

SOME TIPS FOR PREPARING — THE MOTORHOME — FOR THE WINTER MONTHS IN THE UK

BATTERIES

With the approach of Winter in the UK the batteries in all vehicles, but particularly motorhomes, come under a lot more stress than during the warmer and lighter months. Unfortunately many of the breakdowns that the AA, RAC and other breakdown services are called to during the winter months are connected with battery performance.

During the summer months owners pay little or no attention to the state of their batteries, and it is only now that suddenly and unexpectedly the battery fails. In the motorhome you awake one morning and the heating has ceased working, the generator will not start and you probably wish you were still at home where it is warm. All this can be avoided by giving the batteries a good check over before the cold weather comes.

Battery manufacturers have analysed how the vehicle battery reacts to the cold and their investigations show that if the temperature drops to minus 20C, the energy available in a battery in otherwise perfect condition can be halved. In such circumstances it is little wonder that a battery in less than tip top condition has insufficient power to ignite the fuel air mixture to the cylinders when the starter motor is running. Even at freezing point a battery in good condition can only muster 80-85 per cent of its capacity. Conversely the engine requires a much higher starting current in cold weather. The battery produces its highest capacity on hot summer days.

If you follow the suggestions below then you may reduce the chances of your battery letting you down at the vital moment this winter and at the same time prolong its useful life. Remember though that batteries do not last for ever and that as they age their capacity reduces and eventually they will need replacing.

Battery general maintenance guidelines: (1) Clean the terminals regularly; (2) Protect them against corrosion by applying grease; (3) If the battery is old, get it checked by a specialist; (4) Keep the battery as dry as possible; (5) Check electrolyte levels weekly if accessible through vent plugs; (6) Ensure positive and negative clamps fit tightly; (7) Avoid unnecessary use of electrical equipment when stationary, particularly in diesel-engined vehicles.

BATTERY CARE WHEN YOUR RV IS OUT OF USE

Check and inspect batteries carefully and ensure that they are fully charged up at

all times. So-called maintenance-free batteries need checking also. On conventional batteries, check electrolyte specific gravity and charge if below 1.255. If possible disconnect the battery cables (positive and negative) from the batteries if the motorhome is being laid up, even for a short period, as this will prevent gradual discharge, and the possibility of fire due to short circuits. Even when the batteries are disconnected the charge state should be checked periodically as all batteries self-discharge over a period of time.

FUEL TANKS

Fill fuel tanks as full as possible to limit condensation build-up. This is normal practice, even over-night, for aircraft. Even so a small amount of water will collect in the bottom of the tank which may need draining off before you start the engine.

ENGINE

Check engine coolant and, if necessary, increase the antifreeze concentration. If you are laying up your motorhome for a long period then start and run the engine until completely warm, then drain engine oil and replace filter element, and refill with fresh oil. Check and secure all caps to prevent water, snow and dirt from entering engine. **Petrol engines only** — after the oil has been replaced, remove air cleaner and pour 1/2 to 1 pint of 10W or lighter oil into carburettor air intake with engine running. Pour slowly at first, then rapidly using last quarter to stall engine. Replace air cleaner. If vehicle is equipped with air conditioning, the unit should be operated during this final engine warm-up to lubricate compressor seal.

TYRES

Check and keep tyres inflated to recommended pressures. If possible take the weight of the tyres by jacking the motorhome up and resting it on suitable stands. If the motorhome is parked-up outside then cover the tyres with a suitable cover to shield them from the sun.

WATER SYSTEMS

Place the motorhome on a level hard standing and drain all water tanks, water heaters and associated pipework. If necessary you can connect a low pressure air line to the city hook-up and gently blow the water out by turning on the sink and shower taps. Do not forget the toilet and the water heater. After draining leave all the drain valves in the open position. It is also advisable to put a small amount of

potable water antifreeze down the sinks and shower drains to prevent any water in the traps from freezing and damaging them. Changing the trap under the shower in some motorhomes is not any easy job and can prove expensive.

As an alternative to draining down you can fill the water system with potable water antifreeze. First drain off as much water as you can. If you can isolate the water heater from the water system you will require much less antifreeze (water heaters hold between 6 and 10 US gallons of water dependent on model) but ensure that you leave the drain valve open and turn the gas and electric off. Dilute the antifreeze according to the instructions on the container then pump it into the system either with a hand pump or by means of the water pump fitted with a special pick-up pipe. Open each tap in turn until antifreeze solution flows freely. Do not use automotive antifreeze as this is poisonous and will be difficult to flush out completely. When the time comes to de-winterise the motorhome the antifreeze solution can simply be flushed out.

One final thing to protect on the water system is the water heater. Smear vaseline over the gas valve and other exposed parts and then put a piece of old carpet, or similar, behind the outside access cover to keep the wind and rain out.

ROOF AIR-CON UNITS

These units are particularly vulnerable to the elements and also tend to get forgotten until you need them. Before storing the motorhome it is a good idea to remove the outside cover and clean out any debris in and around the cooling unit and motor. The fan shaft tends to rust so it is a good idea to smear some grease, or vaseline, on it and also any other exposed metal parts. Finally cover the unit up with a cover, preferably a purpose-made one which will allow air to flow freely through the unit to reduce condensation.

EXTERIOR AND INTERIOR CLEANING

Before storing your RV for the winter give it a really good clean inside and out. Remove all perishable food items, canned food, etc, and anything else which might attract rodents. Shut all roof vents, except one, which provided it has a vent cover, can be left slightly open to allow movement of air inside the RV. Clean the exterior thoroughly and give it a good polish.

If possible store your RV undercover, but if not on a level hard standing away from trees, grass and weeds, and protected from the elements.