



Launching and Loading for River Boats;

Launching and loading is like any boating or driving skill. The more practice with vehicle, boat and trailer, the easier it becomes. There are slight differences with each boat, trailer and tow vehicle and once you are familiar with your specific set-up, it becomes second nature. The following tips have been self-discovered or handed down to make the process easy.

River launches vary and are generally less refined than Lake Access Areas.

Tip 1: Clear Line of Site- My boat is long and wide which is often easier than with smaller narrow trailers. Time on an Apple Tree farm when I was 14 paid a lot better than the \$1/hr to drive the 1930's wood-sided pickup with water a water tank in tow. I use my mirrors, but that's not for everyone. So if you use mirrors or look over your shoulder, line of site to know where your trailer is helps. Items that will assist sight is trailer flags, side pole markers, lowering tailgates on a pickup or raising a rear window on an SUV. Anything to improve sight.

Tip 2: SLOW Down- Trust me it helps. Back up slowly and do not over-steer. Turning the wheel too much is a common launching mistake. Slower is faster and once you learn how quickly or slowly your trailer responds. With a little practice this becomes second nature- then it is game on.

Tip 3: Not All Trailers are Equal- Bunks or Rollers, New or Old, a lower trailer will launch and load easier day-day than an extremely high trailer. This is especially true at shallow ramps and low water conditions. Our Custom trailer frames are 12" off the ground and use torsion axels to keep the profile low. Not so low they scrape, just low enough to assist in launching. Also, adding Side Guides to your trailer will assist in centering as well.

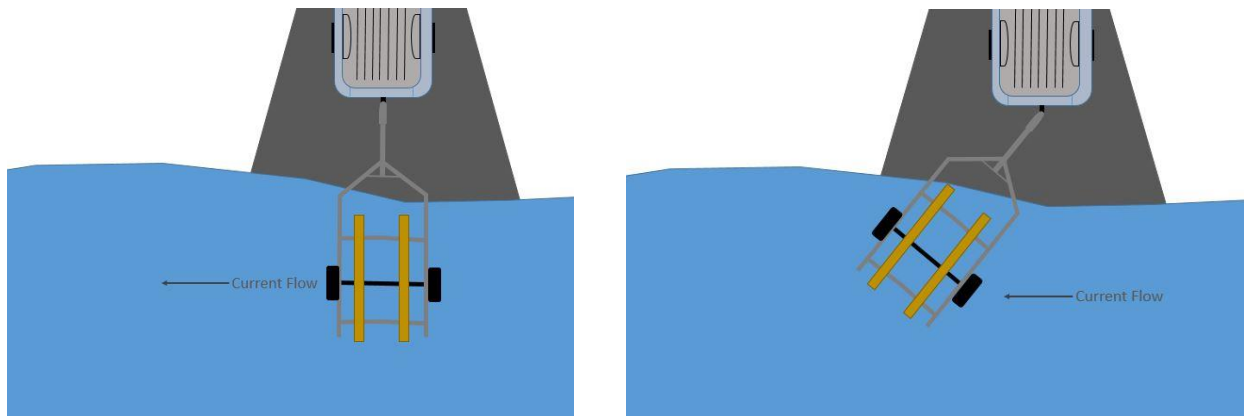
Tip 4: Launching & Loading Depths – One of the biggest mistakes I see while “waiting” to launch, is that people do not back far enough in when unloading the boat and when loading, they put the trailer in too far. Most trailers (bunk or roller) are designed to self-center the craft. Now I know that some older roller trailers are junk- but those aside, this works.

Launching- Back the trailer into the water far enough to float the back of the boat. Not always east when the river is super low (See Tip #5). I have learned to recognize where the waterline is on the boat or trailer so I can repeat the process. Granted each launch is different from the next, but in general the waterline is close each time. With the heaviest part of the boat floating, and the bow still grounded on the bunks or rollers, the boat slips off the trailer with very little effort.

Loading- Back the boat trailer into the water where the 1/3rd – 1/2 of the bunks of rollers are under water. For a bunk trailer this allows the boat to self-center on the bunks. For a roller trailer this allows for the back rollers to align the boat and the front rollers to cradle the boat. If the trailer is too deep and the trailer fenders are completely submerged, there is rarely enough roller or bunk to grab the bow and the boat slides off center and over the fender (generally on the down river side). Again, Side-Guides will help.

Tip 5: Guide Line Launching and Loading- There are a number of ways to unload and load a boat on the trailer. Since there are so few river launches with docks, single or double lining the craft on and off the trailer is difficult without getting in the water; So I generally drive the boat on and off the trailer. Two situations prevent driving this for me. Extremely High or Shallow water for example. High water because of both debris in the water clogging my jet or limiting the area to place the boat once it is launched (assuming like me, you laund and load solo) Or extremely shallow where the trailer is backed so far out into the water where I cannot gain access the trailer without getting wet. Using a 25' guide line (rope) tied to the bow boat and the other end looped onto the trailer winch post, I can back the boat in and use the rope to launch. Once at the end of the trailer, I tighten the rope and slowly move the trailer out of the water, the boat follows. Loading with a guide line is just as easy. On a lake I'll use 2 ropes, bow and stern to guide the boat. But with no dock this is tough. So single bow line, and a $\frac{3}{4}$ catwalk makes this easy. *All of our custom boat trailers come with a $\frac{3}{4}$ Catwalk.*

Tip #6 Use the Current when Possible- One of the best tips I have ever shared on river launching and loading is using the rivers' current to your advantage. When possible, angle your trailer down river. Back the trailer straight in, then at the last 7-10' cut the wheel hard and angle the trailer slightly down river. This allows the current to assist in slipping the boat off the trailer when launching.



When loading, the current flow works to hold boat position steady as you slowly approach the trailer from down river. If the ramp does not already face down river, try angling the trailer slightly downriver. Angling the trailer is also helpful when rope launching.

This “angling” is not always possible on narrow ramps, but any angle down river helps loading and unloading, especially in swift current.

Written by Chris Gorsuch