANS	TOWABLE WITH AUTO TRANS	EPA MILEAGE CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
Chevrolet						
Blazer 4WD	3367	none	yes*	yes*	16/21	14,923
S-10 4WD	3296	none	yes*	yes*	17/23	10,130
<i>*With manual transfer case</i>						
Dodge						
Dakota	3051	none	yes*	yes*	16/20	10,286
D-series Ram	4033	none	yes*	yes*	13/17	12,834
<i>*With 4-wheel drive only</i>						
Ford						
Bronco 4WD	4588	55/none	yes*	yes*	14/19	20,890
Explorer 2WD	3592	55/none	yes	no	18/22	16,854
Explorer 4WD	3690	55/none	yes**	yes*	17/21	20,786
F-series 4WD	3990	55/none	yes*	yes*	15/19	17,684
Ranger 2WD	2945	55/none	yes	no	21/24	10,999
Ranger 4WD	3258	55/none	yes**	yes*	21/25	14,470
<i>*With manual transfer case; **with electric or manual transfer case</i>						
Geo						
Tracker	2320	55/200*	yes*	yes*	23/26	10,865
<i>*With manual hubs only; after 200 miles operate engine one minute with manual transmission in second, automatic transmission in drive</i>						
GMC						
Jimmy 4WD	3450	none	yes*	yes*	17/22	15,639
Sonoma 4WD	3285	none	yes*	yes*	18/22	12,613
<i>*With manual transfer case</i>						
Jeep						
Cherokee	2808	none	yes*	yes*	19/22	16,832
Grand Cherokee	3574	none	yes*	yes*	15/20	22,643
Wrangler	2935	none	yes*	yes*	19/20	11,818
<i>*With 4-wheel drive only</i>						
Mazda B-Series Pickup						
2WD	2918	55/none	yes	no	21/24	8,780
4WD	3208	55/none	yes*	yes*	20/23	13,250
<i>*With manual transfer case</i>						
Nissan						
Pathfinder	3520	60/200/500*	yes**	no	15/18	18,090
Pickup 2WD	2966	60/200/500*	yes	no	22/26	8,995
Pickup 4WD	3167	60/200/500*	yes**	no	18/20	12,830
<i>*V-6 engine 200-mile limit; 4-cyl 500-mile limit</i>						
<i>**Transfer case must be left in 2H, transmission in neutral</i>						
Suzuki						
Samurai 4WD	2059	55/200*	yes*	n/a	28/29	9,889
Sidekick 2-dr 4WD	2253	55/200*	yes*	yes*	23/26	11,669
Sidekick 4-dr 4WD	2397	55/200*	yes*	yes*	23/26	12,399
<i>*With manual hubs only; after 200 miles operate engine one minute with manual transmission in second, automatic transmission in drive.</i>						

case—the electric-shift transfer case (there is no neutral position) or two-wheel drive (2WD) models are not approved as tag-alongs. The Chevrolet Blazer and GMC Jimmy are totally redesigned in 1995 with a more rounded, aerodynamic appearance and a roomy interior. For 1995, these model designations apply to what formerly were S-series (compact) vehicles. The full-size Blazer and Jimmy of 1994 are now known as the Tahoe and Yukon.

The standard 4.3-liter V-6 in the Blazer and Jimmy pumps out 195-hp, up a whopping 30 hp over last year. A driver's side airbag and anti-lock brakes are standard. The trucks' owner's manuals are very explicit in explaining that the steering wheel must be free and unlocked for proper tracking. We have suggested that the folks at Chevrolet car division talk to their truck department so that manuals and towing instructions are consistent.

Chrysler/Dodge/Eagle/Plymouth

Dodge, Eagle and Plymouth nameplates are still in the picture for '95, but the field has narrowed somewhat. The Colt, Shadow, Acclaim and Spirit are phased out and the Dodge/Plymouth Neon takes center stage. When equipped with the manual transmission, the 2384-pound car makes an ideal tag-along. The single overhead cam, 16-valve four-banger provides great performance as well as excellent fuel economy—29 mpg city and 38 mpg highway. The Eagle line remains the same as in '94 with the Summit two- and four-door and station wagon available for dinghy duty.

Last year, Dodge full-size pickup trucks made a market splash with their ground-up design changes. Only the 4WD models are towable, but if so equipped, either automatic or manual transmissions are approved. These models will be best pulled with diesel-pusher coaches, as all their weights are more than 4000 pounds.

If the full-size trucks seem a bit heavy, Dodge's Dakota is nearly 1000 pounds lighter. Like the full-size trucks, the Dakota is towable only if it's equipped with four-wheel drive.

Dodge Caravan and Plymouth Voyager are off the list this year because the automatic transmission is now the only one available.

Ford/Mercury

Ford has always offered an extensive lineup of cars, trucks and sport utilities for towing and 1995 is no exception. Big news from Ford's automotive line is the compact sedan, Contour, and sister car, Mercury Mystique. These models replace the Tempo/Topaz. The base engine is a 2.0-liter, 16-valve, inline four-cylinder engine rated at 125-hp. The optional 2.5-liter engine is a 170-horse, 24-valve V-6 with recommended tune-ups at 100,000-mile intervals. Both Contour and Mystique are towable only if fitted with the manual five-speed transaxle. Ford's economy Escort and Mercury Tracer are still some of the most popular dinghies available. Each has a standard driver's airbag and restyled interior for 1995. Ford's subcompact Aspire continues to provide ease of towing with its 2004-pound curb weight.

Ford's mini-van Aerostar is not on the list this year because Ford discontinued the five-speed manual

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transmission as the standard shifter. Like other mini-vans, Aerostar is available with an automatic transmission only for 1995.

If your heart is set on towing a Ford with automatic transmission, you need to look at a sport-utility or 4WD pickup. Ford offers a good selection of vehicles with automatic transmissions but approval comes *only* if they are equipped with the manual-shift transfer case. You may have to do some shopping to find this combination as most dealers tend to order the electric-shift with the automatic transmission.

The popular Explorer sport-utility and Ranger pickups are new for 1995 and feature new exteriors, front suspension systems and interior restyling. Anti-lock brakes are standard as well as dual airbags and rear-seat head restraints. Both Ranger and Explorer models with electric-shift 4WD are towable when equipped with the five-speed manual transmission.

Geo

Geo Metro receives wider and longer sheetmetal for 1995 as well as a new interior. The standard 1.0-liter, three-cylinder engine is still the economy champ, but this year a 1.3-liter four-cylinder engine is optional, if you'd like a bit more pizzazz.

Hyundai

Last year was the first year that Hyundai officially endorsed dinghy towing. Excel will be phased out in 1995 and will be replaced by the compact Accent. Accents feature dual airbags and optional ABS. Sonata and Scoupe remain virtually unchanged, while the Elantra gets a new interior and better sound-deadening insulation.

Mazda

This year the Navajo has been dropped. The B-series pickup trucks are the only Mazda vehicles approved for dinghy service. They will feature a new instrument layout and standard driver's airbag. All the tow requirements of the Ranger apply to the B-pickups.

Nissan

Nissan's 1995 tow situation remain status quo. Although towing on all fours behind a motorhome is not

addressed in the owner's manual, technical bulletins NTB91-061 and NTB90-004 cover 1987 through 1991 models. These still apply to the drivelines that are used this 1995 model year. Nissan has a distance limit on all of its cars and trucks; it's 500 miles for manual transmission models equipped with the four-cylinder engines and 200 miles with the manually shifted V-6s. Once the distance limitations are reached, the engine

should be started for a few minutes or the vehicle driven a short distance to ensure transmission lubrication. Nissan's Altima has seen minor sheet-metal reconfiguration, while the Maxima has a new 3.0-liter V-6, which is lighter weight and more powerful than its predecessor. The sporty 240SX features a new 16-valve four-cylinder engine, which delivers 155-hp and 160-lb-ft of torque for better low-speed performance. Nis-



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DINGHY TOWING

san's Hardbody pickups in 2WD and 4WD can be towed as well as its popular sport-utility, Pathfinder. Nissan recommends for 4WDs that the transmission be shifted to neutral and the transfer case left in 2H; for 2WDs, the transmission is simply shifted to neutral.

Jeep

Chrysler's Jeep division for 1995 still provides a full line of 4WD vehicles approved for towing. Jeep Wrangler's light weight and go-anywhere capabilities with standard 4WD make it an ideal dinghy. The Cherokee lineup now has standard four-wheel ABS. Jeep owner's manuals are written in a clear, concise manner that takes motorhome owners through a step-by-step procedure to prepare for towing.

Saturn

Saturn continues to be a big hit, partly because it's the only car that is approved for towing when equipped with an automatic transmission. Dual airbags are now standard equipment and a redesigned dash is easier to read. Horsepower of the standard 1.9-liter engine has been increased by 15 due to the addition of a multiport fuel injection.

Suzuki

Suzuki has dropped the Swift four-door and designed a new three-door model. Interior cabin size is increased substantially. Dual airbags and side-impact protection are standard; ABS brakes are optional. Swift's high EPA fuel-economy numbers and low price make it particularly attractive to RVers. Suzuki's Sidekick sport-utility is now equipped with a 1.6-liter engine in both the two- and four-door models.

The owner's manual stipulates that the vehicles must be equipped with manual front wheel hubs and require that you stop every 200 miles and circulate oil in the transfer case. To some, this is an inconvenience, but there aren't that many drivers who can sit in the saddle that distance without stopping for a breather anyway.

Regardless of what make and model you choose, double check the options required by the manufacturer for dinghy-towing approval. Be sure to follow the recommended procedures for towing.

Happy towing! □