

Under Section 721 of the Michigan Vehicle Code, pickup trucks equipped with a fifth-wheel assembly may, with certain restrictions, tow two trailers. This double trailer combination is sometimes called a recreational double.

Drivers must pass a knowledge test to receive their recreational double endorsement. The information in this pamphlet will help you prepare for the knowledge test.

Definition

A recreational double is a pickup truck pulling a fifth-wheel trailer, designed for recreational living purposes, with a second trailer attached to the rear of the fifth-wheel trailer. The pickup truck must have a towing rating equal to, or greater than, the weight being towed.

Licensing Requirements

To operate a recreational double, drivers must have an “R” endorsement on their license. Anyone age 18 or older may apply for the endorsement at a Secretary of State branch office. Applicants must pass a test designed to sample the knowledge needed to operate vehicle combinations of this type. There is a \$10 fee for the endorsement. A skills test is not required.

Note: Drivers who have a Group A Commercial Driver License with a “T” (double trailers) endorsement may legally operate a recreational double without obtaining the “R” endorsement.

Operating Restrictions

The total length of the three units—pickup truck, fifth-wheel trailer and second trailer—when coupled together, must not exceed 65 feet. The gross weight of the second trailer cannot exceed the empty weight of the pickup truck or the empty weight of the fifth-wheel trailer.

The hitch used to tow the second trailer must be attached to the frame of the fifth-wheel trailer. Safety chains for the second trailer must be securely attached at the extreme outer edge of the fifth-wheel trailer with a locking mechanism. A trailer cannot drift more than three inches to either side of the path of the towing vehicle when the combination is being drawn in a straight line on a level, smooth, paved surface.

Getting Ready for a Trip

Before hooking up the fifth-wheel trailer, take time to check tires, brakes, battery, lights, engine belts, hoses and other equipment on the pickup truck.

After the trailer is hooked up, check to see that the fifth-wheel locking jaws have closed around the shank of the trailer kingpin. Make sure the trailer’s electric brakes are hooked up and working properly.

Be sure the load on the trailer is properly distributed. As a general rule, 60 percent of the load should be toward the front of the trailer and 40 percent toward the rear. Too much weight in the rear can cause the trailer to sway.

On the Highway

On the highway, be cautious. Because a recreational double is so large, extra effort is needed to manage the space around the vehicle. Allow additional following distance between you and the vehicle ahead. Look ahead 12 to 15 seconds’ worth of travel time. To estimate this distance, choose a fixed object near the road ahead and begin counting, “one thousand one, one thousand two...” Doing so will give you time to slow down gradually. Sudden stops in a recreational double are very difficult and dangerous. Under ideal conditions, it can take almost four times as much distance to stop at 40 mph as it does at 20 mph.

Manage the space beside your vehicle by staying in the center of your traffic lane. Whenever possible, avoid driving next to other vehicles. Other drivers may not realize that you need additional space and may suddenly change lanes or drive too close. Be sure you have room to safely enter the flow of traffic or cross a roadway. A recreational double requires much more space than a car or pickup truck.

To keep track of vehicles behind you, check your mirrors often. Always turn your head to check for vehicles in your “blind spots.”

Use extra care when approaching a curve. Taking a curve too fast can cause tires to lose traction, resulting in a dangerous skid. To maintain the best control on a curve, you should slow to a safe speed before entering the curve and then accelerate slightly through it.

Turning Corners

Turning corners with a recreational double—especially to the right—can be a challenge. However, a little practice and forethought can make the job easier and safer. When a vehicle goes around a corner, the rear wheels follow a different path than the front wheels. This is called “off-tracking.” The rear wheels of the pickup truck will off-track slightly. The rear wheels of the fifth-wheel trailer will off-track even more and the rear wheels of the second trailer will off-track the most.

The Right Turn

To compensate for off-tracking, steer the front end of the pickup truck wide enough around the corner so the wheels of the second trailer do not go over the curb. Do not cross over into lanes of oncoming traffic as you turn. When turning, keep the rear of your last trailer as close as possible to the curb to prevent others from passing you on the right. Continually check your mirrors to make sure that your vehicle and trailers are clear throughout the turn to avoid hitting anything. You should finish your turn in the correct lane.

The Left Turn

Make sure you are at the center of the intersection before you start the left turn. If you turn too soon, the left side of your vehicle may hit another vehicle because of off-tracking. If there is more than one left-turn lane, always make your turn from the outermost lane.

Backing

When driving a recreational double, avoid backing up. Trying to back two trailers at the same time can be extremely difficult and dangerous—especially on a busy street. Backing up is only recommended when you can safely stop the vehicle and unhook the second trailer before backing, such as when pulling into a campsite or similar location.

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Recreational Double “R” Endorsement



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