

SPANNERMAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

WE WOULD LIKE TO OWN AN AMERICAN RV - CAN YOU HELP

Perhaps you can help me with my quest to own an American RV, or you may be able to supply the names and addresses of persons who may be of some help?

The wife and I are both retired and have owned English style motorhomes, but after looking at the American ones there really is no comparison either in the build quality or the fittings of the American units.

We have made visits to many of the dealers in RV sales, but have been very disappointed by the high asking prices.

Neither can we get a truthful response to the question of fuel consumption, just a vague reply on what might be the mpg. We figure a 6.2 diesel at 10 to 15 mpg and the 7 litre petrol at 5 to 8 mpg.

So we turned to the Internet for help and we obtained access to the American dealer and private sales of which there are plenty on the net. We found have found many units for sale at lower prices than that which they are sold for in the UK.

Many of the prices represent a huge saving if we could purchase from the USA, so our quest is for helpful information on how to go about buying an RV in the USA. We need to know the cost of transport from the USA to the UK and departure and arrival points, also the cost of taxes due and any other cost that may come our way before we make up our minds and go for it.

Hoping you may be able to help.

When the dollar was two to the pound it was worth considering motorhomes in from the States. However with the dollar around the 1.6 dollars to the pound it now not so attractive. You also the cost of shipping to the UK when you arrive in the UK the Customs and Excise require you pay 10% Duty on the total purchase price and shipping costs of your motorhome and then 20% on top of the total including the Duty.

You must also realise that there will be no warranty on your motorhome and any problems, which can be expensive if the engine and or the gearbox need repairing or replacing.

The bottom line is do not import a motorhome from the States yourselves but buy from a reputable dealer and ensure you get a 3 or 6 month warranty which covers all eventualities. I recently purchased a Fleetwood Bouncer 31K on a Chevy P-30 chassis with a 454 engine. The RV weighs 16,000 pounds and has logged over 40,000 miles. A mechanic client of mine recommended I use 15W-40 motor oil due to the fact that the engine is always under a heavy load pushing the RV, and because most of the 454 engines run fairly hot. I asked a number of people who run similar motorhomes but opinions vary considerably. What is your opinion on the grade of motor oil to use, and how often should I change the oil and filter? Chevrolet's maintenance manual for the original chassis indicates three levels of oil

viscosity and suggests selecting the viscosity based on the expected temperature range before your next oil change. The manual says to use 5W-30 when temperatures are 20 below zero to 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Use 10W-30, the preferred oil viscosity, when temperatures are zero to 100 degrees plus. Use 30-weight oil when temperatures range from 40 to more than 100 degrees. The later oil grades, such as SG or SH, are definitely the best, and should be changed every 3,000 to 4,000 miles in a motorhome. Heavier oil will run hotter and reduce fuel efficiency. **BACK AXLE NOISE** I own a 1988 36ft American motorhome. It is powered by an 8.2 litre Detroit Diesel engine and has an Allison 643 transmission. At about 55mph, a noise develops in the rear end and gets worse at higher speeds. The noise lessens when using a lot of power or when holding back on compression. Also, there is a light vibration. I have had a new balanced drive shaft with new U-joints installed, all at a cost of more than £2,500. The noise hasn't changed. At 70mph, I can put the transmission in 'neutral' and all is smooth with no noise. Do you have any suggestions? Without knowing all of the details, I can only guess as to the cause of the noise. Worn bearings in U-joints, often caused by lack of lubrication, will cause noise to develop from the rear axle which usually lessens when you throttle back. Some units require balance weights on the front of the crankshaft and/or on the output shaft of the transmission. I'm hoping that the differential pinion nose angle was checked when the new drive shaft was replaced. Major Freightliner, Cummins and Allison shops may be of assistance, as they work on such units. Other owners might also be able to suggest a cause of the noise and offer tips on how to reduce it.

DAMAGED SPARK-PLUG LEADS

I recently replaced the spark-plug wiring on my motorhome, which has a big-block 454-cid engine. I installed new Jacobs Ceramic 2000 wiring and also replaced original GM wire conduit with Motormite conduit. After one trip with the rig, I needed to check my front suspension so I slid underneath the motorhome and was absolutely horrified at what I saw. Nothing wrong with the suspension but the conduit material surrounding the plug wires had melted and appeared more like shrink wrap. None of the leads or the conduit material were nearer than 4 inches to the exhaust manifold. I tried to contact the manufacturer to ask for an explanation, but I didn't get a response.

Motormite claim that this conduit material is a high-quality product that meets or exceeds original-equipment specifications, but they do not claim that it can withstand the extreme temperatures that exhaust manifolds of big-block Chevy engines produce. The conduit material in question is recommended for general electrical wiring purposes associated with devices such as alternators, fog lights, electrical accessories, etc and it would appear

that it should not be used in situations where it will in close proximity to hot manifolds I would recommend that you contact a reputable trade automotive supplier and ask them which product they would recommend for protecting ignition leads in the proximity of exhaust manifolds.

HITCH-BALL LUBRICATION

What are the pros and cons of using grease or some other lubricant on our travel trailer hitch ball? I've been told the ball should have lubricant on it, and others have said not to. I don't remember seeing it mentioned in any article regarding 'hitching-up' and proper hitch requirements.

Like any other moving mechanical part the hitch ball should indeed be lubricated. This saves wear and tear on the ball and the trailer coupler. It can also reduce noise. Almost any grease will do the job, but major hitch manufacturers, such as Eaz-Lift, Reese and Draw-Tite, and other UK suppliers of towing equipment, sell grease designed specifically for use on hitch balls.

There are also two drawbacks to using grease on the hitch ball. One, it's easy to get the grease on a trouser leg if you walk too closely past the hitch. Two, when the ball is uncovered, road dust and grit can accumulate on the sticky grease. That grit can lead to even faster component wear if this rubbish is left in place when the trailer is hitched up again. Both problems can be solved by protecting the hitch with a commercial dust cover made for this purpose, or by slipping a plastic bag over the ball and securing the bag with a rubber band around the shaft. Be sure to remove the bag before hitching up again, and you'll have a nice, clean, lubricated ball waiting for the trailer coupler.

TOILET TISSUE

Is there a product that can be used in motorhome black water holding tanks that is similar to moist wipes? I've checked a few camping and RV suppliers and they all carry only the Thetford or similar toilet tissue. I am a new motorhome owner and find it hard to believe that in this day and age there is only plain, dry toilet paper available for caravans and motorhomes. The motorhome holding tank system is a critical area and demands attention to the relatively minor recommendations of the manufacturers. Believe me, once you experience a problem with a clogged tank or valve, you won't argue that point. Thetford recommend the use of a low wet strength and easily broken down type paper only. The problem is primarily due to the binders and fibres used in such wipes - they just don't decompose in the motorhome environment like the recommended tissues. If you use a macerator to empty your tanks then extreme care should be exercised in the choice of papers. Wet strength tissues, cotton buds etc should not be disposed of down the toilet. It is an extremely unpleasant job to have to clear a blocked or jammed macerator.