

TOP TWENTY MOTOR CARAVANNING QUESTIONS

This leaflet is prepared by the Caravan Club as part of its free information service to members. The contents are believed correct at date of publication, but please raise any queries with the Club's information department.

July 2010

The following is a selection of the questions most frequently asked of The Club's information department. The answers cover some of the more basic points; however, all the subjects dealt with are discussed in greater detail in around 50 separate information leaflets. A list appears in the technical section of the current Sites Directory and Handbook, and these are available to members on request, on receipt of a suitably stamped addressed envelope.

1 Starting out

Q *I am considering buying a motor caravan, but have never driven one before. What is your advice to beginners?*

A The Club produces a leaflet called 'Choice of Motor Caravan' which explains, amongst other things, different body types of motor caravan available. There is also a booklet available called 'Getting Started'. This is a beginner's guide explaining how to choose, use and look after your motor caravan. The Club also runs a limited number of motor caravanning courses. They are designed for participants who have just bought their first motor caravan and need driving and manoeuvring tuition. Non-members are welcome. For further information, please call 01342 336808. Some dealers offer a *hire before you buy* scheme, which can help you decide what kind of vehicle suits your needs, and perhaps avoid an expensive mistake.

2. Motor Caravan

Q *What Type of Motor Caravan?*

A A motor caravan is either adapted from a series-production panel van or car (conversion), or is designed and built on a commercial chassis, with or without a production driving cab (coachbuilt). The accommodation section is predominately fixed or can be dismountable. Thus there are many different types of motor caravan on the market, so the choice can be bewildering (see 'Choice of Motor Caravan' for further details). European Standards are in existence for health and safety in the design and manufacture of habitation areas, as well as for electrical systems, payloads and ventilation.

3 Driving Licences

Q *Do I need a special driving licence?*

A In general, the answer is no. Most drivers can drive a motor caravan of up to 7500kg, or 8250kg including a trailer. Other limits apply to drivers aged over 70, or drivers licensed since 1 January 1997. See The Club's information leaflet for members, 'Drivers Licences' **4 Ease of Driving**

Q *How easy are they to drive?*

A Most are quite straightforward although often somewhat different to a car. Manoeuvring in tight situations can be a problem due to large overhangs on some models. However, practice and/or aids such as reversing cameras will help increase confidence.

5 Motor caravan tyres

Q *How often should the tyres on my motor caravan be changed?*

A Preferably replace any tyre more than five years old, but never exceed seven. They will have significantly deteriorated by then, whatever the tread depth or amount of use.

Q *What advice do you give for tyre care during the winter months when the motor caravan is not in use?*

A If the motor caravan is not used for a considerable length of time, it is recommended that the wheels and tyres are removed and stored at normal inflation pressure in a cool, dry place and protected from direct sunlight, sources of heat, ozone concentrations and fuel/oil spillages. They can be covered with a natural material (eg hessian) for protection, but not plastic. Failing this, make sure the vehicle is moved from time to time, to ensure that one point on the tyres isn't loaded all the time.

6 Siting

Q *Are there any special requirements when choosing a pitch?*

A It is generally recommended to use hardstanding to site your vehicle but if using grass then check the ground before you drive on to it, by digging in your heel, for instance. Be aware that some sites may have temporary or permanent restrictions on motor caravans, so it is best to check when you book that they will allow your vehicle on site. The Club does not set limits for length or weight of vehicle, but practicalities mean that not all pitches on all sites will be suitable for all vehicles in all weathers.

7 Towing

Q *Can I tow a small car behind my motor caravan?*

A In the UK, although the law is a somewhat grey area on this, it appears it is acceptable to tow a car not weighing more than 750kg gross vehicle weight, which includes the weight of an unbraked A-frame. As far as the Continent is concerned, however, the majority of countries said that members of the public caught towing with an A-frame would be taken off the road. Therefore in all circumstances the Club recommends that vehicles are towed on a braked trailer which takes all four wheels of the car off the ground.

8 Speed

Q *What speed limits apply to motor caravans?*

A The following table gives a guide to speed limits for motor caravans

Type of Vehicle	Built-up Areas	Elsewhere		
		Single Carriageway	Dual Carriageway	Motorway
Passenger vehicle or motor caravan with an unladen weight of up to 3.05 tonnes, and/or up to 8 passenger seats in addition to the driver. (eg family cars, off roaders, MPV's and smaller motor caravans)	30	60	70	70
Passenger vehicle or motor caravan with an unladen weight over 3.05 tonnes, and/or more than 8 passenger seats in addition to the driver, but no more than 12m overall length. (eg 12-seater Land Rovers, minibuses and larger motor caravans)	30	50	60	70
As above but over 12m overall length	30	50	60	60
Passenger vehicle or motor caravan towing a caravan or other trailer.	30	50	60	60

Note: Additional restrictions apply to Goods Vehicles -see Highway Code

9 Liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)

Q *What is the difference between Butane and Propane?*

A Butane and Propane have slightly different properties, the most important to the motor caravanner being the boiling point at atmospheric pressure. In other words, the temperature at which it changes from being a liquid to being a gas. Butane will only readily change to a gas above 0°C, so is generally suitable for the spring to autumn motor caravanner. Propane, on the other hand, will become a gas down to -40°C and therefore can be used in winter, or all year round if desired. In UK Propane is generally sold in red cylinders, Butane in blue; however, BP manufacture a lightweight propane cylinder which is green.

10 Fire prevention

Q *What precautions should I take against the risk of fire?*

A If your motor caravan does not have a smoke detector, consider installing one made to the appropriate British Standard (BS 5446 pt 1) or one that has American UL (Underwriters Laboratory) approval. A portable fire extinguisher, although not compulsory, should be carried. The Club has decided that Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) is the most effective for use on a caravan site and would recommend its use. Note that, unlike caravans, the upholstery and foam of motor caravan furniture does not have to comply with flame retardant regulations. Take extra care when cooking or smoking in the vehicle.

11 Lead acid batteries

Q *What advantages does a leisure battery have over a car battery for use in a motor caravan?*

A The automotive type of battery is designed to supply a high current, sometimes 200 Amps or more, for a short time, frequently only a few seconds, in order to start the engine. For the remaining time it is either at rest or being charged by the vehicle alternator. It is not designed to supply a few Amperes for a period of hours, which is the kind of duty which arises in the habitation area of a motor caravan.

Leisure batteries are designed to supply currents of a few Amps for longer periods and to be discharged and recharged many times; they are generally to be preferred in a motor caravan. However, battery life is enhanced if it has little work to do so the use of a suitable charger is advisable if a mains hook-up is available.

Most motor caravans are fitted with both types of battery, and the addition of a leisure battery to serve the habitation area of one that isn't so fitted, is often a worthwhile upgrade.

12 Motor caravan refrigerators

Q How can I run my refrigerator on ferry journeys?

A The short answer is, you can't! For short crossings of an hour or two, the contents should remain adequately cool until you are able to re-connect, provided the refrigerator was pre-cooled sufficiently beforehand. For longer journeys this is not practicable, and it is best to purchase fresh produce on arrival at your holiday destination. You can help the fridge stay cool by using ice packs, as used for cool boxes, and of course do not open it while the power is off.

13 Winter storage

Q What does The Club recommend for winter storage?

A An indoor and preferably secure location is recommended for winter storage. Turbo diesels are liable to waste gate corrosion over long periods of non usage. Brake disc corrosion is also a possibility where the motor caravan is not being used over a long period. There are covers which can be purchased from car manufacturers to fit over the discs while the van is in storage to stop moisture coming into contact with the discs.

14 Seatbelts

Q Do motor caravans require seat belts for their rear seats?

A. Seat belts must be fitted and worn in the front seats of motor caravans. Most motor caravan manufacturers also fit restraints to forward-facing seats – designated travelling seats – in the rear. If fitted, seat belts to these seats must be worn. Seat belts fitted to seats that are not properly designated passenger seats (eg sideways facing seats) do not meet the necessary standards, and the anchorages would not be adequate. These seats should not be used at all for travelling purposes. However, it should be stressed that, although not illegal, travelling in these seats is **NOT** recommended.

Regulations governing the use of child car seats came into force on 18 September 2006 are as follows:-

- Rear facing baby seats **MUST NOT** be used in a seat protected by a frontal air-bag unless the air-bag has been deactivated manually or automatically.
- From May 2008 all child restraints must comply with the UN ECE 44.03 standard (or subsequent versions). Child seats to the 44.03 standard have been on sale for many years.
- Children under three years **MUST** use the child restraint (i.e. child seat or booster) appropriate for their weight in any vehicle (including vans and other goods vehicles).
- A child under three may travel unrestrained in the rear of a taxi if the right child restraint is not available.

- In vehicles where seat belts are fitted, children three years to 135cm in height (approx 4ft 5in) MUST use the appropriate child restraint.

Three exceptions allow these children to travel in the rear and use an adult belt:

- In a taxi, if the right child restraint is not available;
- For an occasional journey over a short distance, if the right child restraint is not available. The Government defines this kind of journey as being for unforeseen circumstances only, not for regular or planned journeys such as the school run;
- Where two occupied child seats in the rear prevent the fitment of a third child seat.

Further information is available on this subject on the website **dft.gov.uk**.

15 Motor caravan security

Q *Where is the safest place to store my motor caravan, and what security devices are available to protect it from theft?*

A Nowhere is completely safe from the determined thief; however, the majority of motor caravans are stolen from storage compounds, closely followed by the home address. Thefts occur all year round and cover all ages of motor caravan, although newer ones seem most vulnerable. To avoid becoming another insurance statistic, and to meet most insurers' conditions of acceptance, certain precautions should be taken. Many motor caravan security devices are available on the market, from immobilising devices (petrol vans) and cut off devices (diesel vans) to pedal covers, detachable steering wheels and devices that lock the vehicle in reverse, as well as alarms and wheelclamps. Prices vary, and it is very difficult from appearance or cost to decide which would be the most effective. For this reason, The Club suggests choosing products tested and amended by a reputable independent test agency, e.g. Sold Secure or Thatcham. There are also sophisticated tracking systems available costing hundreds of pounds. Leaflets are available to members giving details of the many security devices and measures which are available for motor caravans.

16 Television abroad

Q *Will my television function abroad?*

A When using a television abroad, what you can watch depends on what reception method you use. If you have an aerial and a DVB-T receiver you may be able to pick up some local programmes. If you still do not have any kind of digital reception equipment, you can still use an aerial to watch local television being broadcast in analogue form. To do this however, you will need a multi-system television which is capable of receiving television broadcast in PAL BG and, in France, SECAM L. Check your television's instruction manual to check whether it is a multi-system model.

17 Television aerials

Q *What is the best type of aerial for my motor caravan?*

A In the U.K. both analogue and digital television signals are normally transmitted horizontally and television aerials are positioned in the horizontal plane. However, in localised areas where reception may be difficult, low-powered transmitters are often used to supply a signal to just that small area. In such cases, the signal may be transmitted vertically in order to avoid interference with the signals from the main transmitters. Because of this an aerial has to be adjusted according to the polarisation of the transmitted signal. In such situations a directional aerial is essential as it can be positioned vertically. Most so-called 'Omni-directional' aerials are designed to pick up horizontally polarized signals and are not very good at receiving vertically polarized ones.

18 Motor Caravan Towing Brackets

Q *Do I have to have a type approved towing bracket for my motor caravan?*

A If your motor caravan is type approved, then any towing bracket fitted to it must also be type approved. If it is not type approved, any towing bracket fitted doesn't have to be type approved (although there's no problem if it is).

From 29 April 2011 for brand new motor caravan designs (launched on or after that date) and 29 April 2012 for existing designs (those already being built before 29 April 2011), all new motor caravans will need some form of type approval before they can be registered in the UK and as such can only be fitted with a type approved towing bracket. Note also that some manufacturers are type approving their vehicles ahead of these required dates, so check carefully with any vehicle built from 2009 onwards. This change will not affect older vehicles, which can continue to be fitted with non-approved towing brackets.

19 Appliance power consumption

Q *How do I know what appliances I can use on a mains hook-up?*

A A useful calculation is Amps equals Watts divided by Volts. Therefore, if you have a 1000 Watt kettle, and a 230 Volt supply, you must allow for 4.3 Amps to be drawn when the kettle is in use.

20 Chemical fluids

Q *Does it matter what type of chemical fluid I use in my portable toilet?*

A The Club's policy is that all chemical fluids should be bio-degradable to assist the biological treatment of sewage. Blue fluids on the market may or may not contain formaldehyde, dependent upon the manufacturer. Green fluids are all formaldehyde free but may not be so efficient at masking the presence of sewage waste in holding tanks. Both green and blue fluids are acceptable for use on Club sites and with the correct dilution should not affect any sewage treatment method.

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