

SPANNERMAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

MORE TAG AXLE CONCERNS

We have a 36ft 1997 American motorhome with a slideout that is built on a Chevrolet P-chassis. From the day we picked it up at the factory in June '97 we have experienced an extreme vibration at speeds of over 55 mph.

The tyres have been balanced five times, and Michelin says the tyres are not at fault. The driveline has been removed, trued and balanced, to no avail! The Chevrolet dealer now feels the problem is in the tag axle, but the motorhome is so rear-end heavy that it cannot be tested with the tyres off the tag axle.

The Chevrolet dealer also found that the tag-axle brakes are locking and sliding the tag-axle tyres, even though the brakes are completely backed-off. The dealer feels that the tag-axle wheel on the driver's side has too much front-to-back movement, but the technician can't check this out because the axle is encased in rubber.

The motorhome vibrates so much at 65mph that the front TV set jumps up out of the dashboard as though someone has loosened its release mechanism! Our motorhome has spent collectively three to four weeks in the workshop, and it only has 3,200 miles on it.

We love the RV, but the vibration is driving us mad. Have you any thoughts on the cause, or have you run into this problem before?

Since you have a modified chassis, Chevrolet really has no responsibility for your problem. It's the RV manufacturer's problem. However, knowledgeable Chevrolet Motorhome Service Centres can usually diagnose vibrations using a portable electronic vibration analyser and formulas to determine the offending component(s).

Chevrolet may be able to diagnose the problem, but it will not fix it. Contact the motorhome manufacturer if the dealer cannot provide a solution.

TRANSMISSION PROBLEMS DOWNHILL

I have a 31ft 1988 motorhome on a GM P-chassis with a 454-cid engine. The problem is that it won't coast downhill. When other large motorhomes need to downshift to second gear, I'm still on the accelerator to get down the hill.

Is there something in the transmission that may act as an engine brake? This is my first motorhome and I bought it used, so I have very little information on what type of accessories may have been added. Is there something wrong or needing adjustment?

Assuming that your coach has the original type of transmission, it should be a model TH400 three-speed automatic. This transmission does not have any sort of braking system in it, other than its ability to downshift and use engine braking. However, you may be comparing later-model coaches

which have four-speed overdrive transmissions and/or auxiliary transmissions. Also, there are several rear-axle gear ratios available in GM P-chassis, and you probably have a numerically higher one. Coaches with numerically lower gear-reduction ratios coast downhill easier.

Try your coach on the nearest steady down slope which requires some steady braking to maintain a safe speed. If your coach won't coast down have it checked for dragging brakes. However, if the brakes were already dragging to that extent I think you would have already noticed the poor consumption and smoking brakes.

A NOISY FAN

I own a 1987 American Motorhome on a Chevrolet P-chassis with a 454-cid engine. The fan noise is driving me crazy. On a hot day, the fan will engage before the engine temperature gets up to normal, and it stays engaged for four or five minutes. It then stays disengaged for about a minute and then comes back on.

I had the radiator cleaned out and also changed the water pump, still the same noise. Is there a problem?

According to GM, the fan-clutch coil is calibrated so that at 90° Fahrenheit the clutch is at a point of shifting between high and low fan speeds, so don't expect too much improvement. I prefer to attempt the simplest and least expensive 'fixes' first. Try replacing the thermostat. Also make sure that the panels surrounding the radiator are in place, so hot air does not get recirculated back through the radiator. As a last resort, try replacing the fan clutch. GM has updated the fan since your coach was new.

FRIDGE WILL NOT OPERATE ON LPG AT HIGH ALTITUDE

My refrigerator stopped working on propane as I climbed onto the mountains around 6,000ft. I could not get it to work on propane above that altitude, but it worked fine on electricity. My water heater worked fine on propane at the higher altitude. When I descended from the mountains, the refrigerator began to work again at about 6,000ft. Do you have any idea why I had this problem at high altitude?

Thin air! Your water heater has an air adjustment; your refrigerator does not. As you ascend the mountain, the propane/air mixture changes. If you can give the burner more air the flame will continue to burn but eventually it will become too rich and go out. Some burners are more sensitive to altitude than others. If you plan a lot of high-altitude camping, contact the manufacturer of your refrigerator and buy a smaller burner orifice. Changing to a smaller one should solve your problem. Alternatively, run the refrigerator on electricity. An electric heater is not altitude-sensitive.

TAG AXLE CONCERNS

I just bought a 1998 36ft motorhome

with a tag axle. I have read recent comments, in other magazines, relating to the problems associated with these axles. If a tag axle is not a satisfactory solution to increase the GVWR how can the manufacturer sell it with the coach?

Also, we want to buy a new car that can be towed behind our new motorhome. We want an automatic transmission and tow on an A-frame. What cars are available that will work for us?

When a motorhome manufacturer modifies a chassis, responsibility for compliance with all Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards (FMVSS) becomes the motorhome manufacturer's responsibility. When a tag axle is installed, the motorhome must be recertified before it can be sold. However, recertification is not supervised by the government or any regulatory agency. It is just 'required'.

Some motorhome manufacturers invest more money in engineering than others. Good engineering should be a consideration before buying any motorhome. Engineers don't run the world, but they do make it run!

As for the suitability of an automatic car for towing on an A-frame I suggest you contact Car-a-Tow of Poole, who have a list of cars they have fitted A-frames to. The choice of automatics you will find quite limited though.

A LACK OF BATTERY POWER

I have a recurring problem with my elderly motorhome. When it is not hooked up to mains power the battery-powered lights don't come on at all. I've checked all the terminals in the fuse box and on a couple of occasions when I closed the fuse box the lights have come on. This problem does not affect the water pump, nor does it happen all the time. What are my options?

All motorhomes built to comply with the regulations have a large fuse or a circuit breaker between the fuse panel and the house battery. It is usually rated at 50 or 60 amps. The fuse or circuit breaker is in the circuit for your safety. It is close-wired to the battery and will open if there is a large short. While a blown main fuse is easy to spot, an open or partially open circuit breaker isn't. Furthermore, circuit breakers aren't obvious unless you know what they look like. The larger circuit breakers are round plastic with two terminals and two mounting ears. Others look like a small relay with two terminals.

LETTER TO SPANNERMAN AND ARTICLES FOR ARVM
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