

**JOHN WICKERSHAM**  
DISCUSSES WINDOW BLINDS

# BLINDED

*by the light*

## INFORMATION

Catalogues, leaflets and products made by Seitz and Remis can be obtained through any caravan or motorhome dealer.

Is it just me, or do other Caravan Club members get trouble with blinds? Of course, many owners will have lowered their roller blinds by now for winter and won't lift them again until Easter. And that causes problems.

Apparently the spring inside a roller blind doesn't like long spells under tension. So if your caravan is parked for an extended lay-up, the manufacturers urge you to keep blinds raised to relax the spring. Great! That might help the

blind mechanism but not your upholstery, which subsequently starts to fade! It's a 'no-win' situation.

Anyway, two of my caravan's blinds don't retract well at all – especially the large one covering the front three windows. Interestingly enough, there's no problem with the blinds I fitted in my motorhome, but this gets used all year.

Fortunately, most tired spring mechanisms can be tightened and blind manufacturers usually provide an

adjustment facility. That's the good news. The bad news is that many caravan manufacturers obscure the adjusters by building furniture to the extreme edge of the blind cassette. It necessitates taking the whole unit off the wall.

But enough of my grumbles. What products are usually fitted?

## THE MANUFACTURERS

Most caravans and motorhomes are fitted with either Remis or Seitz blinds. A fly-screen is usually included and these sometimes clip together and scroll up and down in unison.

## FRAMED OR FREE?

Simple roller blinds are not unlike the domestic equivalents fitted in many kitchens. The Remi sun is a case in point. However, more expensive types are mounted within a cassette frame which is 'bug-proof'. Trackways housing the blinds and fluffy-edged trim combine to keep out an unwanted insect airforce.

## INDEPENDENT OR WINDOW LINKED?

In most touring caravans, the blind system is a separate product from the

window it serves. That's because most caravans are fitted with Polyplastic frameless windows. Nevertheless, some recent Elldis models, for instance, have featured Seitz S4 framed windows instead. These products probably offer better insulation, but work out more expensive.

Specifications in motor caravans are different and probably over half of all coachbuilt and van conversions are fitted with Seitz framed windows. It's not just the double-glazed acrylic window that's mounted in an outer frame; an interlocking inner frame houses the blind/flyscreen mechanism as well. Since these two frames have to be screwed together to grasp the wall aperture snugly, you can't have one without the other.

## RETRO-FIT INSTALLATION

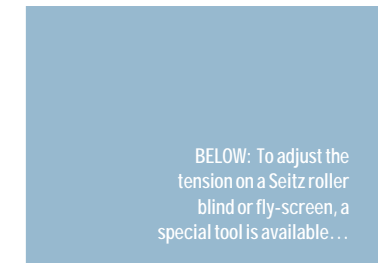
To fit a blind and fly-screen system to an older caravan, it's necessary to fit products which are completely independent of the windows. Simple top-mounted roller blinds like the Remi sun are one example. However, blinds that run within a complete frame, like the Remi joy, are often harder to fit – especially when paired with a Polyplastic window.

In fact I've often had to mount the cassette frame on thin timber battens (fixed in turn to the walls) to ensure the blind doesn't fall foul of the window catches or security clasps. Without packing pieces, there's often insufficient clearance for a passing blind or flyscreen. Moreover, when fitting a product whose sides are supplied separately, the interlocking corners of the frame must be totally square before the assembled unit is wall mounted.

## FITTING SEITZ FRAMED BLIND AND WINDOW UNITS

It's by joining the inner and outer frames firmly together with the fixing screws provided that Seitz units achieve a close register around the aperture in a wall. Sealant is used, too, and the threaded fixings mustn't be tightened beyond a maximum torque setting of 3Nm. However, I strongly suspect many installers merely 'screw the unit tight' rather than using a torque wrench.

Over-tightening can cause frame distortion, especially if a unit is installed in hot weather when plastic frames (actually a semi-rigid polyurethane foam) may have fractionally expanded. Subsequently in cold weather, the frame may contract, whereupon tight fixings then become over-tight. A distorted frame can then cause the blind



BELOW: To adjust the tension on a Seitz roller blind or fly-screen, a special tool is available...



BELOW: Adjusting the spring tension in a Rastrollo unit by turning the end cap



ABOVE: ...but in practice, most fitters make an adjuster using a wire coat hanger or by grinding down a screwdriver



and flyscreen to run tightly in the trackways.

Unfortunately it's hard to loosen over-tightened fixings at a later date in the hope of relieving a mildly distorted frame. But I've often reinstated smooth blind action by spraying track-ways with a silicone rubber lubricant sold at motor factors.

## INSULATION

Of course, most blinds are a sheet of coloured plastic silvered one side. However, for better thermal insulation, the Seitz S5 Duette is a box-sectioned concertina blind. I fitted one recently and installation was no different from fitting the S4 framed product. Whether the Duette's cavity chamber profile is as good as the manufacturer claims is hard to prove. It certainly looks good – but don't mistake it for a single pleated blind which lacks the box construction.

## WHICH WAY UP?

On scrolling blind and fly-screen units, the inner frame can usually be mounted either way up. In most German motor caravans, the blind rolls from the bottom upwards. This allows you to admit a little daylight before you get washed and dressed in the morning without compromising your privacy.

However, noting that a setting sun moves downwards, I decided to invert the Seitz S4 and S5 blind frameworks on my DIY motor caravan. This means the blind roller is at the top and the fly-screen at the bottom. I prefer it that way round – it gives me longer evenings!

## MIX AND MATCH

Nowadays manufacturers fit various blind and window combinations. Some combine Polyplastic windows with Seitz Rastrollo 2000 slide-down units (where an end-rod engages in the guide rails

when the blind has been lowered). On an Auto-Trail Tracker I tested recently, Polyplastic windows were paired with Remis pleated blinds. It's mix and match according to price.

## CARE AND MAINTENANCE

So back to tired recoil mechanisms. With Seitz framed units, re-tensioning is a dealer job because you have to remove the entire frame to reach the rollers. It's easier on a Remi flair or a Seitz Rastrollo because the tightening point is on the sides – provided an adjacent locker doesn't cover them completely!

Lastly, here's a bit of puzzling advice I learnt on a dealer-training course. Apparently if you leave your caravan in bright sun, you shouldn't leave the blinds down because they'll stretch. Opening high-level ventilation is preferred. But wait! Isn't 'keeping out the sun' one of several reasons for having blinds?

BELOW: Although framed acrylic window systems from Seitz are fitted to some caravans, they're more commonly seen on motorhomes



BELOW: It is only by removing the blind/fly-screen frame on this Seitz S4 unit that the rollers are revealed for spring re-tensioning



BELOW: The retraction mechanism on a blind usually comprises a long coil spring

ABOVE: Framed window and blind systems like the Seitz S4 comprise two interlocking elements

