

FMCSA Pre-Trip Inspection Checklist

For Car Haulers (Owner-Operators and Small Fleets)

Driver: _____

Date: _____

Unit #: _____

Trailer #: _____

Odometer: _____

Vehicles loaded: ____

This checklist is built around FMCSA pre-trip inspection requirements (49 CFR 392.7, 396.13) and adds car-hauler-specific equipment checks. Driver must be satisfied the vehicle is in safe operating condition and review/sign the last DVIR before driving.

ZONE 1: ENGINE COMPARTMENT

- ☐ Engine oil level within operating range
- ☐ Coolant level adequate; no leaks at hoses or connections
- ☐ Power steering fluid level adequate
- ☐ Windshield washer fluid filled
- ☐ Belts: no cracks, fraying, or excessive wear
- ☐ Hoses: no soft spots, bulges, or leaks at connections
- ☐ No fluid leaks under vehicle or on engine components
- ☐ Air compressor builds pressure to governor cut-out (confirm PSI per vehicle spec)

ZONE 2: CAB INTERIOR AND CONTROLS

- ☐ Seat belt functions properly
- ☐ Oil pressure gauge reads within normal operating range for vehicle
- ☐ Water temperature gauge reads within normal operating range
- ☐ Voltmeter/ammeter gauge reads within normal operating range
- ☐ Air pressure gauges (primary and secondary) building and holding properly
- ☐ Horn working
- ☐ Windshield wipers functional; blades in good condition
- ☐ Heater/defroster working
- ☐ Mirrors properly adjusted; no broken glass
- ☐ Fire extinguisher present, charged, and current
- ☐ Reflective triangles present and accessible
- ☐ Required documents in cab: registration, insurance, permits, current DVIR

ZONE 3: EXTERIOR WALK-AROUND (LIGHTS, TIRES, SUSPENSION)

Brakes and tires are among the most common vehicle OOS issues (source: CVSA Roadcheck). Do not rush this zone.

- ☐ Headlights working (high and low beam)
- ☐ Taillights and brake lights working
- ☐ Turn signals working (all sides)
- ☐ Clearance lights working
- ☐ Emergency flashers working
- ☐ All lenses clean; not cracked
- ☐ Steer tires: minimum 4/32" tread depth (49 CFR 393.75)
- ☐ All other tires: minimum 2/32" tread depth
- ☐ All tires: no exposed cord, separation, bulges, audible leaks, or unsafe cuts
- ☐ Proper inflation on every tire
- ☐ Lug nuts: no rust trails or shiny spots (indicates looseness)
- ☐ Springs and spring mounts: no cracks; all hardware present
- ☐ U-bolts secure and tight
- ☐ Shock absorbers: secure mounting; no fluid leaks

ZONE 4: BRAKES AND AIR SYSTEM

Air brake test thresholds are CDL test standards. Confirm exact specs against your vehicle manual.

- ☐ Air pressure builds to governor cut-out within manufacturer spec
- ☐ Governor cuts out at correct pressure (typically 120-140 PSI)
- ☐ Applied leakage test: loss < 3 PSI/min (single) or < 4 PSI/min (combo)
- ☐ Low air warning activates before pressure drops below 60 PSI
- ☐ Slack adjuster travel within limits at each wheel
- ☐ No audible air leaks at any connection point
- ☐ Brake hoses/lines: no fraying, cracks, or unsecured couplings
- ☐ Brake chambers: no cracks or dents; mounted securely
- ☐ Parking brake holds vehicle on grade

ZONE 5: COUPLING DEVICES AND CONNECTIONS

Coupling devices are one of the 11 FMCSA-required inspection items under 49 CFR 392.7.

- ☐ Fifth wheel/kingpin: properly engaged; locking jaws fully closed
- ☐ Safety latch secured
- ☐ Fifth wheel mounting bolts and bracket: no cracks or looseness
- ☐ Air lines from tractor to trailer: no chafing or leaks
- ☐ Glad hands fully seated and locked; no air leaks
- ☐ Electrical cable connected; enough slack for turns without pulling
- ☐ Safety chains/cables properly connected where equipped; not dragging

ZONE 6: TRAILER, RAMPS, AND HYDRAULICS (CAR HAULER SPECIFIC)

These items are specific to car carrier equipment and go beyond the FMCSA minimum.

- ☐ Carrier deck and frame: no cracks or rust streaks
- ☐ Body mounting bolts: tight (no rust streaks or shiny spots around heads)
- ☐ Carrier deck lift cylinder ends: no rust streaking (indicates seized pin)
- ☐ Deck hinge pins: no excessive wear or play
- ☐ Ramps deploy smoothly and evenly on both sides
- ☐ Ramp hinge pins: no wear or play
- ☐ Ramp non-skid surface intact
- ☐ Ramp drift check: raise ramps and confirm they hold per manufacturer/carrier procedure; no visible downward drift
- ☐ Ramp locking pins fully engage and hold for travel
- ☐ Winch cables: no frayed strands or burnt appearance
- ☐ L-arm wheel lift locks/slides operate smoothly (if equipped)
- ☐ Trailer lights and electrical connections functional
- ☐ Landing gear fully raised; handle secured

ZONE 7: VEHICLE CARGO SECUREMENT (CAR HAULER SPECIFIC)

Federal minimum for vehicles at or under 10,000 lb: 2 tiedowns, front and rear (49 CFR 393.128). Vehicles over 10,000 lb follow 393.130. Many carriers require 4 as company policy.

- ☐ Each vehicle restrained at front and rear per 49 CFR 393.128
- ☐ If carrier policy requires 4 tie-downs per vehicle: all 4 in place
- ☐ Axle straps: rated and sized correctly for axle diameter
- ☐ Tie-down hooks (J-hooks/flat hooks) fit anchor slots without play
- ☐ All strap webbing: no cuts, fraying, or UV damage
- ☐ Multi-deck clearance verified with height sticks (no vehicle-to-deck contact)
- ☐ Overall trailer height checked; route clearance confirmed for tall vehicles
- ☐ Chains in good condition where chain securement is required
- ☐ Cargo evenly distributed; does not exceed weight limits
- ☐ Wheel chocks in place where required
- ☐ For vehicles over 10,000 lb: follow 49 CFR 393.130 requirements

INSPECTION SIGN-OFF

☐ I have reviewed the last DVIR and confirm any reported defects have been repaired or are unnecessary to repair before operation (49 CFR 396.13).

☐ I am satisfied this vehicle is in safe operating condition.

Defects found (describe below or mark "None"):

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Driver signature: _____ Date/Time: _____

superdispatch.com/blog/fmcsa-pre-trip-inspection/ | Regulatory basis: 49 CFR 392.7, 396.11, 396.13 | DVIR record retention: 3 months (49 CFR 396.11) |
Re-inspect cargo securement within 50 miles of loading

Super Dispatch Driver App provides a digital version of this checklist with photo documentation and automatic DVIR sync.

Disclaimer: This checklist is provided for general informational purposes only and is not legal, safety, or compliance advice. Requirements may vary by equipment type, vehicle configuration, cargo, operating authority, state law, manufacturer specifications, and carrier policy. Drivers and motor carriers are responsible for following all applicable FMCSA regulations, state requirements, company procedures, and equipment manufacturer guidance. When in doubt, consult your safety/compliance manager or a qualified maintenance professional.