

Hitching up

Here are the basic steps for hitching and unhitching a trailer and a fifth wheel. As you gain experience at doing this, you may find other techniques that work better for you and your particular combination, so these may be somewhat generic instructions on how to do the job.

Hitching up trailers with a weight distribution hitch

1. Raise the trailer tongue until there is enough room for the hitch ball to go underneath.
2. Back the tow vehicle up until the ball is directly under the coupler. It might help if there is someone that can assist you with this, but it can be done solo (it just might take a little more time).
3. Open the coupler latch mechanism and lower the coupler onto the ball just enough so that there is a little bit of weight on the ball. This should allow the latch mechanism to engage correctly so that you can lock it in place with a pin or lock. Look underneath the coupler to make sure the ball latch is in the correct position (on the bottom side of the ball).
4. Raise the tongue (and the rear of the tow vehicle) about 3" with the tongue jack so it is easier to install the weight distribution spring bars.
5. Insert one end of the spring bars into the hitch head.
6. Lower the snap-up bracket (sometimes called the saddle) and place the proper chain link onto the hook. If a dealer installed your hitch components, they should have shown you which link to use. If you did the installation yourself, you should remember which link to use. (It might be a good idea to mark the link with some tape, in case you forget some day.)
7. If you have the Dual-cam setup, rest the spring bars on the ends of the cam.
8. Using a short piece of pipe that should have come with your snap-up brackets, raise it back up to its normal position and secure it with a safety clip.
9. Repeat these last 2 steps on the other side.
10. Raise the tongue jack so that there is plenty of clearance between it and the road when traveling.
11. Attach the safety chains to a permanent part on the tow vehicle, usually the hitch receiver. Cross the chains (like an X) under the hitch. This will form a cradle for the coupler and prevent it from hitting the ground should the hitch come out of the receiver or the coupler come off the ball. Make sure the chains are long enough to allow the tow vehicle and trailer to turn sharply, but not too long that they might drag along the ground.
12. Attach the breakaway cable to a permanent fixture on the tow vehicle. This should not be attached to any other part that is used to pull or support the trailer tongue, like the bumper or receiver platform. Should the bumper or receiver fail and the breakaway cable is attached to it, the trailer brakes will not come on as intended, which could lead to serious injury or property damage to someone else.
13. Plug the trailer electrical cord into the receptacle on the tow vehicle and make sure all lights work correctly.

Unhitching a trailer

1. Before unhitching, make sure the trailer is as level from side to side as you can get it by placing boards or blocks under all of the tires on the low side.
2. Chock the trailer tires so they won't roll.
3. Disconnect the electrical cord from the tow vehicle.
4. Disconnect the safety chains.
5. Disconnect the breakaway cable.
6. Raise the tongue high enough to take some weight/pressure off of the spring bars
7. Remove the safety clip from the snap-up brackets and use the short piece of pipe to lower the bracket so the chain can be removed from the hook. **BE CAREFUL!** If there is too much weight still on the spring bars, it could cause the pipe to come out of your hands. Raise the tongue higher to relieve more pressure if needed. If there is an angle difference between the trailer and the tow vehicle (the trailer is on level ground but the tow vehicle is going slightly uphill), this could also cause a problem. Repeat on other side
8. Lower the tongue so that more weight is on the ball, which will allow you to release the coupler latch mechanism (after you remove the pin or lock).
9. Raise the coupler until there is enough room to move the tow vehicle forward and the hitch out from underneath the coupler.

Hitching up and unhitching a fifth wheel

1. Well, I'm afraid I don't have any first-hand experience doing this, but after watching several other people do it at campgrounds, it appears to be a little easier than hitching up a conventional trailer. First of all, you can (or should be able to) see the hitch and the king pin right out the back window of your truck. You don't have to guess where the trailer coupler is hiding behind the tailgate. Other than that, follow the basic rules of hitching and unhitching a trailer...trailer level, wheels chocked and everything out of the way. For more detailed instructions on how to do this, ask a friend, ask your dealer, or do a web search on the top