

Check. *pointers*

If your caravan or motorhome has been off the road for a while, it's time to carry out some pre-season checks. John Wickersham is your guide

Most people feel refreshed after a really good rest. That's not the case with mechanical things; they deteriorate quickly if they're not put to regular use.

That's a point to remember now that Easter is approaching. Many owners will be hitching-up very soon, having not used their caravans or motorhomes since autumn. So before setting off, a number of checks will be needed. Here are some important things to consider.



A cover will protect your caravan but you'll still need to check your pride and joy

EXTERNAL CHECKS



■ If a cover was fitted, inspect it for tears, then remove it carefully and fold it up if it's clean and dry. Also remove temporary protective additions on the caravan, particularly the packing you may have applied round a flue on the roof.



■ Confirm that corner steadies raise and lower with ease. Threads can seize up during long storage periods and the cure is to remove old grease, use a wire brush to remove grit and then apply a *thin* film of new grease.



■ Closely inspect the tyres, including their inner and outer sidewalls. Small cracks indicate that they need replacing. Also check tyre pressures (including the spare's) and inflate them as indicated in the owner's manual.



■ It is not unknown for wheels to become detached from caravans. That's why you are urged to have the wheel fixings checked with a calibrated torque wrench in accordance with the manufacturer's guidance.



■ Irrespective of whether your caravan has seven-pin plugs, the more recent 13-pin plug or an adaptor cable, check road light operation well before departure. Car sockets often get dirty and damp inside and contacts may need cleaning.



■ Driving rain can get into a caravan's road light clusters and damage the contacts. Marker lamps are similarly affected and the fittings on this motorhome were badly rusted inside.

OTHER TASKS

Other tasks to consider include giving the exterior a good clean, checking the handbrake lever is working effectively and verifying that friction pads on a hitch-head stabiliser are not contaminated with grease. If a motorised mover is fitted, give it a quick test. Ideally, it makes sense to have your caravan fully serviced before the start of a new season.

INTERNAL CHECKS



■ Have a close look at wall and ceiling panels for tell-tale signs of developing leaks. Harsh winters sometimes damage ageing external sealant.



■ If you can see marks or you're aware of a musty smell, get your dealer to carry out a damp test as soon as possible. Checks are made at around 50 points and the sooner remedial work is carried out the better.



■ Rooflights usually need cleaning inside and out. Over time, dust gets blown under the frame and spiders often take up residence. Before towing, it's important to check the catches to ensure they engage with the frame.



■ Against manufacturers' advice, many owners keep window roller blinds closed during storage periods. This can weaken the recoil spring. Check its operation because it may need re-tightening.



■ Before parking-up a caravan or motorhome, the food compartment of a fridge should be cleaned and the door left ajar in its storage position. Overlook this and you might find mildew inside when you're about to load provisions after a break.



■ All NCC-approved caravans and motorhomes have smoke alarms which are powered by their own dry-cell batteries. LPG and carbon monoxide alarms, if fitted, are similarly powered – so check batteries as the season starts.

OTHER TASKS

Check all interior lights and appliances, and remove waste plugs which you may have put in the sink, basin or shower tray. If you weren't able to store cushions and mattresses indoors at home, check the undersides for damp.

SUPPLY SYSTEM CHECKS



■ Prior to storage, many owners transfer gas cylinders to a well-ventilated, safe and secure place at their homes. When reinstating a cylinder, check the date on the flexible gas hose and consider booking a system leak test.



■ Leisure batteries are often transferred to a shed or garage where they can be left on a permanent trickle charge. Before returning a battery to a caravan, check the level of the electrolyte in each cell and clean the terminal connectors.



■ Water heaters and supply pipes *must* be drained-down prior to frosty conditions. Leave all taps and shower controls *open* before parking up. If residual water freezes, a pressure build-up can split closed taps apart.



■ At the start of every season, it makes sense to use purifying treatments to clean out your fresh water supply containers (above). A completely different treatment – often unpleasantly smelly – is used for waste water containers.



■ Residual water left in a cartridge-type taste filter can freeze and split the casing. In practice, it makes good sense to start every season with a brand new filter in place.



■ It's a good idea to hose out a cassette toilet but take care because a high pressure flow of water can damage its float mechanism. Then smear the rubber seal with olive oil or Thetford's seal fluid.

OTHER TASKS

Other supply system tasks might include coupling up the mains hook-up lead, confirming operation of the RCD cut-out switch on the 230V consumer unit and checking mains appliances. If you simply left the 12V battery in its locker prior to parking up, it's likely to be as flat as the proverbial pancake. When a fully-discharged battery is left in that state, it is highly unlikely that it can ever be fully revived again. It's a costly mistake but don't be upset; many new owners are caught out this way.