

Trailers & Trailing

1. The Trailing Edge

Trailer sailing is an attractive option for Sea Wych owners. Apart from taking the boat to new cruising areas, or to SWOA Rallies that bigger boats couldn't reach in the space of a family holiday, winter storage costs can be reduced to nil by taking the boat home. Winter maintenance becomes a doddle, with no travelling expenses. If you can launch and recover the boat yourself, then you'll also avoid the expense of craneage. In twenty-one years with Sea Wych Emma, I think our trailer has paid for itself several times over.

There are a number of things to do to ensure you tow your Sea Wych on its trailer *safely*, and the consequences of towing *unsafely* can be disastrous. The best attitude to take, I think, is to treat trailing in the same way that you treat the business of taking the boat to sea. You can divide your preparations for going to sea into three: first your own ability and knowledge (boat handling, navigation, rule of the road, tides, weather etc); secondly, the condition of the boat itself (seaworthy with all gear well maintained and in good working order); finally and most important, safety (VHF radio, lifejackets, flares, first aid kit, a knowledge of emergency procedures etc). It's a long list but you don't regard all those things as problems or chores. In fact making a good job of them is a great source of satisfaction and pleasure.

I think if you use the same 'three-prong' approach to trailing a Sea Wych, you can get as much satisfaction from doing a good safe job of trailing, launching and recovering the boat as you do from getting her ready for the sailing season. Of course there's nothing to beat creaming along on a broad reach in a good breeze, or flying a spinnaker on a sunny day, or sailing your own boat to a Sea Wych Rally.... but you have to get there first! If you intend to trailer-sail your Wych, then it helps to have the same enthusiasm for trailing as you have for all your other preparations for taking the boat to sea. In other words, treat trailing as part of the adventure and fun of owning a Sea Wych!

First, here are some of the things you'll need to know and understand, and some new skills to learn:

The legal requirements are long and detailed, because they cover all types of trailers, but many regulations will not apply in particular instances. Other rules apply to *all* trailers and towing vehicles. The regs cover everything from maximum loads to lighting, and from weight ratios between car and trailer to permitted speeds. Not only are there *lots* of regulations, but they are frequently updated. They're not optional either, and you can be prosecuted for infringement. To add to the fun, you can bet your life - if you still have it to bet with after an accident - that your insurance company will use any contravention of the rules to reject your claim.

Insurance? Is the boat covered by your policy while trailing? Does your car policy cover you for third party risks? Does your driving licence include towing? On the face of it, it all seems a bit daunting and off-putting, and there's more! Unless you're going to leave a trail of destruction and deleted cyclists in your wake, you'll need to master a variety of new driving skills, and understand things like 'nose weight' and 'gross train weight' and lots of other strange phrases.

Second, let's consider the trailer and its gear:

Many boat trailers are in bad condition as a result of being dunked - that is, submerged in salt water in order to launch and recover the boat, usually followed by long periods out of use. If there's a lot of rust (even if an attempt has been made to disguise it with paint, the badly pitted surface will indicate rust) then the insides of the steel box sections will be a lot worse, and the strength of the frame will be in question. Salt, in solution, will find its way into every pinhole and hairline crack, into the bearings and the brake drums. Brakes are often seized up. If you can move the top of the road wheels in and out by any amount, then the wheel bearings are worn. So, you must ask yourself: 'is the trailer in good enough condition for the load and the stresses and strains it'll have to bear on the road?'

Then there's the trailer's gear, including equipment needed to launch and recover the boat on a slipway. The winch, chocks, blocks, strops, ratchet straps, ropes, spare bearings, grease gun, tools, jacks, a ladder, lighting board, spare bulbs, WD40, etc will be just as important to successful trailing as the boat's gear is to sailing.

Third and finally, Safety:

Many of the rules and regulations that you'll comply with, and much of the trailer and equipment maintenance you do, will have a direct bearing on safety. Good, but there's more to it than that. A car and trailer combination can be entirely legal and well maintained, but if the weight distribution is wrong, the rig will be (not might be, will be) unstable. Having an 'anti-snaking' stabilizer fitted between car and trailer is not a legal requirement, but I wouldn't tow without one. Knowing the right nose weight for the trailer and tow vehicle is more than important! In other words, don't just do the minimum necessary to keep things within the law and in reasonable condition. Build in a big safety margin! Look at every aspect of what you intend to do from a 'what could go wrong if....' point of view. Then make sure it can't go wrong.

One example will do: suppose you've just reversed down a slipway and you're about to uncouple the trailer. Can the brakes hold the car and trailer on the slope if it's slippery? Where's the centre of gravity of the boat and trailer combination, because if it's behind the axle of a two-wheeled trailer the whole lot will go over backwards as you uncouple. Block the back of the trailer! Can the trailer brakes hold on the slope? Don't chance it, chock the wheels with a pair of car ramps, not a couple of bricks or wooden wedges.

All in all, if you're going to trail your Wych, treat it as you would taking the boat to sea. Make sure you know and comply with the regs, learn how to handle the rig, keep everything well maintained and then go overboard (so to speak) on safety. Don't be put off by any of the above. Trailing is just one small part of the big picture, and owning and sailing a boat encompass a vast range of topics and skills, many of them more complex and difficult than trailing.

Two books that have proved very useful are:
'The Complete Trailer Manual' by L Porter & C Leavy, published by Porter Publishing Ltd, ISBN 1-899238-21-2. I think I paid about £10 for this, which was produced in association with Indespension and Ifor Williams Trailers,

and secondly:

'The Indespension Trailer Manual' available from Indespension stockists. (Mine was £1-25)

The latter is excellent value, with updated rules and regs explained briefly and clearly. Both books have plenty of advice on towing. I go one step further and use Indespension's pre-season free check, which is an MOT-style checklist carried out with you present. Bearing in mind the object is to sell you goods and services, they are very thorough. When you leave, you take the checklist with you. Well recommended. You should find Indespension in the Yellow Pages, if not call 0800 720720 for nearest stockist.

Also recommended are the excellent article by Keith Bradshaw, 'Safe Trailing', in the December '99 edition of Seawychcraft, and the booklet that Keith mentioned: 'The Caravan Towing Code' published by the Caravan Club, price £2-95. Available from the Caravan Club, East Grinstead House, East Grinstead, West Sussex. RH19 1AU

Peter Hubbard (200?)

2. Launching Antics

After Mike's write-up on launching wet, I thought I'd put pen to paper and explain the dry launch method.

We have used this method now for more than three years, and probably launch and recover Sea Wyches more than most. The main advantage of launching dry is that it saves an awful lot of corrosion on wheels, brakes, bearings, etc, not to mention the trailer framework.

To assist in this method, having a winch fitted to the trailer is a great asset; we have a two-gear winch, with ratios of 5:1 and 10:1 and a capacity of 2000 lbs. The winch is fitted between the bow support and the tow hitch. The cable is then run to a steel angle bar, which spans across the backs of tile keels, with suitable pressure pads to prevent damage. To launch the boat dry, you should place on the ground behind the trailer, two large wooden blocks approx. 4" – 6" thick, by one foot square, in a position so that when the boat plus the trailer is tilted up, the keels will slide nicely down centrally on the blocks.. When sliding, (sometimes joggling), the boat off the trailer, it is advisable to slacken the winch off slowly, letting it take the strain. Once in this position, with the back of the keels on the blocks and the bow up in the air, you then hold the transom down on the ground, disconnect the winch and remove the trailer. Now you release the transom of the boat until the front of the keels touch the ground. Lift the transom up and remove blocks, and lower stem down again. On average, you will have one to two hours before the boat is floating, assuming you removed the boat at the water's edge on a rising tide. This allows ample time to rig the boat, etc. To recover the boat you just reverse this procedure, using the winch to pull the boat onto the trailer

On average, launching or recovering the boat this way takes about five minutes with 2 - 3 people or more, without getting your feet wet.

Jim Randall (199?)

3. Wet Launching

Initially, I only used a dry launch and recovery technique. Unfortunately, that does not work in non-tidal areas such as the Lake District, Kielder Water or in Holland. Lift outs in Holland are even more expensive than in the UK, and more difficult to arrange - especially if you can't speak Dutch!. Wet launch and recovery, when the trailer is properly equipped with side gather guides and bow post etc is very much quicker, and my wife and I used to manage it all by ourselves. I used to jack up the trailer after recovery, remove wheels and brake drums, wash out the bearings and tow gear. It did mean that for safety's sake, I had to fit new wheel bearings every year before the season started

Roy Sallank (2005)

4. Trailers.

Forshaw trailers of Corby, Northants, built most of the original trailers supplied by Sadlers. However, many owners may have bought their trailers later, locally, so there will be different makes around. The Forshaw trailers had ball hitches made by B&B for which spares are no longer available. Any local trailer specialist should be able to fit a suitable replacement of a different make. Some trailers may have beam axle suspension units instead of 'Indespension' units. 'Axles' of Watford would probably have made these. Again your local trailer firm should know.

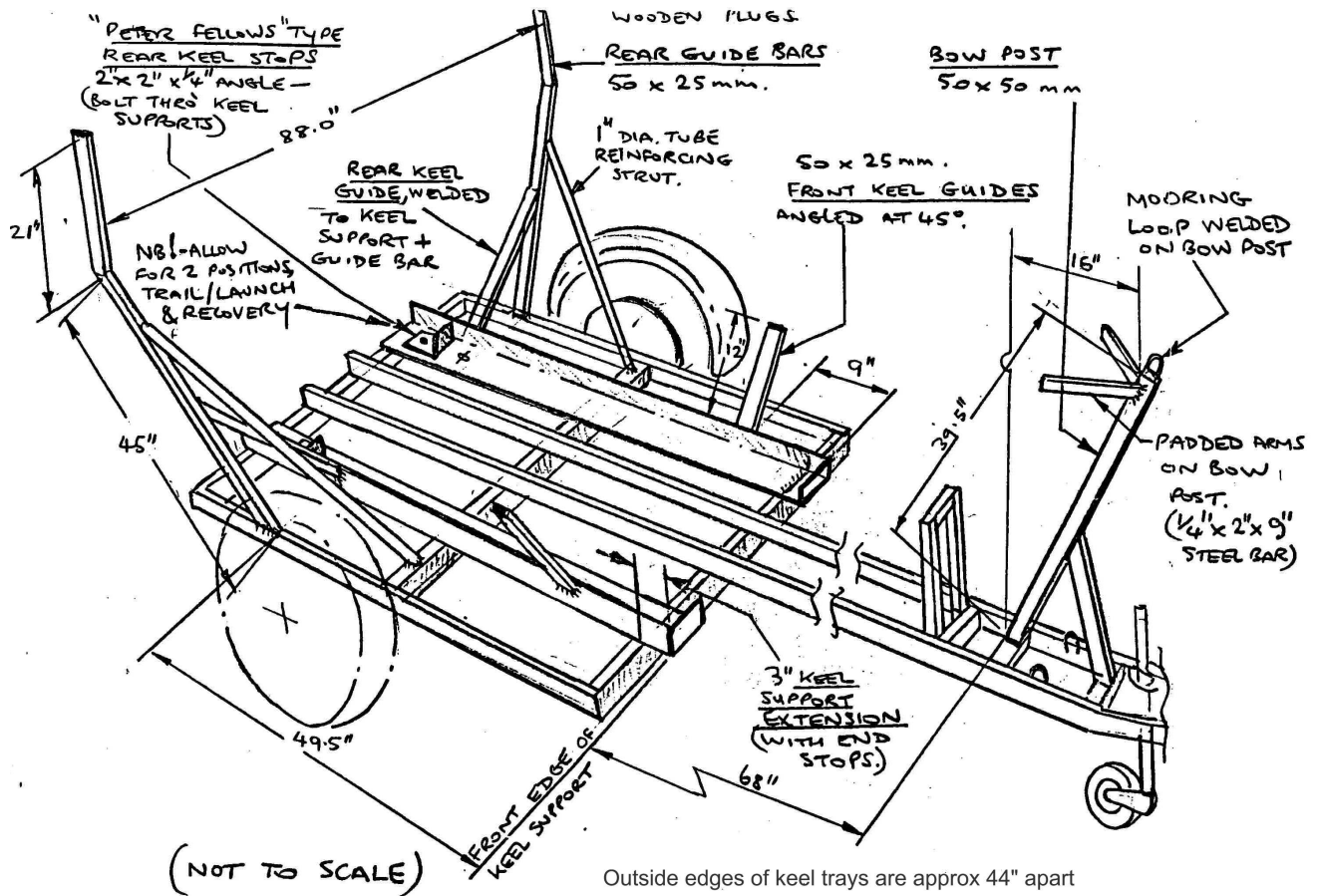
Tony Bromley (199?)

5. More Trailers

The picture below is of a trailer, custom-built in 1990 by West Mersea trailers. Unfortunately, they no longer operate in the marine trailer business. Although no plans are available for this unique design – note the twin-axles – this picture may give some ideas to anyone contemplating commissioning or building a trailer. Note also the substantial and adjustable docking arms and bow post.



This design is relatively modern compared with the one in the Mods Manual - which is still very useful since it contains some key dimensions. This is reproduced below.



6. Trailer design

The partial design below is of an original Sea Wych trailer, which is being re-constructed. At the time of going to press, it had not undergone its 'sea trials', which might lead to modifications. The reconstruction process is outlined at the web site, www.swychblade.net Note that the completed trailer is very substantial, and the weight of the complete rig, trailer plus boat, is likely to be around 1½ tons, thus requiring a hefty vehicle to tow it legally and safely.

John Askew (2005)

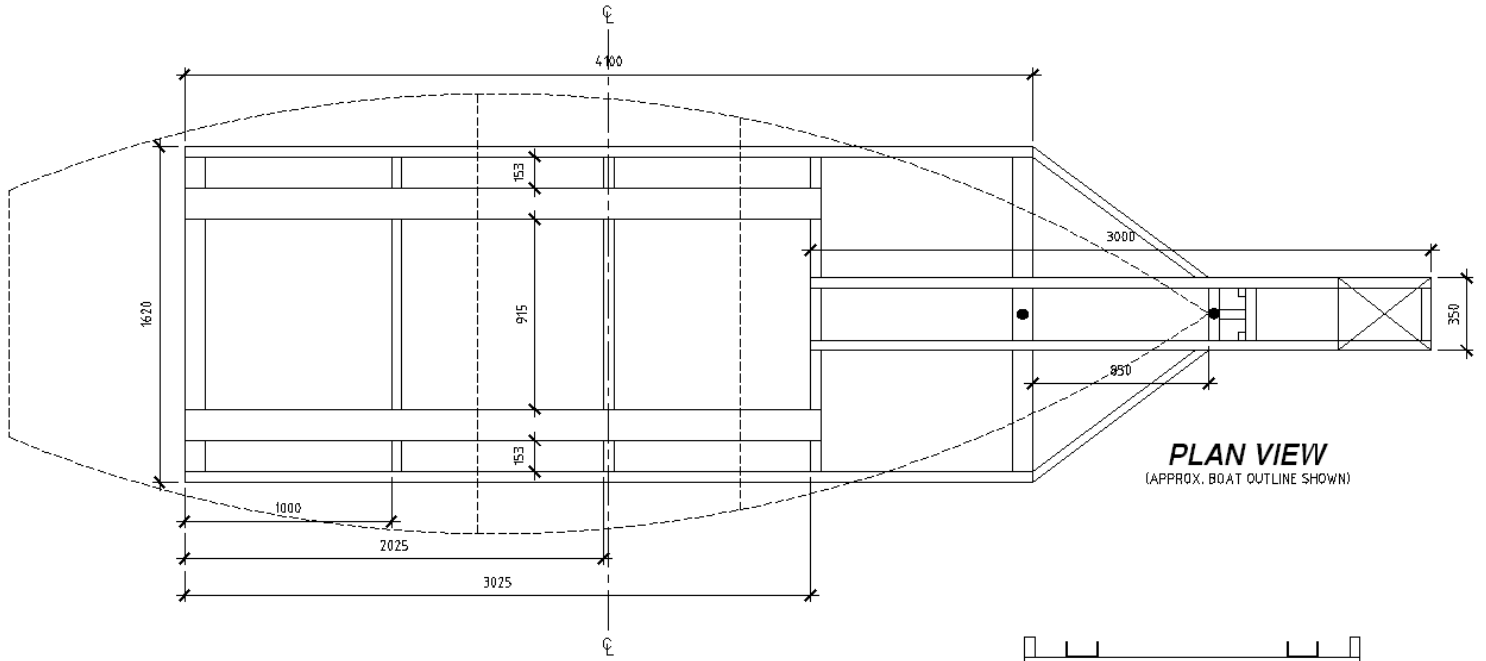
NOTES:-

BOW POST 40mm x 40mm with 30mm
ADJUSTABLE SLIDER FOR TRANSIT

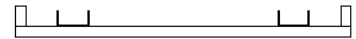
MAIN FRAME IN 100mm x 50mm

CROSS MEMBERS IN 50mm x 50mm

30mm ADJUSTABLE REAR LIGHT BOARD FRAME



PLAN VIEW
(APPROX. BOAT OUTLINE SHOWN)



END VIEW
(AXLE, WHEELS & UPRIGHT POSTS NOT SHOWN)