

SPANNERMAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

KWIKEE ELECTRIC STEP PROBLEMS

I own a 1995 American motorhome which has a Kwikkee electric step fitted to the front entry door. Over the years this step has either stuck in, or out, but can usually be encouraged to extend or retract with a little help. Recently, however, it stopped altogether and I had to remove the pin which connects the mechanism to the movable step to allow me to retract it.

Firstly, how can I check out what has failed and secondly, what can be done to maintain these steps in working order.

Unfortunately the mechanism and the wiring on these steps are completely open to the elements and so rust and corrosion play a large part in the many failures which RV owners experience. Steps on front door RVs seem to suffer a great deal more than centre door models.

I would suggest you remove your step from the motorhome and checked it out on the bench. Removing the step from the motorhome may prove more difficult than it first appears due to heavy corrosion on the fixing bolts but it well worth the effort. If all is well with the motor, control board and the mechanics then clean everything and give it a coat of paint, being careful not to paint over any of the moving parts and bearings. Also whilst you have it on the bench check all the wiring connections and replace if necessary. Then carefully reinstall it using new nuts and bolts, metric sizes will make life easier the next time you need to remove it. You can also fix a small deflector just in front of the step, clear of the mechanism, which will certainly help to reduce the amount of road water and muck getting into onto the mechanism.

SHUDDERING WHEELS

I own a 1983 American A Class 28ft, which I bought last year. I knew the history (35,000 miles, one owner) and in the last few months I have driven it across the UK and down to Spain. It is fitted with a Chevy 6.2 litre diesel and I am generally pleased with its performance except for two problems.

First, the RV gets a severe shudder as if the rear wheels are badly out of balance, it only happens after stopping for a break during a journey.

It appears that the tyres, when warm, get a flat spot and as you drive away the shudder starts, you can even sense that every time the wheels go around it bumps and as you go faster it bumps faster. Then after about a mile or so it begins to get less and gradually disappears.

Second, I understand that the expansion bottle on the coolant system should receive excess liquid from the cooling system and that liquid should be sucked into the system as required. My system is not retrieving the liquid back from the bottle. I manually put the same liquid back in the radiator via the filler cap. Over a long journey it uses very

little coolant, and when I remove the radiator cap (even when quite warm) there is no excess pressure.

My first thoughts about the severe shudder in the rear wheels is that the tyres may need replacing. I would suggest that you have all four rear tyres thoroughly checked over and check that the tyre pressures are balanced. It is important to ensure that all tyres on the rear are inflated to exactly the same pressures and in particular those which are back to back.

If the tyres are found to be in good order then I would have the wheel bearings and the back-axle checked over. Also make sure that the oil in the differential is at the correct level and is of the correct grade.

Your second problem relating to the coolant expansion bottle could be quite straightforward but then again it might not. As you do not lose much coolant on a journey the problem is not related to a faulty gasket, radiator or radiator hoses. The seal on the radiator cap may well be worn which would account for the lack of pressure in the radiator when the engine is warm. When the engine cools and the coolant contracts air will be drawn into the radiator, via the cap seal.

I would suggest you get the cooling system thoroughly checked out as soon as you can just in case there is a more serious problem.

CHASSIS BATTERY DRAIN

I have read a number of articles in various magazines about chassis batteries going dead due to mystery electrical drains. I recently exchanged my motorhome and then experienced the same problem.

After a lot of detective work I tracked the problem down to the carbon-monoxide/LP-gas detector which was wired to the chassis battery and not the coach one.

I corrected the problem by rewiring this detector. It's now connected to the coach battery and isolated with the coach battery-disconnect switch when the motorhome is in storage

That's a quick fix. I am surprised to learn that the RV manufacturer had wired a house item to the chassis battery. Most motorhome owners have some kind of a battery disconnect on their house battery, but few do the same on their chassis battery.

Another source of chassis battery drain is the dash mounted radio and also the cigarette lighter which many RVers plug their mobile phone into for charging. To check out which items are connected which is fairly straightforward. Firstly isolate, or disconnect your coach battery, and then switch on the various items, one by one. If they still operate then it is a sure sign they are connected to the chassis battery.

You can either reconnect all the regularly used items and 12 volt outlets to the coach battery or you could install a small trickle charger, such as a 'Battery Mate', which will keep the chassis battery topped up from the house battery.

It is always a good idea to isolate your coach batteries when the RV is not in use.

WATER FILTERS

We spend a couple months every year touring Europe, particularly France and Spain, both of which we really enjoy.

We have never hooked our motorhome to the campsite water supply because of the usual fears of what we might unleash into our intestinal tracts.

There are a bewildering number of water filters advertised in RV magazines and catalogues, but none of the ads seem to answer our specific question - will the filter make the water safe to drink? Or is there a filter that will make the water at least safe enough to put into our freshwater tank for toilet-flushing and hand-washing without forever polluting the tank?

You ask a very good and timely question. This same question comes up time and time again even from RVers touring the UK where, generally, the water is safe to drink even if the taste is not so good.

Several filters advertise a fineness and chlorination that will remove the harmful bacteria. Such filters will remove just about anything else that will make water unsafe to drink. However, if you want to be doubly sure, you should consider a reverse osmosis filter for your drinking water but these are not cheap.

WHY A TAG-AXLE

I'm looking at a 2002 40-foot motorhome with a slideout. The 2002 model I'm considering has a tag-axle, but the same model in 2001 did not. Both motorhomes are available currently, and both are equipped with 450 horsepower engines. What are the advantages and disadvantages of a tag-axle, assuming, of course, that every thing else is equal?

The predominant reason for adding a tag-axle is to better distribute, or carry, the weight of the coach. You'll need to weigh both models to determine which one has the cargo carrying capacity that best fits your needs. One of the disadvantages of a tag-axle is that you have more tyres to replace and more weight to move. And, in some cases, the motorhome's turning circle and tyre wear can be affected by the additional pair of tyres. Also, although I doubt that this will concern someone in a 40-foot coach, the tag-axle can cause traction problems on roadways with loose material, such as mud, gravel, or snow, and the reduced weight on driven wheels can cause spin.

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