

# 1998 Dinghy

Subaru approves manual-transmission models, and the towable field grows more versatile

JOEL DONALDSON



Subaru Forester



Saturn SC2

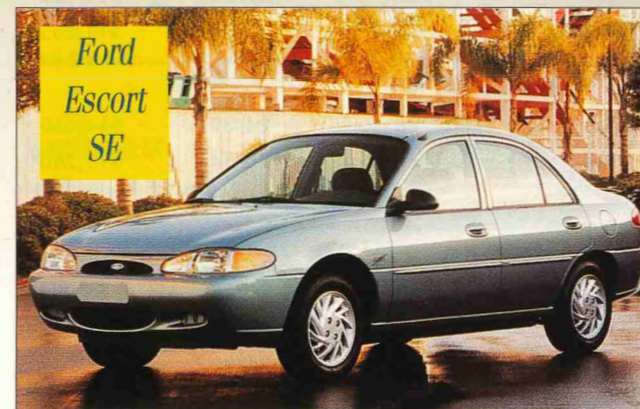


Dodge Durango

# Towing Guide

**A**s in past years, the dinghy-towing scene for 1998 includes some good news and some bad news. On the positive side, Subaru has designated the company's entire line of manual-transmission cars and sport-utility vehicles as towable. And, new dinghy-towable vehicles have been introduced by Dodge, Honda, Nissan and Suzuki. Meanwhile, several formerly towable vehicles from Ford and GM were either discontinued or lost their towability for 1998. Sport-utility vehicles (SUVs) continue to dominate the dinghy-towing news.

In glancing at the list of towable vehicles, it quickly becomes apparent that entire product lines from some manufacturers are missing. This isn't an oversight, but rather an indication that some manufacturers don't ap-



Ford Escort SE



Honda CR-V



Hyundai Elantra Wagon



Kia Sportage



Nissan Frontier 4X2



Suzuki Esteem Wagon



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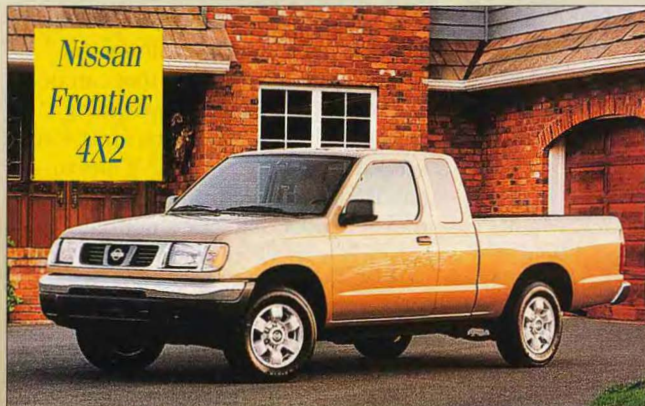
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# 1998 DINGHY TOWING GUIDE

## TOWABLE CARS

	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE W/MANUAL TRANS	TOWABLE W/AUTO TRANS	EPA MPG CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
<b>CHEVROLET</b>						
<b>Cavalier Coupe</b>	2,584	none	yes	yes*	25/37	\$11,610
<b>Malibu</b>	3,100	none	n/a	yes*	23/32	\$15,670
<b>Metro</b>	1,895	55/none	yes	no	44/49	\$8,655
* With 4-speed automatic.						
<b>DODGE/PLYMOUTH</b>						
<b>Neon 2-dr</b>	2,470	none	yes	no	29/39	\$11,655
<b>Neon 4-dr</b>	2,507	none	yes	no	29/39	\$11,855
<b>FORD/MERCURY</b>						
<b>Contour/Mystique</b>	2,774	65/none	yes	no	24/32	\$14,460
<b>Escort/Tracer</b>	2,468	65/none	yes	no	25/34	\$11,260
Prices and weights shown are for Ford versions; Mercury versions are similar.						
<b>HYUNDAI</b>						
<b>Accent</b>	2,101	legal/none	yes	no	28/37	\$9,099
<b>Elantra</b>	2,458	legal/none	yes	no	24/32	\$11,499
<b>Sonata</b>	2,854	legal/none	yes	no	21/29	\$14,749
<b>Tiburon</b>	2,566	legal/none	yes	no	24/32	\$13,599
<b>MITSUBISHI</b>						
<b>Mirage</b>	2,125	none	yes	no	33/40	\$10,830
<b>NISSAN</b>						
<b>200SX</b>	2,363	70/500	yes	no	29/39	\$13,149
<b>240SX</b>	2,800	70/500	yes	no	22/28	\$18,359*
<b>Altima</b>	2,859	70/500	yes	no	24/31	\$14,990
<b>Maxima</b>	3,012	70/500	yes	no	22/27	\$21,499
<b>Sentra</b>	2,315	70/500	yes	no	30/40	\$11,499

\* Price shown is for 1997 version; little change this year.

prove any of their vehicles for dinghy towing as a matter of policy. Frequently, it boils down to a matter of money—the expense involved in testing a number of vehicles for long-term durability while being towed may not generate enough additional sales volume to justify the effort. Also, some manufacturers prefer to avoid any endorsement of dinghy towing out of concern over potential legal liability.

This isn't to say that some of these vehicles don't make excellent dinghies. It's just that the manufacturer won't formally approve this sort

of use and, in some cases, may decline any warranty work that could be attributed to it.

In other cases, there are legitimate mechanical reasons why a particular vehicle shouldn't be towed on all fours. For example, the lubrication pump in most automatic transmissions will deliver oil only when the engine is running, and some manual transmissions also have lubrication problems. Consequently, even though towing the vehicle causes internal transmission components to spin, very little lubrication is available.

This can quickly cause extensive damage. Some four-wheel-drive (4WD) vehicles get around this limitation by having a transfer case that can be shifted into neutral, thus avoiding spinning the automatic transmission output shaft while towing. Unfortunately, the general trend is toward transfer cases that lack a neutral position, especially among the more expensive vehicles. Worse yet, these same vehicles rarely offer a manual transmission as a means of circumventing this problem.

On a brighter note, aftermarket

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	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE W/MANUAL TRANS	TOWABLE W/AUTO TRANS	EPA MPG CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
<b>PONTIAC</b>						
Grand Am	2,835	55/none	yes	no	23/33	\$15,399
Sunfire	2,637	55/none	yes	yes	23/34	\$12,995
<b>SATURN</b>						
SC Series	2,308	65/none	yes	yes	manual 28/39 auto 27/37	\$12,595
SL Series	2,326	65/none	yes	yes	manual 28/39 auto 27/37	\$11,595
SW Series	2,392	65/none	yes	yes	manual 27/37 auto 27/34	\$12,295
<b>SUBARU</b>						
Impreza L Sedan	2,690	none	yes	no	23/30	\$15,895
Impreza L Wagon	2,795	none	yes	no	23/30	\$16,295
Impreza Outback Sport	2,835	none	yes	no	23/30	\$17,995
Legacy L	2,885	none	yes	no	23/30	\$19,195
Legacy Brighton Wagon	2,905	none	yes	no	23/30	\$16,895
<b>SUZUKI</b>						
Esteem Sedan	2,227	55/none	yes	no	27/33	\$11,999
Esteem Wagon	2,284	55/none	yes	no	27/33	\$12,499
Swift Hatchback	1,895	55/none	yes	no	39/43	\$9,099

equipment is available for most vehicles that permits reliable four-wheels-down towing. Which hardware is best for your vehicle depends upon what you're driving. Electrically operated lubrication pumps can be installed in most vehicles; mechanical driveshaft and drive-axle disconnects can be fitted to a number of specific vehicles. You can also use a tow dolly or a trailer for your vehicle.

### GENERAL MOTORS

GM continues to be the only manufacturer to offer towable automatic transmissions in some of its car models (the Pontiac Sunfire, Chevrolet Cavalier and Malibu, and all non-electric Saturn products). Pontiac also continues to offer a five-speed manual transmission in the Grand Am. Note that the Geo brand is no longer avail-

able; all former Geos are now sold under the Chevrolet label. Also, Chevy's Blazer 4WD SUV and S-10 4WD pickup are no longer towable, due to the elimination of a manual-shift transfer case on these models.

### CHRYSLER CORPORATION

The Neon continues to be a popular dinghy vehicle. Dodge's new Durango SUV is also approved for dinghy service, although at 4,500 pounds curb weight it is comparatively heavy. The Durango is based on the midsize Dakota pickup, and is currently offered in a 4WD configuration with an automatic transmission. Fortunately, the standard NV 231 part-time transfer case has a manually-activated neutral position, which allows the vehicle to be towed on all fours for unlimited distances.

### FORD

The Ford Probe and Mercury Aspire were discontinued for this year, which leaves the Contour/Mystique and Escort/Tracer twins as the only towable Ford automobiles. Although the Contour and Mystique are sold as midsize cars, most interior dimensions put them closer to the compacts. The Escort and Tracer are available in sedan and station-wagon versions. On the truck side, properly optioned F-150, Ranger and Explorer models remain viable vehicles for dinghy service (electronic reprogramming by dealer required), although the F-series and Explorer also are comparatively heavy. Note that the Ford Expedition and Lincoln Navigator are not towable, due to the absence of a manual transmission or a suitable transfer case.



# 1998 DINGHY TOWING GUIDE

## TOWABLE SPORT-UTILITIES & PICKUPS

	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE W/MANUAL TRANS	TOWABLE W/AUTO TRANS	EPA MPG CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
<b>CHEVROLET</b>						
<b>Tracker 2-dr</b>	2,339	55/200*	yes*	yes*	23/26	\$14,665
<b>Tracker 4-dr</b>	2,747	55/200*	yes*	yes*	23/26	\$15,605
* With manual hubs only; after 200 miles, operate engine one minute with manual transmission in second, automatic transmission in drive.						
<b>DODGE</b>						
<b>Dakota</b>	3,508	none	yes*	yes*	20/25	\$12,975
<b>Durango</b>	4,568	none	n/a	yes	15/18	\$27,425
<b>Ram</b>	4,640	none	yes*	yes*	14/19	\$14,485
*With 4WD only.						
<b>FORD/MERCURY</b>						
<b>Explorer 2WD</b>	3,911	55/none	yes	no	14/19	\$19,880
<b>Explorer 4WD</b>	4,146	55/none	yes**	yes**	15/19	\$22,650
<b>F-Series 4WD</b>	4,260	55/none	yes*	yes*	15/19	\$18,005
<b>Mountaineer 4WD</b>	4,370	55/none	n/a	yes**	14/18	\$29,765
<b>Ranger 2WD</b>	3,134	55/none	yes	no	20/25	\$11,385
<b>Ranger 4WD</b>	3,626	55/none	yes*	yes*	15/20	\$15,765
* With manual transfer case. ** With electric (dealer-activated program required) or manual transfer case.						
<b>HONDA</b>						
<b>CR-V</b>	3,146	legal/none	n/a	yes*	22/25	\$19,400
* Only with prescribed towing procedure.						
<b>JEEP</b>						
<b>Cherokee</b>	2,979	none	yes*	yes*	20/23	\$16,480
<b>Grand Cherokee</b>	3,621	none	yes*	yes*	16/21	\$25,845
<b>Wrangler</b>	3,045	none	yes*	yes*	19/21	\$14,090
* With 4WD only.						

### HONDA

Honda offers a vehicle that's explicitly approved for dinghy towing. The CR-V is a relatively small, light-weight SUV that shares much of its running gear with the Civic. Currently, only an automatic transmission is offered, the design of which will require a little extra caution for motorhome owners: Prior to towing the vehicle, Honda requires that the user perform a gear shift from Drive/4 to Neutral before shutting off the engine. This leaves the transmission in a mode that prevents damage while being towed

(as opposed to a final reverse-to-neutral shift, which can severely damage the transmission). This mechanical precaution is similar to the one that's been prescribed for other automatic-equipped Honda vehicles for several years.

### HYUNDAI

All of Hyundai's manual-transmission products are approved for dinghy towing. The Elantra is now available in both sedan and station-wagon versions.

### KIA

The lightweight Sportage SUV

remains a vehicle that many motorhomes can handle with ease. The new two-door convertible model has a considerably shorter wheelbase than the other versions.

### NISSAN

Like the model it replaces, Nissan's new Frontier compact pickup is approved for dinghy service. Nissan's Maxima also continues to be the only midsize passenger car that's towable when equipped with a five-speed manual transmission—an interesting blend of sportiness and creature comfort.

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	BASE CURB WEIGHT	SPEED/DISTANCE LIMITS	TOWABLE W/MANUAL TRANS	TOWABLE W/AUTO TRANS	EPA MPG CITY/HWY	BASE RETAIL PRICE
<b>KIA</b>						
<b>Sportage 2WD</b>	3,186	55/400*	yes*	no	19/23	\$14,895
<b>Sportage 4WD</b>	3,230	55/400*	yes*	no	19/23	\$16,395
* After 400 miles, operate engine for three to five minutes to lubricate transmission.						
<b>MAZDA</b>						
<b>2WD B-Series Pickup</b>	3,025	55/none	yes	no	20/25	\$10,885
<b>4WD B-Series Pickup</b>	3,433	55/none	yes*	yes*	15/20	\$15,415
* With manual transfer case						
<b>NISSAN</b>						
<b>Pathfinder 4WD</b>	3,920	60/200/500*	yes**	no	16/18	\$25,999
<b>Frontier Pickup 2WD</b>	2,911	60/500	yes	no	22/26	\$11,990
<b>Frontier Pickup 4WD</b>	3,433	60/500	yes**	no	18/21	\$16,990
* V-6 engine, 200-mile limit; 4-cylinder, 500-mile limit. Start engine to circulate transmission fluids when this limit is reached.						
** Transfer case must be left in 2H, transmission in neutral.						
<b>SUBARU</b>						
<b>Forester</b>	3,020	none	yes	no	21/27	\$18,695
<b>Legacy Outback</b>	3,155	none	yes	no	21/27	\$22,495
<b>SUZUKI</b>						
<b>Sidekick 2-dr 4WD</b>	2,480	55/200*	yes*	yes*	manual 23/26 auto 23/24	\$14,869
<b>Sidekick 4-dr 4WD</b>	2,756	55/200*	yes*	yes*	manual 23/26 auto 22/25	\$15,999
<b>Sidekick Sport 4WD</b>	2,964	55/200*	yes*	yes*	manual 22/25 auto 21/24	\$17,899
<b>X-90 SUV 4WD</b>	2,469	55/200*	yes*	yes*	manual 25/28 auto 23/27	\$14,799

\* With manual hubs only; after 200 miles, operate engine one minute with manual transmission in second, automatic transmission in drive.

### SUBARU

An official at Subaru says they were prompted to approve dinghy towing in response to customers who expressed a desire to buy a Subaru model "but had this special need." All 1997 and 1998 manual-transmission models can be dinghy-towed. Moreover, all Legacy, Impreza, Outback and Forester manual-transmission models dating back to 1990 also are dinghy-towable,

according to the official. No special speed or distance requirements are specified.

### SUZUKI

Suzuki continues to add to its line of towable vehicles, most recently with the introduction of the Esteem. Available in both sedan and station-wagon versions, this new subcompact provides good value for the money—especially since items like air condi-

tioning and a cassette stereo radio are standard equipment.

### Now, Go Forth and Tow!

Before you make a decision on a dinghy vehicle, you'll have to do a little arithmetic to determine whether your motorhome is rated to handle the additional load. It's important to know the loaded (water, fuel, propane, supplies and passengers) weight of

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your motorhome; if you don't have this figure, take the rig to a certified public scale and weigh it. Subtract this weight from the gross combination weight rating (gcwr) of your coach (actually, your chassis). Compare this figure with the weight of the dinghy vehicle.

Keep in mind that even though the difference between the actual loaded weight of the motorhome and its gcwr may be higher than the weight of the dinghy vehicle, some chassis manufacturers may have additional restrictions. For instance, Ford only approves of towing a 1,500-pound unbraked load, and GM is even more strict with a 1,000-pound limit.

After you have settled on a dinghy vehicle, you'll probably also want to give some consideration to selecting a suitable tow bar and base-plate. The July '97 issue of *MOTORHOME* has a tow-bar buyers guide that covers 29 different models.

Finally, you may want to look into a supplemental braking system for your dinghy vehicle, since the brakes on many motorhomes are not adequate to handle the weight of the motorhome plus an unbraked towed vehicle. The April '97 issue has a dinghy-brake buyers guide, and the April '96 issue has a buyers guide for exhaust retarder systems.

Although the charts shown in this article list only the 1998 models, used-car shoppers will be glad to know that reprints of dinghy-towing guides for years dating back as far as 1990 are still available. Call (805) 667-4366 for information on how to obtain any of these earlier articles. ■

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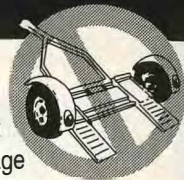
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