



Driver, Move that Boat!

By Pete Dubler

Moving your large sailboat over land may be the most cost-effective (or only) way to get it where you want to enjoy or work on it. Our Pearson 424, *Regina Oceani*, just experienced an over-the-road journey from North Carolina to—believe it or not—our home in Colorado, where we will be conducting her refit over the next few years. Here is what you need to know about moving your boat over land.

*The ins and outs
of over-road
transportation*

	Flatbed	Hydraulic
Loading/unloading	Must be loaded via a travel lift, crane or gantry.	No extra loading/unloading costs.
Transit	Can have lower cost per mile since trailer can haul just about anything and the driver will likely be able to find a load to haul on the return leg.	Typically higher cost per mile due to unlikelihood of driver finding a load to haul on the return leg. Also, since the hydraulic trailer is such a versatile tool in the boat yard, it could potentially be making more money per day at its home base.
Terrain limitations	Lowboy trailers have minimal road clearance on the order of only 4" (though there are some equipped with extended air lift capabilities). This means you are limited to gradual transitions between roads.*	Due to high ground clearance and tighter turning radius, can handle more abrupt transitions between roads. Also has the ability to lower wheels near the tongue and to be pulled via a winch on the tractor bed.

FLATBED OR HYDRAULIC?

We've all seen flatbed trailers on highways transporting large equipment. For maximum height clearance, "lowboy" trailers that hug the road are used for large boat transport. More rarely seen is the hydraulic boat trailer.

First invented in the 1950s by David F. Brownell (the same fellow who invented the well-known Brownell adjustable boat stands), these extremely versatile trailers are open down the middle to allow them to straddle the keel of a boat. Crossbars are inserted to support the keel. Pneumatics (aka "air bags") allow the trailer to be raised to meet the keel, where at least 75 percent of the weight of the load is borne. Hydraulic arms with highly adjustable swivel pads stabilize the sides of the boat. The boat stands are removed and the air bags partially deflated to lower the trailer to travel height. Today, Brownell, Hostar and others make hydraulic boat trailers. You can contact them for referrals to boat transport companies that use their trailers.

***One flatbed we were considering got high-centered on the crown of the road crossing between the exit and entrance ramps of I-95 in New Jersey. It blocked traffic in all directions for 45 minutes until a large tow truck pulled it through the intersection.**

PREPARATION COSTS

Preparing the boat for transport. Charged at yard labor rates of \$50 to \$120/hour, this is all easy work, but time consuming. With just a few tools, once the mast is un-stepped, you can do it all yourself.

Loading the boat onto and off of the trailer. Flat bed transport companies will not usually take responsibility for getting your boat onto or off of their trailers. You have to make all of these arrangements and carefully schedule the resources to avoid paying hourly fees to truckers or crane operators while they wait on one another. There are four options, and

sometimes a combination may be used:

1. **Travel lift.** Normal travel lift charges apply if your boat is in a yard with one; figure a few hundred dollars here, depending on the length of your boat.
2. **Crane.** If you are moving from a yard without a travel lift or from your home, for example, and not moving via a hydraulic trailer, you will have to hire a crane. The crane company, which may refer to itself as a rigging company, will have to provide all of the lifting hardware: straps, spreader bars, shackles and a 4-to-1 bridle. Do not let anyone tell



you that you do not need spreader bars when lifting a large boat; not using them will at a minimum damage your toe rail and could do much worse damage. The crane charge will be the most open-ended expense of

the process. Riggers typically charge their time on a door-to-door basis. The spreader bars will likely come via a separate truck, for which you will also pay a door-to-door charge. You should budget between \$140

and \$220 per hour, with a likely two- or three-hour minimum, plus extra charges for the spreader bars.

3. **Gantry.** A gantry is a fixed lifting frame, somewhat like a travel lift without wheels. Yards often use these for moving a boat from one trailer to another. We engineered one for our work site since we could also use it for hauling the engine and fuel tank, but later decided on the hydraulic trailer option and a smaller gantry for the engine and other work.

4. **Hydraulic trailer.** Point-to-point on-land pick-up and delivery. Coming out of the water, a travel lift can place the boat right on the hydraulic trailer. Hydraulic trailers can even take a boat right out of the water if a sufficiently deep boat ramp is available (this process is used more often for motorboats than sailboats). A hydraulic trailer may also be used within a yard to transport the boat from stands to a gantry, where the



boat is then loaded onto a lowboy flatbed trailer.

TRANSPORT COSTS

Quotations for the over-road movement of the boat will include mileage fees, insurance, permits, escort car fees and potentially lay time fees. I found tremendous variability, with quotations ranging from \$7800 to more than \$12,000 for the same 1850-mile move, not including loading and unloading of the boat.

Mileage fees are the main component of the transport cost. Often, all other fees are just rolled into this number. Understanding the other components, though, gives you a greater basis for negotiation.

Trucking companies will want you to believe that state permit fees are a huge cost to them, but in reality, one-time permits typically run between \$20 and \$150 per state for a wide load. Truckers typically have standing annual permits for the states in which they operate most.

Escort vehicle requirements vary from state to state. Some require a forward escort for loads wider than 13 feet or even 13' 2", while others lower the requirement to 12 feet.

Height is also a consideration. If your boat is running both wide and high, it may in some states require both a forward and rear escort. Don't be hood-winked here. In some states, for certain sized loads, a flashing yellow





Top, "Mind the height, boys!"
Bottom, *Regina Oceani* truckin' down
the highway en route to Colorado.
Opposite, the Dublers, at home with
their baby at last

light on the rear is allowed in lieu of a rear escort. Escort vehicles cost about \$1.50 per mile, but often you will find that the driver's spouse drives the escort vehicle. Generally speaking, the requirements are more onerous near the coasts and less so in the middle of the country.

TIMING

You can figure that a large boat will be moved about 500 miles each

day. The scheduling of delivery may be more complicated due to curfews around large cities and even Sunday or weekend-long curfews in some states.

INSURANCE

Insurance should not be a separate line item of the transport quotation, but it is critical to make sure proper insurance is included. Require the transport company to provide you evidence of insurance for your par-

ticular load. Imagine the worst were to happen; an accident where your boat leaves the trailer or the trailer is rolled on its side. While your boat insurance may cover damage to the boat, it may not cover such expenses as removing the boat and trailer from the roadside. This would have to be covered by the trucker's insurance.

And finally, let your insurance company know about the move and method of transport ahead of time. Your insurance rate should be adjusted to the norms of your boat's new home port. ≈

Resources:

*State-by-state oversize load regulations: www.lgiinc.com/shipping_state_regulations.html

*Hydraulic trailer manufacturers: www.brownelltrailers.com, www.hostarmarine.com

PREPARING THE BOAT

Lean and clean. Remove everything that can rattle and chafe. This means all shrouds and tackle. Secure and pad what you can't remove. Lots of carpet scraps and nylon line come in handy here. If you tape items down with duct tape, remember the "sticky side out" technique—use several wraps of tape with the sticky side away from the item you are taping. This avoids any clean up of tape residue when the tape is removed. A final wrap of tape, sticky side to sticky side, leaves you with a very clean job and you won't have to worry about shirt sleeves or anything else sticking to the tape. (Since learning this trick, my daughters have become fond of asking hardware stores if they stock "sticky side out" duct tape.)

Mind your height. At a minimum, remove everything that extends above the height of your pushpit and pulpits. Antennas, davits, mast pulpits, etc need to be removed and secured on deck.

Label everything you remove. Save yourself from trying to remember where each block, bale, shackle, halyard, sheet or shroud belongs. Shipping tags, available at the office supply store, make great labels. Ziploc bags, cables ties and a ballpoint pen complete the toolset.

Take pictures. Before removing parts, photograph them in their



original position.

Including the label in the photo makes it easy to later identify. Also photograph any wires, such as inside the radar dome, before disconnecting them.

Secure below decks. Prepare items below deck as you would for a passage. In addition, consider how repetitive shaking or oscillations might wear or chafe items below deck. A little extra padding in the form of a towel or t-shirt here and there can make a big difference in the way items endure the ride. Triple check that all hatches, ports, doors, and cabinets are latched and secure.

Seal holes. If your mast is keel stepped, double seal the mast boot with duct tape. Apply tape first parallel to the length of the boat and then a second layer athwartships, starting at the rear and layering forward so the wind will tend to hold down (rather than peel up) the tape.

Shrink wrap or not?

A few companies recommend shrink-wrapping the mast (for an extra fee of course), but most do not. Unanimously, every transporter I spoke with advised against shrink-wrapping the boat, as they feel that shrink wrap is just not up for the trials of highway-speed winds hour after hour.

The magic dimensions. As the load gets either wider or higher, the transportation costs go up, mostly due to escort requirements. By and large, if the boat, on the trailer, is below 13 feet wide and 13' 6" tall, you will at most need one escort. Our boat: 42'4" long, 23,000-lb displacement, 13-foot beam, 13-foot high on trailer.

Pete Dubler has crewed offshore deliveries since 1999 and is an ASA-certified instructor. Experience on many boats led to his purchase of a one-owner Pearson 424 in June of 2004, re-named Regina Oceani. Worldwide cruising plans delayed by Ponzi losses, Pete and his wife Jill moved their boat to their home in Colorado—which Pete points out is strategically located between two oceans—for a complete do-it-yourself refit and restoration while they rebuild the cruising kitty.