

810-5-1-.207 Motor Vehicle Wreckers.

(1) Section 40-12-248, Code of Alabama 1975, provides that a motor vehicle wrecker, commonly known as a tow truck, which is used primarily to move, tow or recover disabled motor vehicles or used for impoundment purposes, shall be licensed and registered based on the gross vehicle weight of the wrecker only without regard to the gross vehicle weight of any motor vehicle to be towed by the wrecker.

(2) A wrecker is constructed or permanently adapted primarily for the purpose of lifting, towing and transporting a disabled motor vehicle.

(3) Five general types of wreckers are in common usage, usually based on the type or size of vehicle to be towed:

(a) Boom - not specifically used for towing. Many trucks are equipped with an adjustable boom winch for recovering vehicles that are in a ditch, culvert, over an embankment, or any place the wrecker cannot be safely backed-up to.

(b) Hook and chain (also known as a "sling" or "belt lift") - chains are looped around the vehicle frame or axle, which is drawn aloft by a boom winch to rest against a pair of heavy rubberized mats so the vehicle can be towed on its other axle. Slings are sometimes used for towing vehicles that have been in an accident or have one or two of the front or rear wheels missing or for pickup trucks and other vehicles that have steel bumpers.

(c) Wheel Lift - evolved from the hook and chain technology to produce a large metal yoke that can be fitted under the front or rear wheels to cradle them, drawing the front or rear end of the vehicle clear of the ground by a pneumatic or hydraulic hoist so it can be towed. This apparatus generally picks up the drive wheels of the vehicle (i.e. the front wheels if it is front wheel drive, the rear wheels if it is rear wheel drive) touching only the tires.

(d) Flatbed (also called a Rollback or a Slide) - the entire back of the truck is fitted with a bed that can be hydraulically inclined and moved to ground level, allowing the vehicle being towed to be placed on it under its own power or pulled by a winch.

(e) Integrated (also referred to as a "Self Loader" Snatcher, Quick Pick or Repo Truck) - boom and wheel-lift integrated into one unit. Used in light duty trucks to repossess vehicles or move illegally parked vehicles. Most have controls for the apparatus inside the cab of the tow truck to make quick pickup possible without the inconvenience of exiting the truck to hook up the vehicle. Heavy duty trucks are also manufactured with integrated lift.

These are the most common arrangements, but are by no means exclusive, as there are flatbed units that offer a wheel-lift, boom trucks that can recover but not tow, and wheel-lift units that offer a combination boom with sling.

(4) A wrecker is primarily used to move, tow or recover disabled motor vehicles or used for impoundment purposes. The term "motor vehicle" includes every vehicle which is self-propelled, every vehicle which is propelled by electric power, and every vehicle that is drawn by a self-propelled vehicle, including every trailer and semitrailer, as provided by §40-12-240(7). The term "disabled" means the motor vehicle is incapable of being self-operated. The term "impound" means to seize and retain in legal custody.

(5) The license fee shall be based on the gross vehicle weight of the wrecker which includes the empty (unladen) weight of the wrecker fully equipped and serviced for operation including the weight of any add-on equipment, tools, spare tires, fuel and passengers.

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