

DIY surgery



WINTERISATION SPECIAL

We answer your questions on all aspects of running, improving and repairing your motorhome. Each month, we invite industry experts to contribute, too. Email us at diamond.dave@haymarket.com or write to us at the address on page 154.



Our technical team is: Phil Curry (pictured, left) and Diamond Dave (right)

PREPARING FOR WINTER TOURING

Engine checks

Q What checks will I need to run on my motorhome's engine in preparation for winter touring?
Guy Silverson (via email)

A Phil Curry replies There are a couple of things to look out for when touring in the winter. If you have been topping up your cooling system with water only, then you will need to drain it and replace it with a mixture of water and

antifreeze. When water freezes it expands, and this can split your radiator. Antifreeze works by lowering the freezing point of the liquid. If your 'van is fitted with glow plugs, be sure that they are working correctly. Make sure you wait for the light on the instrument cluster to go out – it's often an orange light which looks like two small coils – indicating that the glow plugs are warm enough to heat the diesel oil. This is critical during the winter because cold diesel can clog up injectors and valves.



Don't get caught out – remember to add antifreeze to your coolant



Propane is better than butane in cold weather but you will need to change the 'pigtail' connector (circled)



WINTER TOURING

Which gas is best in cold weather?

Q When I bought my motorhome, earlier this year, it came fitted with Butane gas canisters. However, I have since been told that this is not the ideal type of gas to use when touring in colder climates.

I am hoping to take my motorhome to Switzerland for a skiing trip and wondered if my motorhome's gas system would be up to the task. If not,

what do I need to do to change to another gas system?
James Davidson
Staffordshire

A Diamond Dave says Propane is better in cold weather because butane only turns from liquid to gas in temperatures above freezing. In 0°C temperatures and below it stops 'gassing' and you will end up with no gas for your motorhome's cooker or heating system. Propane continues to gas right down to minus 24°C so it is better for cold weather camping.

It's worth noting, too, that LPG Autogas on the Continent contains a higher proportion of butane than in the UK. Therefore, you may find that you have a limited quantity of propane available if you use a bulk tank or refillable cylinder. So, if you're touring abroad in colder climates for long periods, it is advisable to carry as much propane as you can within your gas locker. If you are currently using butane, you will have to change the 'pigtail' connector that runs to your regulator, as the two bottles take different nozzle fittings.

LAYING UP

I'm worried about my gas cylinders

Q I'm laying up my 'van over the winter as I can only afford to tax it for six months of the year. However, I'm worried about leaving the gas cylinders in the locker. I don't like the idea of

explosive canisters sitting on my driveway for all this time. Do you have any advice?

Tim Rolands
Maidstone

A Phil Curry says I completely agree with you, gas is a dangerous substance and should always be treated with the utmost care.

The best course of action is to drain your system. Burn off all the gas and then, to be certain, remove the bottle and open a hob ring. This will ensure that all the gas in the pipes is cleared. Not only will this prevent an explosion in case of a fire, but will also mean that the pipes are free of pressure, and will be less susceptible to splits or leaks in the future.



Burn off all the gas in the system before laying up your motorhome

WINTER ON THE ROAD

Snow chains

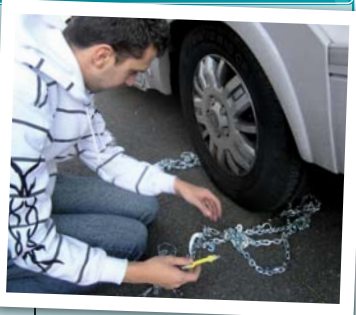
Q How easy is it to fit snow chains to my motorhome's tyres? Will I need to take the wheels off before I do it? And how effective are they on icy or snow-covered roads?

Jack Karlington
(via email)

A Phil Curry says You don't need to remove your road wheels before fitting snow

chains. In fact, they are actually pretty simple to fit, and a snow chain kit usually comes with instructions. Fit your chains by passing them around and behind the road wheel before connecting them up at the front. (You'll find that two small sections, opposite each other, do not have criss-crossing chains – that is to enable the gear to be fitted while the road wheel is in place.) Then, you just roll them back and over the tyre.

In terms of how effective they are, I would recommend them for slippery roads that have been subjected to extremely low temperatures. They add extra grip in the snow, which is essential for heavier vehicles. However, temperatures rarely drop low enough in the UK so I would only recommend fitting them if you're off to the colder areas of continental Europe.



Snow chains may look complicated but they are relatively easy to attach

LAYING UP FOR WINTER

How do I prevent damp problems?

Q What is the best way to prevent damp in my 2005 Swift Sundance? I will not be using it during the winter months because I primarily like to stay on Club sites, and most of them are closed during this period. It will be sitting under cover on my driveway, but I have heard from motorcaravanning friends that even this does not ensure that damp will not set in.

Mary Blundell
(via email)

A Diamond Dave says If your motorhome is sealed up properly, and you have checked all the seals around doors and windows for any leaks, then problems such as water ingress should not materialise.

The damp effects you have probably heard others talk about is 'condensation damp'. 'Vans are built with a number of vents to create a constant circulation of air to the interior. This air flow around the 'van prevents walls from getting cold and condensation setting in. However, in closed overhead lockers and underneath seats there is less air circulation. Therefore, when you lay up your motorhome, be sure to remove your seat cushions, and open all the interior lockers and cupboard doors, allowing air to flow and thereby reducing the risk of condensation damp.



When laying your 'van up for the winter, remove seat cushions...



...and open locker doors, to ensure that the air can circulate

LAYING UP

Should I cover up my 'van?

Q We bought our first motorhome, a Bürstner Solano T710, last May and this will be the first winter it spends on our driveway.

I've heard conflicting reports on the benefits of using a vehicle cover. Some of the drawbacks seem to be scuffing, caused by the cover rubbing the paintwork, and the possibility of damp interiors due to a lack of ventilation. Is a cover a good idea, or is it better to leave the 'van uncovered? Also, I have tried to find somewhere to store my 'van over the winter, but there is nowhere nearby and I'm worried about the effect the elements might have on my Solano's exterior.

Tom Mapherson
Stonehaven

A Diamond Dave says I have no personal experience of these covers so it's difficult to give exact advice. But I do know of several people who use Protec covers (www.caravancovers.org.uk) and they are all pleased with them.

My advice is to wash your 'van thoroughly, before fitting the cover, to remove any surface dirt that could otherwise be picked up and rubbed into the paintwork, which might cause the scuffing you mention.

Phil Curry says In terms of ventilation, many firms offer a breathable cover which allows air to circulate, while also preventing rain and dirt from entering. Having used covers on my cars in the past, I would say that they are a good idea to protect your vehicle from the elements, and are generally safe to use.

Also see page 92 (storage facilities) and p56 (covers).



Leave your drain tap open so that water can flow into a bucket rather than freeze up inside your tank

FIGHT JACK FROST

Tank protection

Q What's the best way to prevent my waste-water tank from freezing? I don't want to leave my pitch, only to find that I can't drain down because the tank has frozen up.

Michael Anderson (via email)

A Diamond Dave says If your fresh- and waste-water tanks are slung underneath the motorhome it is a good idea to have them insulated. This will extend the time it takes for their contents to freeze. And any water pipes, fresh or waste, which are below the floor and

exposed to the elements, should also be insulated. However, in extremely cold climates they will still freeze without some means of heating. Either a 12-volt heating element, or even a fish-tank heater should ensure that your tank's contents do not freeze.

Another good tip is to leave the waste tap open to prevent water collecting in the tank.



A 12-volt heating element will stop your water tanks freezing

ON THE ROAD

Misty windscreens

Q I've got an old VW camper, and despite the cold weather I intend to go on using it throughout the winter. However, the cab heaters are not that efficient and the interior windscreen suffers

with fogging, which is a pain to clear. Any ideas on how I can prevent this?

Paul Roddings Somerset

A Phil Curry says Rain-X is a type of glass polish that will help to prevent your windscreen from misting up. I've used



a similar product myself in the past, and it has always worked wonders. You apply it just like a normal polish, and it prevents the windscreen from fogging in cold, damp or humid conditions. It is available from most car accessory retailers, or for further information go to www.rainx.co.uk.

MUDDY SITES

Sticky situation

Q My main worry when I'm touring in winter is not the cold weather, but the 'wet stuff'. I plan to stay on CLs, which are more likely to be open at this time of year. However, most of the CLs I've visited have only been able to offer grass pitches. As my 'van weighs four-tonnes, I've got visions of waking up in the morning to find that my 'van has sunk up to its axles. Any tips on how I might get out of such sticky situations?

Ken Bullings (via email)

A Diamond Dave says If you do find yourself getting bogged down on site and want to move off, my advice is to let all the air out of your tyres. This will mean you have a greater grip/contact area with the mud, so this will help pull you out. Make sure you do not drive too far, however, as driving on flat tyres can lead to severe damage. Take it slowly, and as soon as you are safe, inflate them to the correct pressures.

LAYING UP



Add extra air to your tyres to stop them from flat-spotting

Should I over-inflate my tyres?

Q I've heard that I should over-inflate my tyres when my motorhome is left standing for an extended period. Why is this? Is it absolutely necessary?

Les Footall (via email)

A Phil Curry says When a vehicle is left stationary for a long period of time, it will place a lot of downward weight on the tyres, and this will cause the treads to flat-spot: that is, the tyre becomes flat, rather than rounded, at its point of contact with the road. If this happens, you will need to replace the tyre.

So, when laying-up for winter you should either slightly over-inflate your tyres, or jack the 'van up and remove its wheels. In the former case, add around two or three pounds per square inch (psi). If possible, turn the wheels a little, every fortnight, and this will prevent pressure from being applied to the same spot for months on end.



WINTER WARMER
Window insulation

Q Is there any way I can fit screens or blinds into my 1989 Talbot Express windows for when I'm away on tour? It is fitted with curtains at the moment which block out the light, but still let in a draught. However, I don't want to spend too much money as I'm replacing the 'van soon.

Ben Hancock
(via email)

A Phil Curry says If there is quite a noticeable draught, my first instinct would be to check the rubber seals around your windows. On a 'van as old as yours, they could be perished, leading not just to draughts, but possible damp problems, too.



Stretching a length of cling film over your motorhome's habitation window frames is a cost-friendly alternative to double-glazing

If the seals are fine, then one of the better (and cheaper) ways of insulating your windows is to cut a length of cling film, and stretch it over the frame. This traps a layer of air in between the window and the film, adding further insulation.

However, this is only recommended if your window is offset to the outside wall of the 'van. If your windows are flush with the internal walls, any cling film left touching a window for too long could cause crazing in the plastic.

TOP TIPS FOR WINTER STORAGE

Here is a selection of useful tips you can use when preparing your motorhome for safe winter storage:

- Place paper or some cloth underneath the wiper blades on the windscreen, to prevent them sticking to the glass
- Leave a note on your steering wheel to remind you what needs doing when taking your 'van back out on tour
- Make sure you store your 'van with a full, or nearly full, tank of fuel. This will limit the possibility of condensation in the tank contaminating the fuel

- If possible, leave the handbrake off, and chock up the wheels. This will prevent your rear brakes from seizing
- Stuff a lump of rag up your exhaust pipe to prevent any small animals nesting, or carrying rubbish up into it.



Left Check the wheels of your 'van and release the handbrake to prevent brake seizure later
Above Before storing your 'van over the winter, write yourself a 'To do' list

Our thanks to... Peter White, CTEK Battery Chargers. Tel 01380 722621. Web www.ctek.com.

LAYING UP

Battery care

Q How can I protect my engine battery during a lay-up? I don't want it to go flat and ruin the electrics. And what will I have to check when it comes to using my 'van again?

Philip Stoke
(via email)

A Peter White, of CTEK, replies The battery should be removed. In newer 'vans with complex electronics it's not always possible, so it should be checked for cracks (and disposed of, or repaired).

The top of the battery, terminal posts and connectors should be cleaned with water and baking soda. Contact terminals should be clean, dry and greased.

If you can remove the battery, its compartment should be cleaned and dried. Traditional batteries (not maintenance-free types) should have electrolyte levels checked and topped up.

To avoid a flat battery, maintain a regular charge: if you have access to electricity, use a smart charger to keep the battery in good condition.

Before re-starting your 'van ensure that battery terminals are clean and secure. Recharge the battery if necessary – a jump-start and a long drive *does not* fully recharge the battery as an alternator will only partly charge it. After this first drive, the battery will need to be charged again.

