



Towing and Suspension Solutions

How to inspect your tow bar

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Maybe we just have a hard time letting go of something we put so much into, but we follow our tow bars around the country. If you've been to an FMCA or Good Sam rally, you've probably seen our crews inspecting, cleaning and lubricating our tow bars (okay, technically they're yours now).

The checklist below is exactly what our crews are looking for to determine if a tow bar is in good working order or whether it should be serviced, repaired or replaced. We recommend using this information to check your tow bar at the beginning of every trip.

A good rule of thumb is — when in doubt, repair or replace it.

For all tow bars...

- Inspect all the metal surfaces. Look for cracks or signs of metal fatigue. (Don't forget the tow bar mounting brackets — check them every time you have your oil changed, when it's easy to get under the vehicle.)
- Make sure both of the quick-disconnects (QDs) have safety plates (Figure 1). If they don't, add the safety plates before you tow again. Call Customer Service at 800-669-9690. This is a quick fix.

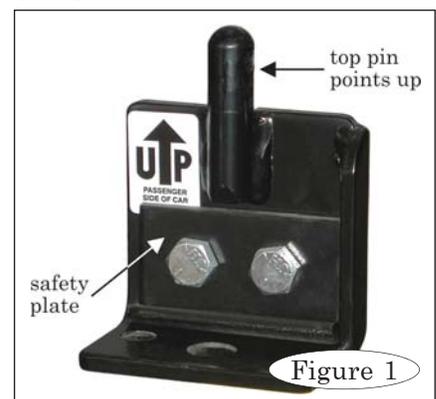
The top pins on both QDs (Figure 1) should be pointing straight up. If they aren't, this is a sign that the tow bar mounting bracket — or perhaps your vehicle's frame — may be bent or damaged. Check the brackets and the frame.

- Look at the buttons or handles used to lock and unlock the tow bar arms. If the button is steel then you've got a very, very old tow bar that probably should be sent out to pasture. If you've got plastic buttons and one is missing, you should replace it immediately, using one of our repair kits. Again, this is a quick fix. Call Customer Service.

- What's the overall condition of your tow bar? If it's wearing a lot of rust and dirt, it's probably seen some rough use. A tow bar in this condition will wear out much more rapidly, so check it carefully.

Connect your tow bar to your motorhome. How easy is it to extend and lock the arms? Then release, collapse and fold the tow bar as if you were storing it. Does the tow bar seem to be a little stiffer than you remember? Does everything work okay? If not, it's probably time to clean and lubricate your tow bar. Complete instructions are in your owner's manual — if you've misplaced yours, go to www.roadmasterinc.com and click on 'Support.' The most current version of every owner's manual is under 'Manuals and Support Documents.'

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Motorhome-mounted tow bars

Unfold the tow bar and extend and lock both arms. Move the tow bar through its complete range of motion — using the arms as handles, pivot the tow bar up, down, left and right. If the bar won't pivot in any of these directions, the bar should be repaired. Call Customer Service and describe what's happening.

Hold both tow bar arms and compress them together until they're parallel. Then push and pull them back and forth to check for looseness where the main pivot bolt (Figure 2) goes into the two-inch stinger. There should be hardly any free play, or none at all. If there is excessive play, the stinger assembly should be replaced.

Before you do that, how's the rest of the tow bar? If it's severely worn, consider replacing it.

Look where the two tow bar arms are bolted together, at the swivel joint (Figure 2). Is the swivel joint loose? If it is, you should install the appropriate bushing kit. (Again, call Customer Service.)

Both swivel collars (at the ends of the stainless steel inner arms, Figure 3) must be able to rotate 10 to 15 degrees in both directions. If the collar is rusted, it may be locked onto the threads — this can make the tow bar difficult to connect and disconnect.

Remove the tow bar from the receiver hitch and look at the hitch pin hole. If it's not circular, but instead elongated and stretched, this is one sign that your tow bar has been heavily used. Consider replacing it.

If one of the arms is really hard to extend there may be a slight bend in the stainless steel inner arm. This is usually caused by backing up the motorhome with the towed vehicle attached. (Never do this, even for a few feet — this is the number one cause of tow bar damage.) If the inner arm is bent, it can't be fixed — you must replace the inner arm assembly.

Car-mounted tow bars

Look at the bottom of the coupler and inspect the tongue inside. With a flashlight, look for cracks in the corners of the tongue (Figure 4). Also look for heavy wear at the point where the tongue contacts the trailer ball (Figure 4).

Look at the large stainless steel tube at the base of the tow bar (Figure 5). Check for severe wear on this tube at the point where the collars ride while towing (Figure 5).

Fold the tow bar up to store it on the front of the vehicle. Is the retaining collar that holds the bar in the stored position broken or damaged?

Note: the Eagle 5000, Eagle 8000 and StowMaster with steel buttons are unserviceable due to age.

Disclaimer: this checklist is intended as a general reference and not as a comprehensive list of any and all issues that might affect your tow bar.

