

A helping hand

John Wickersham proposes a selection of repair and servicing tasks aimed at the competent caravan DIY-er



IT'S IMPORTANT that caravan owners perform basic safety checks such as monitoring tyre pressures. Similarly, caravanners have to observe all precautionary measures when fitting replacement gas cylinders. Practical tasks are very much part of our pastime – however, some owners like to tackle repair jobs as well.

As a general rule, The Caravan Club doesn't encourage caravanners to carry out DIY repairs or servicing operations, although it's acknowledged that some members undoubtedly have the competence and knowledge to perform certain tasks. It is imperative, though, that unqualified persons never attempt safety-critical repairs on gas appliances or faulty braking systems.

Here are several jobs that owners might want to tackle depending on their experience and ability. Inevitably, the advice is brief so consult the Club's Technical leaflets for more information. Detailed guidance is also given in *The Caravan Manual* (Fourth Edition) from Haynes Publishing.

WIRING-UP A 13-PIN PLUG

Since new caravans are fitted with a 13-pin plug instead of a pair of 12N and 12S plugs, owners of older caravans sometimes want to upgrade their system. As long as you make no alterations within the car or caravan and confine your work to the couplings, the job is fairly straightforward.

Tips: Check connections numbered on the plug mouldings and then carefully prepare the length of individual cables to suit the two tiers of connectors in a 13-pin plug. A wiring reference table appeared in the August 2008 *Club Magazine*; see also *The Caravan Manual* Chapter 3.

REMOVING SCRATCHES FROM ACRYLIC WINDOWS

Caravan plastic window panels get scratched and several specialists sell mild abrasives to remove minor damage. Owners normally apply the compounds by hand, although it's a lengthy process. Specialists use slow-rotating polishing machines with buffing discs of different grades.

Tips: DIY electric drills usually rotate too fast. If you are using a foam mop on a slow-moving machine, copious amounts of water are needed to cool the surface, act as a lubricant and to prevent compounds damaging the mop. There is guidance in *The Caravan Manual* on pages 78-79.

GREASING WORK

To keep corner steadies working easily, periodically remove old grease, clean the spindle's threads with a wire brush and apply fresh grease. Many owners use Castrol LM grease.

Tip: Al-Ko strongly discourages the application of large quantities of grease which can attract dust and grit. Merely apply a thin film along the threaded >>

Some owners re-bed external aluminium strips using an adhesive sealant like Sikaflex-512



Since connections in a 13-pin plug are grouped in two tiers, the cables need to be trimmed to the appropriate length



When preparing each cable it is helpful to have a good-quality wire stripper for trimming back the insulation



Acrylic plastic windows fitted on touring and motor caravans often get scratched by roadside hedgerows



Scratch removing compounds are available from Seitz (call 0844 626 0133), Farecla (call 01920 465041) and Fenwick's (call 01270 524111)



Corner-steady spindle threads only need a light smear of grease; large lumps attract grit



Grease nipples like this one on the underside of a coupling head assembly sometimes get missed



Some of the halogen lamps on ceilings and under shelves can be replaced with LED units



Great care is needed to avoid snapping the terminals; a screwdriver helps push this unit into place



When an end cap has been removed from this Seitz Rastrollo cassette blind, its spindle can be tensioned



There's no need to withdraw a spring assembly like this but the illustration shows what's inside



To clean out the interior of a fridge, Dometic recommends a solution of bicarbonate of soda in warm water

spindle with a protected finger. Lubricating greasing points using a grease gun is fine but make sure you know where they all are.

Tip: Grease nipples on top of a coupling head assembly are easily found – don't overlook the ones underneath.

REPLACING A HALOGEN BULB WITH LEDs

Some lamp fittings presently fitted with halogen bulbs can house a cluster of replacement LEDs instead. Specialists like CAK (call 0844 414 2324) sell many types – including the replacement LEDs shown above.

Tip: If you dislike the sometimes clinical, harsh light of LEDs, note there are now 'warmer' colours available too. If you prefer to replace a halogen bulb, remember you mustn't touch the glass with bare fingers – skin contact greatly reduces the bulb's operating life.

TIGHTENING ROLLER BLIND RECOIL SPRINGS

Interior blinds and flyscreens recoil sluggishly when their springs need tensioning. On cassettes directly fixed to the wall, the spring assembly can be accessed at one end. However, the entire cassette will have to be detached if it's mounted hard against furniture. When the end cap's removed, the spring unrolls so you need to tighten it even more on its spindle. Dealers have a special tool to turn the spindle's flattened end but pliers also work. Replacing the plastic end cap over



Marks left by metal cans can be removed using fine wire wool and plenty of water

the spindle and remounting it in the cassette prevents it from unwinding.

Tip: Be prepared for some trial and error when adjusting a spring. If over-tensioned, a blind withdraws at frightening speed.

CLEANING INSIDE A REFRIGERATOR

Clean the interior of your refrigerator in accordance with manufacturer's instructions. Dometic recommends using a teaspoonful of bicarbonate of soda dissolved in a litre of warm water. Thetford recommends the company's 'Bathroom Cleaner' which is sometimes labelled 'Plastics Cleaner'.

Tip: If an egg breaks and the yolk stains the plastic interior, or if drinks cans leave metal abrasion marks, Dometic recommends the use of very fine wire wool lubricated with plenty of water to prevent any heat from friction. ■

FURTHER INFO

For more information, check the Technical leaflets available from the Club's East Grinstead office or at caravanclub.co.uk. Further guidance is provided in *The Caravan Manual* by John Wickersham (Fourth Edition) and published by Haynes Publishing.