

SPANNERMAN ANSWERS YOUR QUESTIONS

TRIM DISCOLOURATION

The plastic trim on my motorhome has hardened and discoloured to such an extent that it ruins the look of what is otherwise a good looking vehicle for its age. Is it normal for plastic trim to wear badly like this or is there a fault with the material? I have been given lots of advice on how to clean and have even been told to paint it. Is there something simple that I can do to restore the trim back to as new.

Unfortunately plastics are affected by ultraviolet from the sun which will harden and discolour them. A motorhome which spends much of its time in very sunny areas, particularly away from industrial areas will suffer much more than those resident in colder and not so sunny climates.

The trim can be cleaned and you could try using a kitchen scourer or Scotchbrite material (available at motor factors) but you will have to be careful not to damage the bodywork.

Painting the plastic is not recommended as it only covers up the problem which will return when the paint peels off.

If your trim is the type which slips into an aluminium channel then the best and cheapest solution is to replace the old trim. 1" and 1 1/16" wide plastic trim is still available and is not too expensive.

OH THAT ... ELECTRIC STEP AGAIN

I have an American RV is fitted with electric steps. Recently, whenever I lower the steps by opening the door, turn off the step switch by the door so the steps will stay down, and close the door, the steps will raise back up at a later time. This can happen when you are inside or outside the motorhome, and it can cause a nasty accident particularly when you open the door and step out only to realise, too late, that the steps are retracted.

The steps can raise at any time from two to 20 minutes after the door is closed. Upon opening the door, I must activate the switch to get the steps to lower again. What might be the cause of this problem?

It sounds like the steps are getting an ignition signal. If you turn on the ignition switch when the steps are down, they will raise regardless of the position of the step switch when the door is closed. However, they should come down when the door is opened.

Check all wiring connections, particularly the connection to the ignition source and the plug and socket which connects the step to the wiring loom. Because of the position of the step, particularly on front door coaches, water can easily get into the plug and socket connection. If you cannot find a loose connection or someone in the coach who is turning the ignition on, the control board in the step probably has developed a problem. A new board will have to be fitted, or the old board can be repaired by a knowledgeable electronic repair person.

PROPANE ONLY

I have heard that we should only use propane in our LP-gas appliances, particularly our refrigerator. However, I have also heard that LP-gas in some countries is butane or a butane-propane mix. Can I use butane-propane or butane if propane is not available.

Refilling stations that sell motor fuel sell only specification propane, because motor fuel must be propane only. But if you cannot be sure of finding one then the best advice is to buy your propane beforehand and then try to make it last.

Butane and butane-propane mixes can permanently damage motorhome appliances, particularly refrigerators. Butane has a 30 percent higher BTU content than propane. It will overheat propane refrigerators and cause other LP-gas appliances to run rich and become sooted unless they are specifically orificed to use the gas.

EXHAUST BRAKES

I am about to take delivery of a Class A motorhome on a Spartan chassis with a Cummins B5.9 230-hp turbodiesel and a Allison MD3060 transmission. The motorhome does not come with any type of exhaust brake, and I am wondering if this will be a problem when we travel in mountain areas.

In an "Extarder" article in a back issue of the Magazine it was mentioned that with the brake engaged a downhill speed of 45 mph or so could be maintained in fourth gear. My question is, could the same speed be maintained without engaging the exhaust brake but rather simply shifting into third gear, or would that have caused the engine to rev into an unsafe or too high rpm?

How necessary is some type of exhaust or Jake brake? This is my first RV with a Cummins and Allison gearbox. Should I had opted for the exhaust brake option when purchasing?

When you have diesel power shifting down doesn't do much, because diesel engines do not provide compression braking like petrol engines. Diesel-powered motorhomes are slowed and stopped with foot brakes and only foot brakes. Also the Allison gearbox will tend to change up if the engine revs increase to a preset limit, to protect the engine and transmission, which will result in less braking effect and hence road speed of the RV will increase.

That's why the Jake brake and the Extarder are of interest to most motorhome owners. They provide engine braking similar to the braking you are used to getting from a petrol powered engine. In some cases the exhaust brake can provide all the braking you need, and the foot brakes can take a holiday on downhill grades.

If you are going to be doing a lot of mountain driving, you did overlook an important option. The nice part is the Extarder can be added at any time, and it may even cost less as an aftermarket installation.

AUXILIARY TRANSMISSION FLUID COOLER

I have recently purchased a 1996 motorhome that's built on a 1995 Ford, F-Super Duty chassis. The chassis comes with a standard automatic transmission fluid cooler that, Ford states in its brochure, provides optimal cooling of the transmission.

Is the factory-installed cooler sufficient or should an aftermarket cooler also be installed? The motorhome will be loaded to near its 17,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (gvwr), and we tow a Honda Civic that weighs approximately 2,300 pounds. Thank you for any information you can provide.

If you weren't towing a car I would not recommend an auxiliary cooler. However, you can't over cool a transmission except in extremely cold weather.

Installing auxiliary coolers on any motorhome that is going to be towing anything has been recommended for some years. It has also been recommended to install a temperature sending unit in the transmission fluid pan and connecting it to an added dashboard-mounted gauge.

Ideally, transmission fluid sumps should run somewhat less than 200 degrees F. Anything over 250 degrees F is excessive.

Aftermarket suppliers of coolers also supply temperature-sensitive diverter valves. Since almost all aftermarket auxiliary transmission fluid coolers are installed after the OEM cooler that is usually in a radiator tank, the diverter valve keeps the transmission fluid from flowing to the aftermarket cooler when the ambient temperature drops below freezing. Since these valves are always optional, individual operating conditions determine whether one should be installed.

DIRTY AWNING

My awning has begun to accumulate grime and mildew. What can I use to clean it up?

To remove mould, mildew, dirt, tree sap and grime, use a good quality Awning Cleaner. Just mix with water according to label directions, scrub with a sponge or soft brush and rinse. For extremely dirty awnings, use full strength. Most awning cleaners also protect your awning against the damaging effects of the sun's rays, weathering & salt.

If your awning is made of an acrylic fabric check the manufacturers cleaning recommendations before using awning cleaners.

TECHNICAL QUESTIONS

If you have a technical question that you would like answering please send it to: SPANNERMAN, ARVM, MONTROSE, CROWN HILL, GREAT DALBY, LE14 2ER. Fax. 01664 481400 Email: apleisure@btinternet.com

Whilst every care will be taken to ensure the accuracy of answers the Magazine will assume no responsibility for any effect from errors or omissions.