



Getting To Know Your New RV

By Barbara Cormack

Hints and tips to smooth travelling.

You purchase your first RV and you don't know what to do first. When you buy, hopefully your dealer will explain everything you need to know about your special RV.

You first need to ensure everything in the RV works - TVs, VCRs, the oven, icemaker and washer/dryer if you have them, along with the water heater. Run the air conditioning and the heater for the vehicle and the RV. Make sure you have all the remote controls for each system. Have them put water in the gray, black and water tank to check for leaks. Check all your running lights and headlights. This should all be done before you take your RV home. The dealer should also take you out for a test drive with you at the wheel.

When you are heading home, you will promptly forget everything you were shown and told. The first thing to do is sit down and read your manual. If you are like me, you won't understand any of it and the only way to learn is to jump in and do it.

Find your monitor panel, which shows your sewage tanks, water level, propane level and battery power. Learn which tanks are your gray water (sink and shower) and black water (toilet). I found my tanks were reversed so I wrote down which one was which, as I never remember.

My first priority is fresh water and your filler nozzle is usually on the driver's side of the RV. Make sure you run water through the hose for a couple of seconds to clear the line before hooking it up. Also, let the water run before the hose is hooked up. I have a bleach and water mixture to spray the ends with as a safety precaution before they are attached. You never know where they have been. Keep an eye on the water level, as you don't want to over fill it. I watch the tank and only fill it three-quarters full; it saves running in to look at your monitor panel all the time. If it is overfilled, you will go down the road with water leaking out the overflow vent and you could split your tank.

Always use a pressure regulator on your water line; some campgrounds have high water pressure and it is too strong for our RV systems. Some campgrounds will warn you that the pressure is high. On some RVs, the water tank can be filled while you are hooked up to potable (drinking) water. Always use this water in your tank. Check to see if there is a valve you can turn on to fill the tank.

Use the non-toxic white hoses for your water as they are especially made for drinking water. The sun doesn't bake them like the green ones, which are used for other jobs. I also have a water filter that I attach to the hose between the campground

water supply and the RV.

Some RVs have a filtered tap in the kitchen. These filters should be changed regularly if used a lot. In the spring, I always put some bleach in the fresh water tank, drive it around to mix it up then flush the whole tank. This keeps the tank fresh and gets rid of the germs that may be waiting. I have never had my tank go bad, but have talked to people who have and it takes a while to fix it. I like to have a lot of water on board as I don't have to worry about running out. I know it is a lot of weight to carry, but that is just me.

Now for the sewer tanks.

If you look in your sewage compartment, you will see two plastic pipes with pull handles (knife valves) on them. These valves cap the sewer lines so they don't leak onto the ground.

The biggest one is the black water tank and the smallest is the gray. Do not pull these valves when the caps are on. Always drain the black water tank first and drain them only when they are full, adding water if you have to. The tank does not flush properly if you don't add a lot of water and, over time, the sludge accumulates and problems can begin to crop up.

I don't leave my tanks open when I am in a campground hooked up for a few days. Sometimes I leave my gray water open, but the day before I leave, I close it, take my shower and have enough to flush the hoses after dumping the black water. Most of the time, my gauges do not work. I have tried everything to clean them, but it doesn't work, so I have become used to what I use over a period of time and dump when I know they are three-quarters full. I know when my black water tank is empty; I have a clear see-through elbow mounted on the drainpipe with a flushing hose hook up. This works really well as I can flush the black water and see what is happening.

Something I forget to do is fill the bottom of the tank with water after it is empty. Remember, use lots of water when you are flushing. My dishwater is put down the toilet so my gray tank doesn't fill up so fast and this helps the black water tank. Make sure there is nothing in it - you don't want to put any silverware down it.

Do not put anything down the toilet except toilet paper. I use the one-ply variety. Also make sure you use tank deodorant chemicals approved for septic tank systems. These chemicals help the breakdown of solid wastes and make the system more pleasant to use. More campgrounds are asking that you not use formaldehyde in your tanks.

I use a valve lubricant to keep the knife valves working. You also need an elbow that fits on your hose and screws into the campground sewer. I always hold the hose down with something heavy just to be safe. Also, make sure the hose attached to the drainpipe is tight as it can work loose with the pressure. Always check your hose for leaks and if you make a mess, please clean it up, leaving your site as clean as when you arrived. When you flush your toilet, make sure you have lots of water in it so it flushes without leaving paper residue which can become stuck in the trap valve.

When you are storing your RV for a long period of time, clean the refrigerator and leave the doors open. You will have a lot of mildew to clean if you don't. Run your engine for 15 minutes every 30 days and turn the air conditioning on. I run my generator at the same time under a full load.

Did you know that your generator is fueled from your gas tank? I didn't, so take that into consideration when you are calculating mileage. The generator will not work when the fuel level in your gas tank reaches a certain level, usually at a quarter of a tank. It is a safeguard so you won't run out of fuel to drive the RV. If you have a generator, there is a winter switch so it is easier to start in cold weather. Don't forget you need to change your oil in the generator too. Your manual will tell you after how many hours of use it should be changed.

Always cover your tires when you are parked. The rubber is lubricated when you are driving, but breaks down when it is sitting in the sun. Remove all batteries from your remotes and clocks if you are storing the RV in winter. Make sure that you have water in your hot water tank before you light the pilot. When travelling, turn off your water pump as water flowing on the floor of the RV is not fun. If your propane tank is permanently mounted on the RV, make sure you turn all your appliances off when filling it. I turn my fridge off when travelling. I feel safer and put a clip on the steering wheel to remind me to do so. I also use it to remind me to put my TV aerial down and that my keys are in the tow car ignition, my transmission is in neutral and the key is turned to auxiliary. I know that when I take it off everything is done. Your carbon monoxide detector will chirp at you if you have turned it off to store the RV. I turn it on and off a couple of times and it stops.

Wonder why your TV reception isn't very good? Most RVs have a booster switch in the front cupboard. If it isn't turned on, that's likely your problem. Remember it will flatten your batteries over a period of time in storage if left on. The 12-volt system doesn't run much when dry camping, usually lights and a 12-volt TV if you have one. I use an inverter to run my satellite dish and I plug it into the cigarette lighter. Make sure it is big enough as I have a 300-watt unit and it will not run my TV along with the satellite.

Some RVs have full shutoff switches for the main batteries and the auxiliary. I use them all the time. When I am camped, I will turn off the main battery and leave the auxiliary on. Then, when I start the engine, I know it will start. There is usually a button by the ignition switch that you can push to start the engine if your main battery is dead. Rubber roofs are always a question. I wash mine a couple of times a year and I have resorted to a sealant so I don't have to deal with the caulking substance running down the RV. Don't forget to lubricate your stairs, whether they are automatic or manual and your levelling jacks as well. They are used as a levelling system only - do not use them as a jack.

That covers some of the things you are probably wondering about. If you have other questions, drop me an e-mail and I will try to help you out. I will be starting my travels on May 24 so will keep you informed of where I am and what I am doing. Have a great summer.

Barbara Cormack travels the roads of North America in her 35-foot Fleetwood Bounder with a Ford Escort wagon in tow. After being widowed, she decided to continue with a longtime dream of RVing and set out to learn how to drive her motorhome. She succeeded and now travels the country meeting new people and seeing new sights.

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