

CHOOSING A QUALITY AND RELIABLE RV NEW OR PRE-OWNED

I have read many articles, letters, etc, from newbies in the world of American RVs and one of the things they all agree on is that they didn't expect as many problems as they found with the new RVs they bought. The same kind of complaints came from buyers of used entry-level motorhomes and buyers of new top-of-the-line models. The only difference was WHAT went wrong. In case of the first group, there were mostly workmanship and lack-of-maintenance issues. In case of the second group, there were electronic malfunctions and problems with slide-rooms, etc.

I see two very different issues here, namely expectations and responsibilities. We can argue about this for years to come and still get nowhere with the discussion but those of you who take a different view are welcome to post responses.

Expectations

Buyers expect to buy a perfect house on a perfect chassis. Some get one of the two, few get both. Many manufacturers expect, or at least hope for, a small degree of self-help attitude from the buyer. If you see a screw sticking out, don't make an appointment and file a complaint. Instead, take a screwdriver and tighten that screw. I would think most people think that's a reasonable expectation but the gap widens quickly when just about all the screws aren't tight (former quality

issue with Winnies and Fleetwoods) and the RV needs a thorough going over to find all the loose screws. That's where we enter the area of responsibility.

Responsibility

The manufacturer builds and sells (through his agents and retailers) very complex products. It is his responsibility to make sure everything works, and if it doesn't, to fix it so that it does. The buyer is responsible for applying reasonable care in order to keep things in good working condition.

Most buyers of NEW motorhomes find that it takes about two years to sort out what is 'normal' and what needs to be fixed, and to get the jobs done. You won't find all the little problems on your first day out and you may have to 'fix' one thing more than once to get it right. Whether that's right or wrong can be discussed until the cows come home but it is a fact and, in my opinion, repeat buyers of NEW motorhomes expect they will go through a 'find and fix' period. First-time buyers of NEW RVs have, in my opinion, unreasonable expectations of a 'perfect world' in this regard. If we're talking about USED RVs, well, then everything must be expected as the buyer not only inherits manufacturing problems but also problems to which the previous owner contributed. Buying an RV, used or new, is not quite like sending the shuttle to the moon and to expect the launch and journey will run smoothly and flawlessly – but it's similar. Think about how much equipment is on your motorhome and compare that to the car you have in your garage. I agree that I SHOULD get a perfect unit for my perfect money but I don't expect to actually get one.

My advice is to buy the best motorhome one can afford. Many people in the States look for the most bang for their buck. That's a good approach, too but when you look at what's going on in the newsgroups of the 'bang for the buck' RVs you may conclude that having the most gadgets (or whatever turns you on in RVs of that category) isn't as important to you as having the highest quality, and 'bang for buck' is measured in quantity, not in quality.

At the end of your post you ask for ideas in which groups you can discuss this. There are several consumer groups and general discussion boards where you can vent your frustration and find support from your peers. Since the topic is RV related you can also use this forum here.

I have purposely avoided the 'which brand' question. With the many readers we have just about every brand sold in the US is represented, and we know from previous discussions that near perfect units and problem units roll out of every factory.

The way I see it, this thread may send a floodwave of correspondence about whatever went wrong in the reader's RV. In the end, we know details of what we already know in general: RVs aren't perfect. So, what's the point of the discussion here? Details need to be discussed with your dealer and/or the manufacturer and we already know the general situation. But if readers want to email responses, that's okay. After all, this is a thread about RVs.

I touched on many subjects in this article and much more can be said. If you're unhappy with your motorhome, I suggest you put it on the market. It will take a while to sell it (because I do not suggest you offer it a bargain basement price). During that period, you can look for quality in the motorhomes that fit your budget, or look for a two, or three year old pre-owned one. The longer you wait the less you can ask for your current motorhome. Alternatively, accept that your motorhome isn't perfect and fix it up and enjoy it – if possible. (I assume you don't have a semi-lemon, but just some issues.)

Common complaints

All RVs have their share of problems and it is to be expected.

Many owners complain of leaks that allow outside air in to the point that many units can not effectively heat or cool while under way, and some have problems even when not moving. These air leaks have also resulted in water leaks and discoloration of areas where air flows in. The manufacturer says that correcting these leaks is the responsibility of the owner and that the company will not get into 'retrofitting.' One owner developed a set of procedures outlining how to locate the leaks and how to repair them using a foam material.

My personal feeling is that no one buys a new unit with the understanding that problems like the above example are to be expected because "all RVs have them."

I would like to find a message board that would help me to determine, in an objective fashion, what reasonable expectations are when buying, and which brands maintain a high focus on quality.

Any suggestions?