

Understanding Trailer Hitch Classes

Check that your trailer hitch can handle the trailer's loaded weight. Most modern hitches are labelled with the capacity information they can safely support. Also make sure you understand the difference between the [Gross Vehicle Weight Rating](#) and the [Gross Combined Weight Rating](#) which determines the capacities of vehicles and vehicles plus trailers when pulling or hauling.



What class of trailer hitch is needed?

Hitches are classified in the following way:

- Class I 2,000 lbs max trailer weight
- Class II 3,500 lbs max trailer weight
- Class III 5,000 lbs max trailer weight
- Class IV 10,000 lbs max trailer weight
- Class V 10,000+ lbs max trailer weight

Trailer hitch class designations often refer to both the Gross Trailer Weight they can pull as well as the Tongue Weight they can support. Gross Trailer Weight is the combined weight of the trailer plus its loaded cargo. Example: a 1000 lb trailer with a 500 lb load of gravel will have a 1500 lb Gross Trailer Weight. Tongue Weight is the maximum weight your trailer hitch can handle in terms of the downward force exerted on it by the trailer's tongue. Note: Using a higher class trailer ball mounted on a lower class hitch does not increase the towing capacity of the hitch. Generally

speaking (see details below) the tongue weight rating of a hitch is 10% of the gross trailer weight capacity.

For more information on the hitch capacities and differences between weight carrying hitches and weight distributing hitches, see below.

Class	Weight Carrying Rating (GTW)	Max. Tongue Weight (WC)	Receiver Opening*	Weight Distributing Rating	Max. Tongue Weight (WD)
I	2,000 lbs	200 lbs	1-1/4"	n/a	n/a
II	3,500 lbs	300 lbs	1-1/4"	n/a	n.a
III	6,000 lbs	600 lbs	2"	10,000 lbs	1,000 lbs
IV	10,000 lbs	1,000 lbs	2"	14,000 lbs	1,400 lbs
V	12,000 lbs	1,200 lbs	2-1/2"	17,000 lbs	1,700 lbs

* receiver openings are typical for hitch class but may vary by manufacturer

Typical Uses by Hitch Classes

A Class I hitch would be used for such light duty towing duties as towing a personal watercraft trailer or attaching a bike rack to the back of a vehicle.

A Class II hitch would typically be used for a light camper trailer such as a tent trailer or smaller fishing boats.

Beginning with Class III, hitches can be weight carrying (WC) and/or weight distributing (WD) depending on the vehicle and hitch specifications. (Weight distribution hitches evenly distribute weight over the entire length of tow vehicle and trailer, resulting in a more level ride with more control.) Not all Class III Hitches are both weight carrying (WC) and weight distributing (WD).

A Class III hitch will commonly be found on full size SUVs and trucks and used to tow medium sized camper trailers, most recreational boats, and light to medium duty utility trailers.

Class IV hitches would most often be used on full size and heavy duty pickups and SUV's such as ¾ ton vehicles to tow large camper trailers, livestock trailers and medium duty industrial/construction trailers.

A Class V hitch is usually found on heavy duty pick ups such as 1 tons when towing large sized trailers including dump trailers, flat deck equipment trailers or large utility trailers carrying heavier cargo loads.