

WINTER CARAVANNING

This leaflet is prepared by The Caravan Club as part of its service to members. The contents are believed to be correct at the time of publication, but the current position may be checked with The Club's Information Office. The Club does not endorse the listed products and you should satisfy yourself as to their suitability. As always check that the installation of an after-market accessory does not invalidate your Warranty.

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Many Sites have extended their opening season or remain open all year round, where caravanners can enjoy heated toilet/shower blocks, laundry rooms, mains electric hook ups and often hard standing. With the right preparation, caravanning can be enjoyed throughout the year, and there is something quite special about the silence of a snow covered CL when snug inside a caravan!

1. Liquefied Petroleum Gas

Butane is ineffective as temperatures fall to around freezing (0°C) so the winter caravanner should switch to propane. Heat should never be directly applied to LPG cylinders to make them gas. Most modern appliances work equally well on butane or propane, so all that is required is a change of regulator and, whilst doing that, check the hose is in good condition. There should be a date on the hose and, if it is more than three years old, replace it anyway. (Systems which have changeover valves and have hose installed between cylinder and regulator must utilise high pressure hose.) Older appliances may have aeration adjustment screws to alter the air/gas mix, but the appliance handbook should advise if this is necessary. Some equipment with high off-take rates, eg. central heating systems, will only work effectively on propane. If it is more convenient, propane can be used all year round - there is no need to switch back to butane for the summer.

2. Fresh water

In below zero conditions, your outside water container may well partially freeze over so you will need a second container inside the caravan you can transfer your water pump to. Truma* have made this easy with their winter conversion kit (cost around £34) which fits the Carver* Water system with plug-in pump, and enables you to switch between inside and outside water containers. New pumps cost from about £40.

Other options include installing an on-board water tank if payload and space permits, or if you always hook-up to mains, there are products that can supply low heat to the water pipes, such as the Freezstop Micro System, which will cost about £100 to kit-out an average sized caravan. This, coupled with pipe lagging, should prevent major freezes. There are currently no 'anti-freeze' additives on the market that are recommended for use in fresh water supplies. Some 'winterised' caravans and motor caravans have an on-board tank as standard, with pipes running inside the main body. Some new caravans and motorhomes are fitted with a fresh and waste water system

inside a locker, accessible from outside the caravan, which should protect against freezing.

3. Waste water

To prevent freezing of the waste tanks or porta-potti, it is acceptable to add car-type anti-freeze. There are two main varieties, ethylene glycol and propylene glycol. The latter is advisable, being less toxic, but can be difficult to find. Fernox produce a propylene glycol anti-freeze, which should be available at plumbing centres or builders merchants. Salt is an alternative for plastic waste containers, but remember it is corrosive and should not be used in toilets with valves etc. If waste pipes are small and convoluted, they may freeze up. Try to ensure the pipe run falls vertically down without kinks which trap water.

4. Heating

Most caravans now have balanced flue space heaters, which in theory are safe to leave on all night. However, there is a very small risk of wind-blown rubbish or snow blocking the flue and creating problems; therefore we do not recommend this unless the caravan is extremely well ventilated, which tends to defeat the object. LPG heaters without flues must not be left on if all the occupants are sleeping (day or night). If hooking-up to mains, a thermostatically controlled fan heater (1 kW max. is advised to avoid tripping caravan or site equipment) which only comes on when the temperature falls below a certain level is useful. Alternatively a very low-wattage panel heater, eg. Aztec (from around £59 inc. VAT and carriage), the Dimplex TUX tubular heater range - the TUX120 (approx £20) and the larger TUX240 (approx £27), or Honeywell's tiny oil-filled radiator. Never use radiant heaters i.e. where the wire element is exposed.

Fully winterised caravans tend to have central heating systems, which can be wet (eg. Primus or Alde) or dry (eg. Truma*). The wet systems naturally provide hot water as well, but have quite high lpg consumption rates. However, for prolonged winter caravanning, they are ideal. Most systems can be added to a caravan but must be professionally installed for safety. Systems incorporating fans, like the Carver* Fan Master (no longer produced), Truma's* Ultraheat (price approx. £153.60 incl. VAT, supply only), are reasonably effective but the fans run on 12 Volts and present an extra drain on the caravan battery. Truma has also launched a product called the 'awning warmer' that diverts warm air from a blown-air heating system through an outlet in the caravan wall, so a hole will need to be cut. Cost is about £40, suitable for DIY fitting or workshop fitted at additional cost.

Water heaters are unlikely to freeze whilst the caravan is occupied, but for travelling in near-zero conditions and if the caravan is left unoccupied for any length of time, it must be drained down to prevent frost damage.

5. Insulation

Most caravans are now double-glazed, but for any that are not, plastic sheeting (used for household secondary double-glazing) is readily available from DIY stores and can

be cut to size using scissors. This can then be placed over existing windows using velcro for a temporary installation, or a proper frame can be made for permanent installation. Edges can be sealed using rubber draught-sealing strips. General insulation can be improved on older caravans - refer to our separate leaflet on the subject.

6. For the car

Mud and Snow tyres often improve traction and can be used all year round. Despite rumours of increased road noise and poor wear characteristics, we did not find this on Michelin MS tyres tested on a typical family saloon. For very slippery sites snow chains might be needed. Snowchains can be purchased or hired from Snowchains Europroducts. They cost from about £50, depending on the type of chain and the size of tyre. The Spikes Spider traction system is a clip on anti-skid device. Some preparation needs to be done, but once this initial work is completed fitting and removal is said to be quick. Two versions are available, depending on weight and size of vehicle. Prices range from £190.00 to £275.00. Do not use these products on the public highway unless very snowy as it is an offence to have anything on your tyre which might damage the road surface. Mats or ramps that can be inserted under wheels are not always successful. Grip Trak, from W4 Limited, are made from tough easy to clean plastic and cost approximately £8.98 a pair. Griptrack is a tough lightweight track suitable for front and rear wheel drive vehicles, and costs £49.99 plus post and packaging. Portable flooring systems are available; however, you should check with the Warden or site owner that there are no objections to its use. Rola-Trac Ultra portable flooring weighs 4.5kg per square metre, it is available in black or yellow and costs £16.75 per metre. For regular winter caravanners, a four-wheel drive car or all-terrain vehicle is well worth considering. ABS brakes offer significant advantages, and other comforts such as heated seats and steering wheels (found on some Volvos, amongst others), can make all the difference.

7. General Tips

A porch awning is a useful accessory for storing wellington boots and hanging waterproofs up to dry, but if you intend to stay on hardstanding pitches, or even frozen ones, you may not be able to peg out. In any case, extra strong steel pegs are advised. If buying a porch awning, check that sufficient roof supports are provided to prevent snow or rain collecting on top.

If snow is on the ground, regularly lift and shake the mains cable or it will become permanently embedded. Regularly clear any drifting snow from underneath the caravan, to ensure air vents and appliance flues are kept free. Despite the temptation to block off permanent vents – do not do it, it could be dangerous. Try to site the caravan so that fridge vents etc are away from the prevailing wind.

Good quality sleeping bags or a high-tog continental quilt are advisable and avoid the need to have a heater on all night.

As water freezes from the top down, an insulated 'hat' for an aquaroll type container combined with foam pipe lagging might postpone the icicles. A discarded hot water cylinder jacket will offer some protection for caravan water containers.

Condensation can be a problem, so moisture absorbing crystals (available from DIY stores) would be useful. Mitsubishi Electric manufacture portable dehumidifiers – the MJ/E16V and the MJ/E16VX both weigh 12kg (empty) and cost £299 and £349 respectively. Ebac Ltd 'Powerdri' weighs 13kg (empty) and costs £199. Mattress underlay is available, which is designed to aid removal of the moisture that builds up in the mattress, which can still be a problem despite slatted bed bases and ventilated bed-boxes. Hawke House Marine markets Ventair Mat anti-fungal under-mattress material, costing approx. £15.19/m 200cm wide for a 6ft x 2ft bunk or £14.95 per sq metre. It comprises two layers of porous polyester, sandwiching a stiff but flexible mesh core. The Natural Mat Company supplies the Natural Mat, which is constructed from 15mm thick coir matting soaked in natural latex. It is said to be uncrushable and is supplied in 210cm long sheets. The sheets are available in five different widths, costing from £38 for the 60cm size. Avoid excessive moisture production - one pressure cooker is better than three saucepans. Despite the cold, ensure adequate ventilation when cooking or if catalytic heaters are in use.

Most UK caravan manufacturers have some models in their range that can be fully winterised with factory fitted options. It is worth looking at some of the German made caravans available in this country, or consider those like the Swedish Polar, which will have to be purchased from abroad if new, or might be available used from a dealer.

With extra appliances in use, ensure adequate fire safety equipment is carried - see our leaflet on the subject.

Keep moving parts on the caravan, like steadies, jockey wheel and handbrake well oiled to prevent seizing. If travelling through a lot of surface water before siting and if temperatures are likely to fall below zero, it might be an idea to leave the caravan handbrake off *providing* the caravan is on the level and securely chocked - otherwise the brakes might seize. The same applies to a car or motor caravan.

- *Truma (UK) took over Carver Technology Ltd in August 2000 and are committed to supply, for five years, all spare part requirements for Carver Space Heater and Water based products. There may be options where a substitute Truma based product will be offered in place of the Carver based version. After the initial five year period a review will take place, based on spares usage and extended warranty options.*

PRODUCT	MANUFACTURER/SUPPLIER	TELEPHONE
Aztec mains panel heater 'Super 105 Shower'	Aztec (Europe) Ltd, 17/18 Woodgate Way South, Eastfield Industrial Estate, Glenrothes, Fife, KY7 4PF, Scotland www.aztec-europe.co.uk	01592 630212
TUX120/TUX240 tubular heater	Dimplex UK Ltd, Millbrook House, Grange Drive, Hedge End, Southampton, SSO30 2DF www.dimplex.co.uk	0845 6005111
Truma winterising kit	Truma (UK) Ltd, Park Lane, Dove Valley Park, South Derbyshire DE65 5BG www.truma.com	01283 586050
Truma 'awning warmer'	Truma (UK) Ltd, Dove Valley Park, South Derbyshire DE65 5BG www.truma.com	01283 586050
Fernox-Alphi-11 Propylene Glycol anti- freeze	Cookson Electronics Forsyth Road, Sheerwater, Woking, Surrey, GU21 5RZ www.fernox.com	01483 793200
Freezstop Micro System (mains powered)	Heat Trace Ltd, Mere's Edge, Chester Road, Helsby Frodsham, Cheshire, WA6 0DJ www.heat-trace.com	01928 726451
Royal Fan Heater (1000 & 2000 watt heat settings)	Available from most good caravan accessory shops	
Snowchains (hire or purchase) can be bought by Mail Order	Snowchains Europroducts, Bourne Enterprise Centre, Borough Green, Kent TN15 8DG www.snowchains.co.uk	01732 884408
Spikes Spider	UNIT 1A, Toll Bar Estate, Sedbergh, Cumbria, LA10 5HA www.spikesspider.com	01539 621884
Snowchains (hire or purchase) 10% discount for Caravan Club members	Polar Automotive Ltd, Unit 8 Orchard Business Centre, Sanderson Way, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 1QG www.snowchains.com	01732 360638
Rola-Trac Ultra	Rola-Trac Ltd, South Burlingham Road, Lingwood, Norwich, NR13 4ET www.rola-trac.co.uk	01493 750200
Moisture Munchers (Silica Gel Crystals)	Available from camping/ caravanning accessory shops	

Water Tanks	CAK Ltd, 10 Princes Drive, Kenilworth, Warwickshire, CV8 2FD www.caktanks.co.uk or Amber Plastics Ltd, Broombank Road, Chesterfield Ind Est, Sheepbridge, Chesterfield, S41 9QJ www.amberplastics.co.uk	01926 854271 01246 456525
Ventair Mat (under-mattress material)	Hawke House Ltd, Unit E1, Heritage Business Park, Heritage Way, Gosport, Hants, PO12 4BG www.hawkehouse.com	02392 588588
Natural Mat	The Natural Mat Company, 99 Talbot Road, London, W11 2AT www.airflowsprings.com	0207 9850474
Bags 4 Everything	76 Wakefield Road Ossett, West Yorkshire, WF5 9JX www.bags4everything.co.uk	01924 265367
Pyramid's Rechargeable Dehumidifier	Available from camping/caravanning accessory shops	
Mitsubishi Portable dehumidifiers MJ/E16V and MJ/E16VX	MEACO (UK Limited) Unit 4, 1 Cobbet Park, Moorfield Road, Slyfield Ind Estate, Guildford, GU1 1RU www.meaco.com/mitsubishi.htm	0500 418458
Grip Trak	W4 Limited, Ford Lane Industrial Estate, Arundel, West Sussex BN18 0DF www.w4limited.com	01243 553355
Powerdri	EBAC Ltd, St Helens Trading Estate, Bishop Auckland, County Durham, DL14 9AL www.ebac.com	0845 6341392
Griptrack	126 Stonehill Rise, Scawthorpe, Doncaster, DN5 9HB www.griptrack.co.uk	07774604843