

Saving Your Rear End

Being an RVer means that you must occasionally drive or tow a large rig. Your experience driving this large rig is likely not extensive. This is why we always suggest you learn various driving techniques other than simply being able to steer it down the highway. You need to know the limitations of your RV and how to manipulate it in extreme and unusual situations. We call these "Driving Challenges"—a situation you happen onto while driving but could not know in advance that it was there—something unplanned—and construction is the most common.

Dragging Your Rear End

One common driving challenge is crossing depressions and dragging the rear end of your motorhome. When towing a car, dragging is a common way to cut your safety cables. Plus the noise sounds like you are ripping apart the rear of your coach. Also, dragging your fifth wheel or trailer is equally bad—the sound is awful and damage may occur.

You drag when two conditions exist. One is the depth of the depression plus the steepness of the approach and exit. Second, your "overhang"—defined as the length the rear end of the RV extends behind the rear axle. Overhang is unique to each RV.

Crossing depressions (commonly coming out of parking lots, fuel stops, or cross streets) is a prime time to drag the rear of any RV and even more likely if you have a drop receiver on your motorhome. The closer to the ground, the more likely it is to drag. As shown here, even an innocent-looking dip or depression can cause your RV to drag. These dips are commonly found in the south where they are used to help large amounts of rainwater clear the street or highway.



Sometimes the depression does not look bad but a history of grooves in the pavement provides evidence that you, too, will likely drag. If possible, drive by or around the block for a closer look at this entrance/exit. We once entered a lot nearly level with the street but were forced to exit onto a different street. It was nearly a disaster with its steep down ramp. One time around the block would have provided some insight.

Sometimes depressions look innocent while patiently lying in wait—just for you. It is difficult to judge depressions from a motorhome driver's seat since you are literally sitting a considerable distance above them and the viewing angle is wrong to clearly see them. Again, the drive-by is the best prevention.

If you can, try to observe traffic entering/exiting over the depression like the one shown below. If you observe smaller vehicles appearing to tilt up or down, you will likely drag crossing that depression. After all, your overhang may be 4-5-6 times longer than that of a car. Therefore, if you observe a car almost dragging, it's practically guaranteed that you will, too.



What follows are two driving maneuvers you can easily use to prevent your RV from dragging. Both are easy. Use them.

Here's the first trick... Approach the depression as **straight as possible** (perpendicular to the cross street) and, if possible, keep the RV toward the center or even crowding the incoming (left) half of the exit. Keep your drive wheels pointing **straight forward** (perpendicular to the depression)

until both front wheels are down in the depression as far as possible.

Then **STOP**—completely. It is common to feel you want, need, or have to start turning those drive wheels early—but don't.

While stopped, turn your drive wheels to the maximum **before moving the coach** (no creeping while turning). Try putting your coach in "Park" while turning those drive wheels.

With the wheels turned fully, creep out **slowly—dead slow—slower than idle speed!** You achieve "slower than idle speed" by tapping the brakes. (Note: Tapping air brakes is not recommended when driving down a hill but okay for exiting a parking lot.) Driving across the depression in this manner you will most likely not drag.

Why? What makes this work? This procedure causes the rear wheels to pass through the lowest part of the depression at slightly different times—one side will go through the depression slightly ahead of the other. This, in turn, forces your hitch point to literally stay at a higher point above the pavement. The hitch point is in the center of the coach and the different heights of the rear wheels (when passing over the depression at different times) will keep the hitch point up a bit.

Second, the hitch point actually moves over the depression (and the "hills" on each side that creates the depression) at an angle. This was caused when you turned the drive wheels. Ultimately, the positive result is not dragging.

One negative in this is that you need lots of time and little cross traffic. You literally must put the nose of your motorhome into the cross traffic lane, stop, then maneuver out slowly. You will need ample time or lots of bravery as this must be done slowly.

Here's the second trick... If possible, enter and cross the depression at a slight angle to flow into traffic. This also forces the rear wheels to enter the depression at different times. If the exit is wide enough and you have the space available, this is the easier of the two maneuvers. Remember, you must go dead slow.

Driving Challenges

An RVing lifestyle provides you with immense flexibility to see this magnificent planet and take your home with you. Be safe. Learn your equipment. You are going to be faced with driving challenges and, unfortunately, it can happen at any time. Practice what you can and hope for the best in everything else.