



# On the move

Looking for help when manoeuvring your caravan? **John Wickersham** considers a device that could be just what you're after

**T**HANKS TO Carver's invention of electric motorised movers, thousands of elderly and disabled caravanners continue to enjoy the touring life. Others find reversing a caravan is a potential white-knuckle ride. If you can't back your caravan on to a Club pitch or on to your driveway, a motorised mover will help. But so will participation on one of the Club's manoeuvring courses.

It is, of course, down to personal choice whether or not you need a mover. Having owned caravans continuously since the 1960s, I've never encountered a situation where I've really needed one. Admittedly, parking caravans in tight places at home has often required some tricky manoeuvres. But with practice and patience reversing can be fun, and practical courses are particularly useful. But so, too, are motor movers – and here are some points to consider.

## PLUS POINTS

- A mover can prevent injury, especially if you're not fit and strong
- Intricate positioning adjustments are achievable
- You can monitor progress when

standing *alongside* your caravan.

- Aligning and hitching-up a caravan is often easier when using a mover
- It is possible to move an unhitched caravan up a slope
- Unhitched caravans can be shifted from boggy pitches with a mover
- When their drive rollers are engaged movers can act like a brake
- A remote-control mover is fun to operate

## MINUS POINTS

- Including installation, movers typically cost between £1000 and £2000 (four-motor models made to fit twin-axle caravans are very costly)
- They are heavy and take up a lot of your caravan's payload
- They make a substantial current draw on a leisure battery

Above: controlling caravan movements is easy when you can stand conveniently close

Below: moving a caravan with a wireless remote-control handset is rather fun

- Ground clearance is usually reduced – so watch out for speed humps
- Traction ability depends on conditions and the drive rollers
- It might not be easy to transfer a mover when changing your caravan
- A number of the designs are a little unsightly

## INSTALLATION COSTS

Depending on the model and workshop equipment, a wheel-driving mover takes an experienced fitter at least three hours to install, while a competent DIY-er will probably need a full day. This is not a job to be taken lightly. Considerable time is spent on the ground, underneath a caravan, and the wiring-up work isn't always straightforward either – for instance, the cable lengths feeding each motor need to be identical to avoid voltage drops which would affect their performance. Installing the master control box inside a caravan, coupling-up and discreetly hiding thick cables all take time. >>



As a guide, my local Approved Workshop normally fits a standard Powrtouch mover in three hours and the hourly labour charge (including 17.5% VAT) is £52.82. Some suppliers offer a home-fit installation service.

**WEIGHT MATTERS**

A single-axle system typically weighs around 37kg (81.6lb), the equivalent of a large amount of bedding, clothing and other personal items. If your caravan is often loaded close to its limit, adding a motorised mover will mean you'll have to leave some possessions at home.

This is seldom mentioned by suppliers and as recent roadside weight checks have established, some caravans are overweight – and, therefore, illegal. When considering having a mover fitted, any responsible caravanner should...

- Check the Maximum Technically Permissible Laden Mass (MTPLM) of their caravan as recorded on its data plate
- Load the caravan as if they're going on a typical holiday
- Check its actual laden weight (ALW) on a public weighbridge
- Subtract the ALW from the MTPLM to establish if a mover can be installed without exceeding the caravan's legal limit

Paradoxically, many caravanners applaud the importance of road safety but never bother to carry out this simple check. As stated earlier, motor movers are heavy; those for twin-axle caravans even scale 72kg (158lb).

**BATTERY REQUIREMENTS**

Several mover suppliers advise that a leisure battery of 110Ah is fitted to provide sufficient power. That's not unrealistic if you want a mover to draw a caravan from its pitch towards your towcar; or propel it some distance to a resting place at home, particularly if there's a slope.

If you tend to stay on caravan sites with mains hook-ups, you can at least replenish a battery. If a mover is only needed to make fine positional adjustments to sited caravan, the current draw is considerably reduced. A peak current consumption is often as much as 120A, although on average this might be around 15-20A. Caravan weight, terrain and slopes inevitably play their part.

**DESIGN DETAILS**

When comparing different movers, check:

- Actuation: this is the means of engaging the drive rollers. Some movers involve manual engagement on each side, while others adopt 'cross actuation' where both rollers are engaged simultaneously from one side. Electric actuation is

another 'extra' which is activated on the handset

- Ground clearance: reduction is often 50mm (2in), although the integrated chassis version of the 2010 Al-Ko Mammut does not affect clearance
- Appearance: this varies from rudimentary appendage to the sleek Mammut which is completely sealed against water ingress
- Rollers: both abrasive grit and aluminium rollers are used
- Soft start: eliminates a sudden lurch when the motors are activated, thus permitting precise movements
- Caravan weights: the weight limit of caravans that a mover can manage is given in the product specifications

**DAMAGE**

Club members have reported problems with grounding, kerb damage and jockey wheel distortion. When a laden caravan is rolling on a poor surface, abrupt bumps can damage a jockey wheel. Al-Ko recommends its Premium Jockey Wheel with its wide wheel surface and integrated suspension. On balance, only a small minority of owners experience problems, many of which are of their own making.

**COMPARISONS**

To compare product specifications, check brochures, manufacturer websites and caravanmoversonline.co.uk, which includes a detailed table examining key elements of 17 different products. ■



Twin-axle caravans present more problems so motorised mover devices are heavy and costly



The main components in a Powrtouch kit which was installed as a DIY project



The Al-Ko Mammut is neatly enclosed and there's no loss of clearance on the integrated chassis model



An entry-level mover with manual actuation system



The central control units are complex items which are normally mounted indoors



Some products employ rollers that are finished with an abrasive, grit-like surface



The specification on this Reich Move Control Compact states it moves single-axle caravans weighing up to 2000kg