

TOW BAR or TOW DOLLY

The Pros and Cons

One of the primary decisions motorhome owners run into after purchasing their first motorhome is what to do about a tow car, often referred to as a dinghy or toad. There are two main methods to accomplish the goal of towing a tow vehicle. One is by using a Tow Dolly and the other is by using Base Plates and a Tow Bar and towing four wheels down. And, there is a third option, that of towing a flat bed or enclosed trailer for your dinghy or motorcycles, but that option is not included here. While your first thinking might be that of buying a tow dolly, you really need to look at all the options, your intended travels and destinations, and make an informed decision. Having not owned a motorhome before, there was usually no consideration as to whether or not your current vehicle could be towed four wheels down, with or without modification. So the first requirement in making this decision is to determine your dinghy's towability. *Family Motor Coaching* magazine publishes a Dinghy Tow Guide each year which can be found at <http://www.fmca.com/motorhome/towing/204-towing-guides-towing-four-wheels-down>. If your dinghy requires additional equipment to be towed, you can find out all about transmission lube pumps and other equipment at Remco Towing, <http://www.remcotowing.com>. To learn even more, there is also general information about towing at <http://www.towingworld.com>. Another bit of information you have to figure in is the towing capability of your motorhome. Is it rated for 3,500, 5,000, or 10,000 pounds. You certainly don't want to tow more than your motorhome is rated to tow. Also, you do not want to exceed your motorhome's Gross Vehicle Weight Rating or GVW. For one thing, it is just not safe, may cause failure of the trailer hitch, cause engine overheating, and/or failure of the transmission. Plus, it may be illegal in many states. Now for some pros and cons.

Tow Dolly:

Pro – Usually easy to purchase and can be used with most any front wheel drive vehicle. Almost all towing instructions state never to tow a vehicle backwards with the front wheels on the ground.

Pro – Simply hooks to your trailer hitch ball with no initial or repetitive installation costs.

Pro – With dolly brake/tail lights and turn signals, there is no need to have them on your dinghy.

Con – The weight of the dolly must be added to the weight of your dinghy for trailer hitch and GVWR considerations and limits. Therefore it may limit the size/weight of your dinghy.

Con – Based on the overall weight of the dolly, it can be difficult to connect, disconnect, and move around. If not on level ground, it may want to drag you down a hill. How strong is your back? Also it must be stored somewhere when not in use. Some campgrounds have limited storage space.

Con – The tow dolly may be wider than your motorhome and may be difficult to manage while driving on narrow roads. Also the ramps often drag on driveway entrances or exits.

Con – The tire strap baskets can be very dirty to handle when strapping down the tires. Also, for some models it is very difficult to connect the dinghy safety chains to the dolly.

Con – The dolly will require a license plate and may have annual ad valorem taxes in some states.

Tow Bar:

Pro – Very easy to connect and disconnect to and from your dinghy. No dirty mess like handling the tire strap baskets or under carriage safety chains. Many folks can connect or disconnect in two to five minutes with no problems.

Pro – All tow bars are stored intact on your motorhome or the front of your dinghy. But can be removed in the camping off season if so desired. No storage requirement at the campground and no back breaking pulling like the tow dolly, to connect or disconnect to and from the trailer hitch.

Pro – Better models of the tow bar hook into your hitch receiver and do not use a ball hitch.

Pro – No extra width to contend with like many of the wider tow dollies.

Pro – No real extra weight to be added to your dinghy, like the tow dolly.

Con – Your vehicle must be able to be towed four wheels down. This may require expensive transmission lube pumps or other dinghy modifications to enable this requirement. It may limit your preferences for certain vehicles to be used as a dinghy.

Con – Requires Base Plates to be installed on your dinghy. Another expense, and Base Plates are not interchangeable between different models and makes of vehicles.

Con – Need to install connections for brake, tail, and turn signal lights on your dinghy.

Con – May need to have auxiliary braking system on dinghy, which is not a requirement with a tow dolly that has its own braking system.

Con – Based on your model dinghy, it may require the pulling of fuses or run your battery down.

All the above is based on my personal experience and what I have seen, read, and discussed over my 15 years of motorhoming. It may not cover everything and there may be disagreements as to whether or not some of the issues are pro or con. However, it does include a lot of things to consider before making your decision, and hopefully it will be an educated and wise one.

What did I do? I immediately bought a tow dolly. Took it on a two week trip into the Smoky Mountains. Ran off the narrow mountain roads with the dolly wheels. Almost broke my back trying to unhook and hook back up at an unlevel campground. Sold the dolly for a loss and purchased base plates and a tow bar for my other vehicle. **My strong recommendation is not to go the Tow Dolly route. Since beginning my flat towing, four wheels down, I have towed about 170,000 miles with the same Tow Bar and four different toads; and for me, it is the only way to tow.**

By Ted Barrett