



DELIVERING THE GOODS

There's a surprising amount to learn when you buy a caravan

John Wickersham finds out about Pre Delivery Inspections and the customer handover procedure

On top of the basic price of a new caravan, there's a further charge called the 'Retailer Delivery Cost'. Some dealers refer to this as an 'On The Road' charge and it is typically between £500 and £600.

As well as the transportation to the dealer, this fee covers a Pre-Delivery Inspection (PDI) and, not surprisingly, many customers want to know what they get for their money. I have bought caravans whose drawers contained sawdust and countless loose screws, for example. Conversely, there are many occasions when I have observed exemplary dealer assistance and standards. So what constitutes a good PDI and a thorough handover operation?

THE SCOPE OF A PDI

A spotless caravan leaving a factory can become disappointingly dirty by the time it reaches a dealer. Some fittings might shake loose, too. So in addition to its transportation, a caravan must be thoroughly cleaned and subjected to a PDI. Typically this can take three to four hours, depending on the model.

To gain an insight into the work involved, I arranged to spend a day at the Midlands base of Venture Caravans and was permitted to photograph proceedings. Following valeting, Venture's touring caravan checklist focuses on nine areas:

- **Chassis** – over-run device/coupling head/jockey wheel/chassis condition/body to chassis connection/corner steady operation
- **Suspension** – tyre pressure/condition check (inc spare)/brake rods/linkages/cables/visual checks of brake assembly, axle and hubs/handbrake operation/reversing operation/suspension units/dampers/axle tube
- **External lights** – connecting plug and cable/side lights/indicator lights/brake lights/reverse and fog lights
- **12V electrical system** – security alarm/safety alarms/leisure battery (if supplied)/internal lights/awning light/12V appliances/fuses
- **Ventilation** – operation of windows/roof light/catches/airflow of fixed ventilation
- **Water systems** – operation of pump/filter/taps/valves/pipework/onboard tank(s)/cleanliness
- **Gas systems** – regulator performance/leak test/operation of refrigerator/space heater/water heater/hob/grill/oven/flues/pipework/hoses/gas vent holes/CO and CO₂ readings on all gas appliances/LPG sticker
- **230V mains** – general check/consumer unit operation check/socket and light operation/refrigerator/water heater and other mains appliance operation (eg microwave oven)

PRE-DELIVERY INSPECTION



With the 230V and 12V supply systems connected, output from the onboard battery charger is checked



The gas supply system is checked for leaks using the standard air-pressure testing routine

INFORMATION

- *Note: If you buy a non-standard caravan or a campervan from a small-scale converter, collection is usually from the factory. However, large manufacturers of caravans and motorhomes do not conduct 'direct sales'. Their products are transported to their approved dealers and delivery costs have to be met by the customer. The dealer then conducts the PDI and handover arrangements.*

PRE-DELIVERY INSPECTION



A probe is inserted into gas flues to gather information about the presence of CO and CO₂ from appliances



A water supply is connected so that the taps, water heater and shower controls can be checked



Wheel fixings are checked with a calibrated torque wrench, then re-checked by another technician using a second wrench



Road light checks are carried out using purpose-made testing equipment

CUSTOMER HANDOVER



The customer is shown external lockers and their contents, including a 25m mains hook-up cable and basic tools



Pump coupling-up tips are given



Controls for the Whale space heater are explained and the under-floor device is fired-up



Procedures for accessing the toilet cassette are outlined



The bed set-up procedure is explained



Use of the gas strut-assisted handbrake lever is demonstrated

→ **General and miscellaneous** – toilet operation and cleanliness/bed slats/bed make-up/stereo operation/water ingress inspection/drain water system/wheel nut torque test

Note: Some models might not be fitted with certain items on the above list. Also be aware that PDI schedules are normally laid down by individual manufacturers and, at present, there is no 'cross-industry' standardised checklist.

THE CUSTOMER HANDOVER

Before a caravan is towed away by its new owner, there's an important routine called the 'customer hand-over'. This session includes a detailed explanation of how everything works.

If you are buying a caravan for the first time, this will probably take at

least an hour – longer if you need help with coupling up.

Even experienced caravanners often need advice when confronted with a different stabiliser, hand-brake lever, coupling head or electrical plug. Their new caravan's fridge and heating appliances might also be different from the types they had in previous models.

The photographs here show glimpses of a confidence-boosting presentation that took over an hour to complete.

SUMMARY

Modern caravans are so much more complicated than the first one I bought in 1969! That's why it was pleasing to see how an informed dealer can enlighten new owners and explain how things work. ■

INFORMATION

Did you have a favourable caravan buying experience? The Club is well aware that the standards found across the industry are not consistent at present and welcomes ongoing work by the National Caravan Council to improve matters. Perhaps a question or two about how the PDI and handover are performed is worth adding to your pre-purchase checklist. Feedback from Club members shows that good dealer practice in such areas results in a distinctly better ownership experience.

■ Support from Venture Caravans on the A5 near Watford Gap Services was gratefully appreciated – see venture-caravans.com for details