

SPANNERMAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

FAULTY PROPANE TANK FILLER

Having owned a number of American motorhomes, in recent years, I've always thought of myself as a reasonably knowledgeable RVer. That is until recently while attempting to fill my domestic propane tank at an LPG filling station. I could not get a tight connection because of a slight nick in the brass fill valve, which indeed there was. At the next filling station, it was the same story, although I did manage to get gas into the tank even though some was lost into the atmosphere in the process.

I thought that the solution to the problem was to have the filler valve replaced but I was told by a gas company that the valve could not be replaced until the tank was empty, because they had no way to recapture the gas remaining in it. It is illegal to exhaust LPG into the atmosphere by simply opening the valve. On my return home we nursed what little fuel remained for the refrigerator and cooking and then contacted my regular propane supplier. When I explained the problem, he said, 'You've lost the rubber gasket for the fill valve.' I had always thought the propane connection was metal to metal, with no gasket at all. I was referred to a LPG supply company for the simple 1-15/16 inch rubber washer. Wouldn't you think that people who sell propane to RVers would know better, even if I didn't? Needless to say, I now carry several spare gaskets!

In most motorhomes, the LP tank is positioned behind a structural component, for safety reasons, and usually pretty inaccessible. So, this little-known washer, or 'O' ring, you speak of, isn't always readily visible. As you know, the LP tank will fill without the 'O' ring, but there will be leakage. I can assure you that you are not the first, neither will you be the last, to experience this problem.

It well worth carrying a spare 'O' ring (washer) for the LPG filler as the new LPG stations will be using a bayonet type European fitting which is smaller. The American style connection will gradually be phased out over the next couple of years. However don't panic as simple adaptor will still enable you to fill up in the UK and Europe.

GRAY WATER PROBLEMS

The lights on my gray water holding-tank monitor indicator lights stay on most of the time. I have tried several commercial holding-tank cleaning products to no avail. What do you suggest?

Just because your gray-water monitor lights stay on doesn't necessarily mean the probes in the gray-water tank are fouled. The monitor itself could be the problem.

Get under the motorhome and disconnect the wires from the sender or the probes. If the monitor lights don't change, you have a

wiring or a monitor problem. If they do change, you may have a sender or a probe problem that no amount of cleaning will ever fix.

Most monitor problems are sender/probe problems. Rarely is the problem caused by debris in the tank, particularly the gray-water tank.

BRAKE FLUID PROBLEMS

I own a 1986 C Class American motorhome built on a Ford E-350 chassis with a 460-cid engine and a three-speed automatic transmission. I have recently experienced two brake failures, the reasons which I do not understand.

In one instance, I was driving at low speed in heavy traffic on a level road when I experienced minor brake drag, followed by total failure. The pedal went to the floor and the brake warning light came on. I used low gear and the emergency brake to bring the vehicle to a halt, where I inspected the system. I found no fluid leakage, and the master-cylinder reservoir was full.

The second failure occurred a few weeks later, when I was coming down a long hill. I shifted into a lower gear at the top of the hill and seldom applied the brakes on the way down. About one or two miles into the down hill, at about 25 mph, I applied the brakes to slow for a bend and the pedal went to the floor. One pump on the pedal brought it up again, and braking was temporarily restored. As I proceeded down the hill, the situation deteriorated. By the time I got to the bottom, it took about three pumps to restore pressure. I pulled off and checked the system: no leaks, fluid level normal, no brake warning light. I got back in, drove another two miles down the back road at slow speed and, by the time I got to the main highway, everything appeared completely normal.

I have never experienced a brake problem like this before and am obviously concerned about the possibility of future recurrence.

Brake fluid is hygroscopic, which means it absorbs water to keep it from accumulating in pockets in the system. As the brake fluid absorbs more water, the boiling point of the brake fluid goes down.

When the boiling point goes down, the brake fluid boils and forms steam pockets that pressurise the system but collapse when the brakes are applied. This causes the pedal-to-the-metal phenomenon that sends you to the side of the road looking for a leak. Just going to the side of the road allows the brake fluid to cool off and everything inexplicably returns to normal.

Completely flush your entire brake system with a high quality brake fluid - check your handbook to ensure that you use the correct type.

The better quality brake fluids have a dry boiling point that is higher than many of the cheaper types and it will give you the best possible protection as long as it is kept dry.

Motorhomes sit more than they are used.

The brake system breathes every day with the change in temperature from night to day. Moisture is drawn in and absorbed by the brake fluid. If the fluid is not changed periodically, this problem will occur on any hot day, in heavy traffic or in downhill situations where you can least afford to have it happen.

BODY LONGEVITY

I have been looking for a used diesel pusher motorhome in a price range of less than £60,000. Various sales people have given me conflicting information about engine performance, chassis specifications and body integrity. A basic conflict is the strength and longevity of fibreglass versus aluminium. One salesman informed me that a 1989 coach would not be a wise purchase because fibreglass would not last more than 100,000 miles, while aluminium would last 'forever'.

I realise there would be some variables based on exposure to sun and care given to the exterior, but can fibreglass be as bad as this person predicts? I'm amazed at the lack of general knowledge some sales people have about engines and chassis components. I frequently refer to articles in Motorhome publications. This usually brings a look of pain from the salesperson.

Thanks for any information you can provide.

If it is properly cared for, fibreglass will generally outlast aluminium. However, this does not include so-called fibreglass that is a thin sheet of material in a side-wall laminate. Properly manufactured side-wall laminates will also last a very long time, especially when there is no water intrusion at the seams or around the windows. Unfortunately, we are hearing more and more complaints about side wall delamination. The fibreglass isn't failing, the side wall is simply coming apart. Expensive side-wall replacement is sometimes the only long-lasting repair but very often a localised repair will do the job.

A common fault on many motorhomes is the seal around windows which after a period of time cracks and allows water in. The water then creeps between the layers and causes the delamination. If you notice any sign of a bad window seal get it fixed straight away.

I don't know of any Class A motorhome manufacturer that is currently making a complete fibreglass shell, but there are some that make metal shells. The metal can be steel or aluminium. Without care, both can deteriorate like any automobile body.

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