Small load or full delivery for residential concrete work?

Understanding your concrete delivery options

When planning a residential concrete project, whether it is a garden path, a shed base, a driveway extension or a larger foundation, one of the first practical decisions you face is how to order the ready mix concrete. The choice often comes down to whether a small load or a full delivery is the right approach for your job. Each option has its own set of advantages and limitations, and matching the delivery type to your specific project can save both time and effort.

Ready mix concrete is batched at a plant and delivered in a truck mixer. The truck keeps the mix turning so it stays workable until it reaches your site. For the homeowner or small contractor, the key variable is the volume of concrete you actually need. Ordering too little means a halt in the pour; ordering much more than needed means waste and extra cost. Understanding the trade-offs between a small load and a full truck load helps you make the best call.

What counts as a small load?

A small load in the ready mix concrete industry typically refers to any delivery where the volume ordered is less than the full capacity of the truck. Most standard mixer trucks carry between six and eight cubic metres of concrete. A small load might be one cubic metre or even less, depending on the supplier. Some companies set a minimum order, often around half a cubic metre or a full cubic metre, to make the trip viable.

Small loads are common for residential jobs such as setting fence posts, laying a small patio, pouring a garage floor, or repairing a section of a driveway. The advantage is that you pay for exactly what you need, and you are not left with leftover material that hardens in a pile. However, small loads come with a few practical considerations. The truck still has to travel from the plant, and the cost of fuel and driver time is spread over a smaller volume. This can mean a higher price per cubic metre compared with a full load. Also, if you order a very small volume, the truck may need to carry a partial batch, and the concrete mix itself must be carefully adjusted to maintain the correct strength grade and workability at a reduced volume.



When a full delivery makes sense

A full delivery, meaning a truck loaded to near its full drum capacity, is typically more economical per cubic metre. This option suits larger residential projects such as a new driveway, a substantial extension foundation, a large garage slab, or multiple interconnected paths and patios. If your total concrete requirement is six cubic metres or more, ordering a full truck load can bring the cost per cubic metre down noticeably.

There are also logistical benefits. With a full load, the concrete is all from the same batch, so the colour and consistency are uniform across the entire pour. You get one delivery, one chute setup, and one truck to manage. For a big pour, this simplifies coordination. The concrete arrives at a consistent slump, and you can place it steadily without waiting for a second truck to arrive. That said, a full load requires careful planning. You need to have enough labour and equipment on site to handle the full volume before the concrete begins to set. For a typical residential project, that might mean a team of three or four people, a wheelbarrow or concrete pump, and a prepared sub-base with reinforcement in place.

Assessing your site access

Before deciding on small load or full delivery, consider how the truck will reach your pour location. Ready mix concrete trucks are large and heavy. They need a clear, firm path to back up to the work area. A narrow driveway, low-hanging tree branches, tight gates, or soft ground can all limit access. For a full load, the truck must be able to get close enough for the chute to reach the farthest point of the pour. If access is restricted, a small load delivered by a smaller vehicle or pumped from a distance might be the only practical option.

For many residential sites, the concrete truck can park on the street and the chute can reach 10 to 15 feet. If the pour is further away, you might need a concrete pump or a line pump, which adds to the cost but can be worth it for a full load. On the other hand, a small load can sometimes be handled with wheelbarrows if the distance is short and the volume is low. Checking the access route beforehand prevents delays on pour day.

Strength grade and mix design

Both small loads and full deliveries can be supplied in a range of strength grades. The strength grade you choose depends on the intended use. For a light-duty path or a shed base, a lower strength mix like C20 or C25 might be sufficient. For a driveway that will take vehicle loads, a C30 or C35 mix is common. Foundations often require a specific design mix to meet structural requirements. The supplier can advise on the correct cement, aggregate and water content for your project. With a small load, you are still getting the same quality control as a full load, but the batch may be smaller, so the plant operator must be precise with the proportions.



It is worth noting that ordering a full load does not lock you into a single strength grade. You can still specify the exact mix you need. The advantage of a full load is that the entire pour is consistent. If you order a small load and later need a second, separate batch for the same job, there is a small risk of slight variation in colour or finish between pours. For most residential work this is not a problem, but for visible surfaces it is something to consider.

Planning your pour day

Whether you choose a small load or a full delivery, the day of the pour requires preparation. Have the sub-base compacted and the formwork in place. Make sure reinforcement is tied and supported at the correct height. Check that the water content of the mix is appropriate for the weather. On a hot day, concrete can stiffen faster, so you may need to work quickly or request a retarder additive. On a cold day, the concrete may take longer to set, but you must protect it from frost.

For a small load, you might manage with two people. For a full load, you need a crew. It is better to have extra hands than to watch concrete harden in the truck. Also, plan for the disposal of washout water and any excess concrete. The truck driver will need to wash the

chute after the pour, so have a designated area where the water can run off without damaging the lawn or driveway.

Cost considerations without price talk

While specific prices vary between suppliers and regions, the general principle is that a full delivery spreads fixed costs over more cubic metres, so the per-unit cost is lower. A small load attracts a premium because the same travel and setup costs are applied to a smaller volume. However, ordering a full load when you only need half of it means you pay for concrete you cannot use. Waste is not just a cost issue; it is also an environmental concern. For this reason, accurate volume calculation is essential. Measure the length, width, and depth of each pour section, and add a small allowance for spillage and uneven ground. Most suppliers can help you check your quantities before you order.

Making the right choice for your project

For small residential jobs like a single fence post base, a small path, or a repair patch, a small load is the sensible option. For larger work such as a driveway, a garage floor, or a house extension foundation, a full delivery is often more economical and convenient. In between, you might consider ordering a half load or a quarter load, depending on what the supplier offers. The key is to match the delivery size to the job volume, not the other way round.



When you are ready to order, it helps to discuss your project with a local supplier who understands the area. For example, a Derbyshire supplier providing ready mix concrete, concrete mixes, delivery and customer support for domestic and construction projects such as staceyconcrete.co.uk can guide you on the best approach for your site. They can advise on access, mix design, and whether a small load or a full delivery suits your timeline and budget.

In the end, both options have their place. A small load gives you flexibility and avoids waste for modest jobs. A full delivery offers better value per cubic metre and consistency for larger pours. By thinking through your project size, site access, and labour, you can decide confidently which one works for you. And if you are ever unsure, a quick conversation with a ready mix concrete supplier will clarify what is possible for your specific job. For a reliable local source of ready mix concrete, consider staceyconcrete.co.uk for your next residential project.