

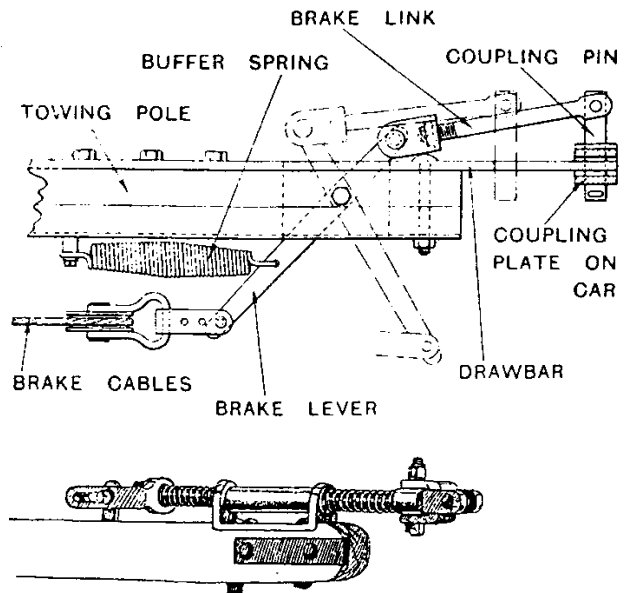
Make sure your journey goes without a hitch !



By Shirley Pippin

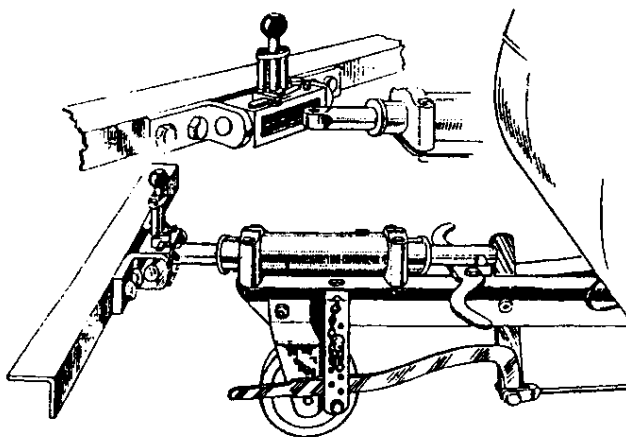
We all have them, but generally take them for granted - perhaps not even noticing how different many of them are. I'm talking about the hitch, or trailer coupling.

In the history of caravanning, no other country had such a wide variety of hitch that Britain had. If nothing else, it meant that there was no danger of design being frozen. The great disadvantage was (and still is to many club members) the need to change the coupling on the car before towing a different 'van.

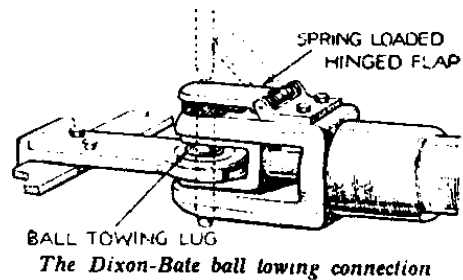
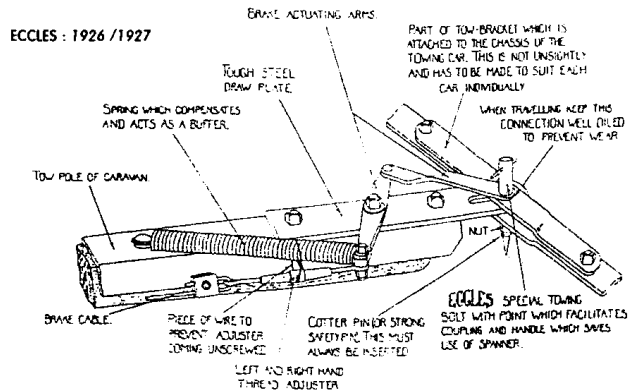


HUTCHINGS: 1929 /1930.

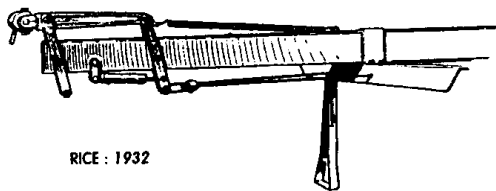
BURLINGHAM - 1938.



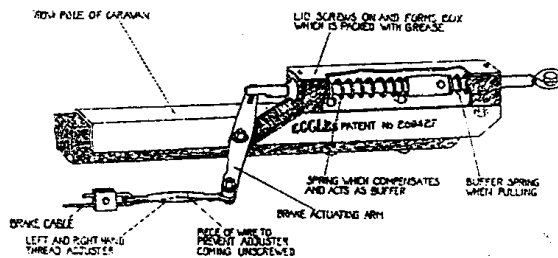
The earliest hitches were of the pin and eye variety, with limited movement. Various types of universal joint did help the rattles and bangs, but the invention of the ball hitch in the early 1930's, must have made a tremendous difference - so much so that many pin hitches were converted from the original as we can often see when we look around displays of old caravans. One or two manufacturers, even into the 1950's, retained some form of pin hitch - Alperson, for example - but today they tend to be confined only to some farm trailers



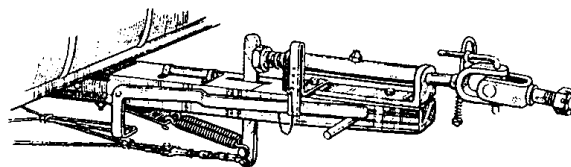
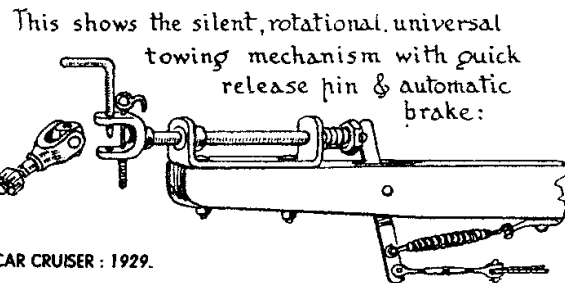
DIXON BATE : 1933



RICE : 1932



Manufacturers were in agreement that, in addition to the main method of locking, there should be a safety catch requiring separate operation. The main locking method *was* usually by moving a jaw which, when in place, extends the arc of the cup to more than 180 degrees and so grips the ball, or else by moving up a dished plug or plate which grips one side of the ball while the other is held by a similar but fixed dished surface in the coupling head. The safety catch was usually a plunger or catch held on by a spring which does not allow the locking device to move unless it is itself held out by hand. This should be foolproof but does not allow for the human element, where the caravanner's attention is distracted at the moment of hitching up to move off a site and he fails to apply the safety catch. When going in to a pot-hole or over a bump in the road, the cup jumps off the ball !

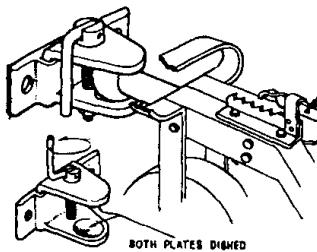


DRAW POLE OF CAR CRUISER
 Note universal coupling, safety clip for coupling pin, automatic brake operating lever, with hand brake and locking pin—drawbar lubricator—also spirit-level for levelling caravan

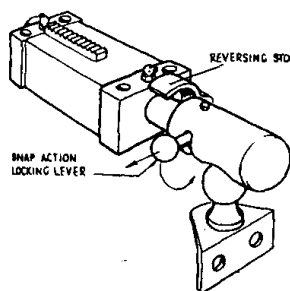
CAR CRUISER : 1934.

To most of us, a tow ball is a tow ball -they're all the same Not so I remember when we first took out a Brockhouse - chassised caravan and were told it should have a proper Brockhouse ball on the car More by luck than anything else, it turned out that we did So, if you have a Brockhouse hitch, make sure the ball is of the "swan necked" kind If not, apparently, you may become separated from your caravan Most tow balls are on vertical "stems" and fitted to the tow car but a few manufacturers did things the other way around, with the ball on the 'van and the coupling on the car Dixon-Bate undergear is an example If you buy a Raven, make sure both halves of the coupling are there, otherwise it might be a problem towing it home '

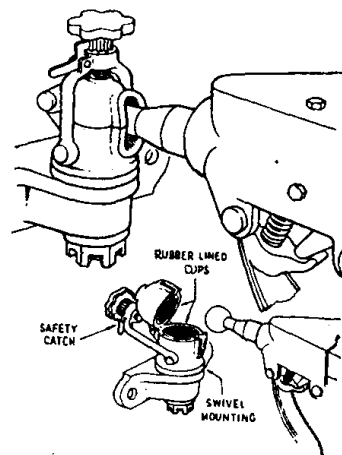
RAVEN : A ball on the caravan is held between dished plates. The shape of the locking screw handle prevents its unscrewing by itself.



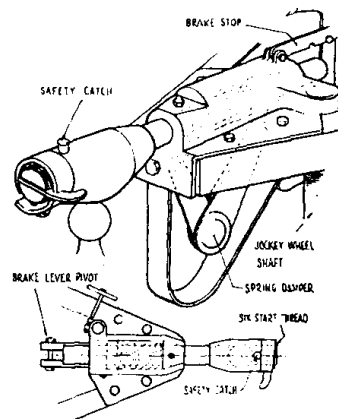
MOORE-DAVIS : The locking piece moves on a cam. A spring-loaded peg secures the handle in the closed position.



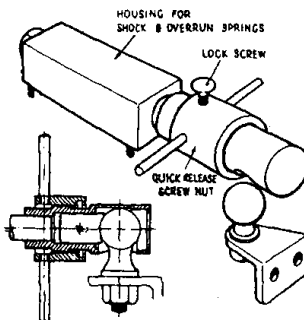
DIXON-BATE : Ball on the caravan is held in a rubber-lined cup. The closure screw is locked by a safety catch.



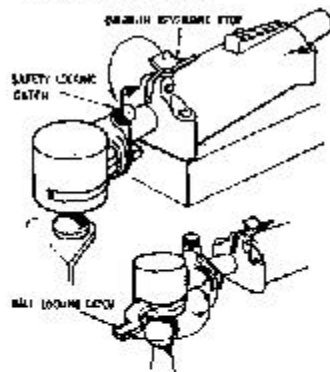
CHELTENHAM : Cup-faced locking piece moves on a quick thread and is locked in place by a lever and slot, and a spring-loaded peg. Braking spring surging is damped by a friction disc.



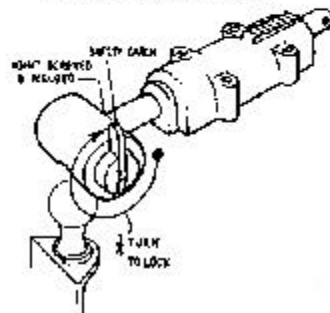
BRAMBER : Cup-faced locking piece is held by an outside sleeve moving on a screw thread.



CYL : The ball is held by a swinging C-shaped arm which traps the neck and is itself locked by a hook located by a spring-loaded peg.

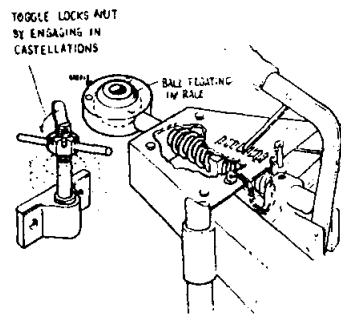


LEASON : A cup-faced locking piece screws home against the ball and is prevented from moving accidentally by a spring-loaded lever engaging in a slot.



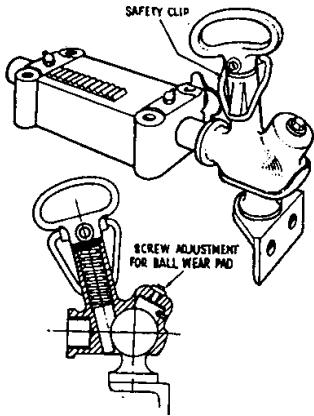
Various types of hitch used in the 1950's

ALPERSON : Simple pin-and-eye coupling with articulation provided by a non-detachable ball and socket joint.

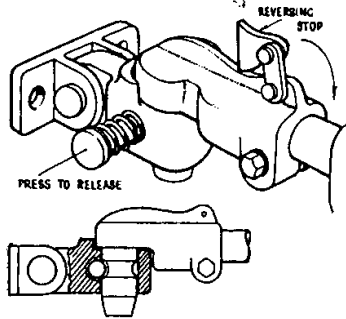


By the early 1950's, the industry was trying to standardise to a 2 inch ball, which the USA had already adopted Germany was using a 50 mm ball (one millimetre under the British and American size)

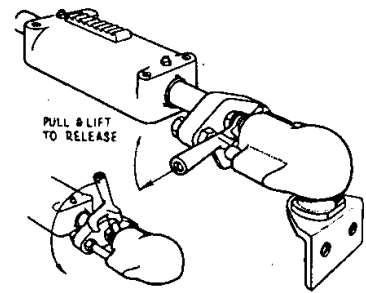
B & B : Self-locking coupling, the ball forcing itself home against the spring-loaded cam. After releasing the safety stirrup, one pull frees the ball.



PAYNTERS : Vertical movement provided for by a trunnion block, lateral movement by a peg rotating in a socket. The coupling is self-locking.

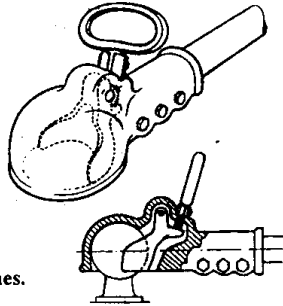


HOLDER GRAISELEY : A cup-faced locking piece moving on a screw thread mates up with the ball and is itself locked when the hook on its handle engages a bar at the side.



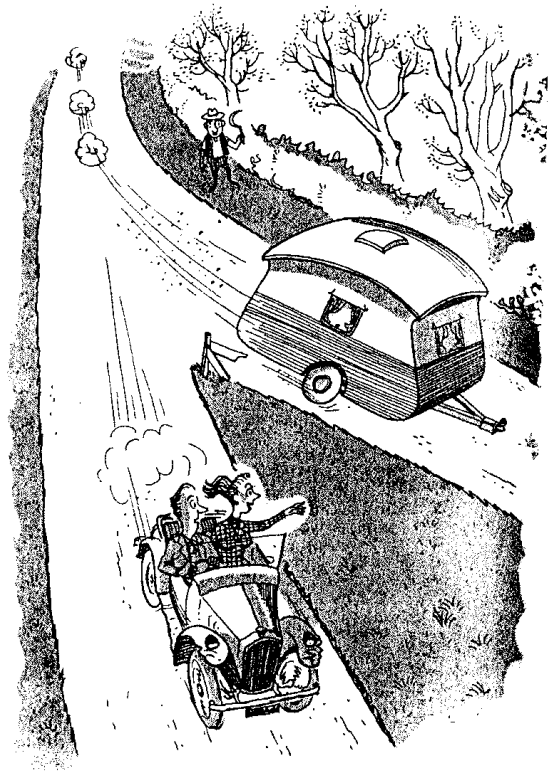
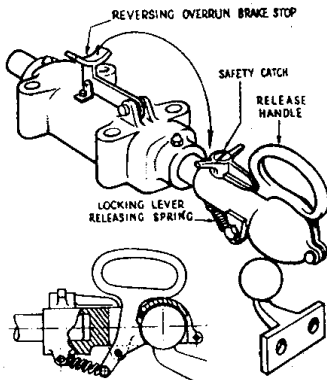
Make sure that if you have to change or fit a replacement hitch, that the spring housing and shaft are of suitable strength and diameter for the weight of the caravan you are towing. For example, Brockhouse and Leason made hitches of various capacities to suit different 'vans

RICE : A new design by an old maker to suit the 2in. ball standard. Closure is operated by a screw-down handle with a spring steel collar as safety catch.



More 1950's hitches.

BROCKHOUSE : Simple locking action by spring-loaded jaw. The safety catch closes the slot of the release handle.



"Look, dear! There's one just like ours!"

Next time you are out at a show, don't just look and admire the caravans. Have a look at the variety of hitches they have and make sure yours is clean, properly lubricated and above all, safe. And a safety chain isn't a bad idea either - just in case.