

MOT

AND SERVICING

The facts

 **Phil Curry** shows you the inside track on MoT testing and habitation servicing, and what the professionals watch out for – some checks are easy enough to do yourself before the test, which might also save you a bit of cash



We all know that the annual MoT test is a legal obligation but how many of us have considered having the test carried out at other times, of the year? It will offer you peace of mind that your 'van is safe and roadworthy and, if a problem is spotted, will also protect your vehicle from serious damage later. So, you should really view an MoT test as a frequent check, rather than an annual formality.

At the end of a test, your 'van may pass its MoT with 'advisories' – that is, things that are not serious at present but could become so in the following months, and will anyway need to be fixed before the next MoT test takes place. So, the 'advisories' represent a really useful early-warning system. Since the MoT certificate process was computerised, testers now log vehicles on at the start of a test, to check that the registration and chassis numbers match up. Then, at the end, they will log the pass (or fail) decision, along with their 'advisories'. One little-known advantage is that if you lose your paperwork during the coming year, you can check your

'advisories' online at the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency website www.vosa.gov.uk, and take action to have any problems sorted early.

The habitation check, while neither an essential nor legal necessity, is something that should anyway be carried out annually, especially if you lay your 'van up over the winter. It tests areas such as gas systems, ventilation, water flow, seals, joints and electrical connections, and ensures that all are within their specified parameters. You may feel able to check these yourself, but garages have specialist equipment to measure levels and pressures, and provide a detailed picture of potential problems and identify what is needed to sort these out. For instance, did you know that an electrical trip switch must activate within 0.040 seconds of a surge (which is less than half the time it takes you to blink)? If not, it is considered faulty.

So, to see what is involved, we went to Marquis Motorhomes' service centre in Northampton, to follow the engineers as they carried out an MoT (see p93) and a habitation check (see p94).

TOP TIP

To check that your rear lights are working, back up to a wall at night and watch for the reflections in your wing mirrors

Phil's TIPS

There is no alternative to an annual MoT vehicle test. The checks that are carried out can sometimes highlight problems you never knew existed – and some of these can be dangerous.

For example, a long time ago, when I was younger and less experienced, I was called into the garage where my own car's MoT was taking place, to be shown how badly the wheel bearing had failed. In fact, it had

fallen out, and the wheel was holding on by a thread. All I had noticed was a squeaking noise on full lock. But remember, the MoT is a test, not a vehicle service. The inspection carried out is visual, and no parts are actually removed from the vehicle.

If your motorhome fails, you have to specify that you want the work to be carried out and this can sometimes incur additional costs. Therefore, if you have a problem and know about it, say a blown headlight bulb, don't assume the tester will just chuck a new one in for you there and then – they won't, and you may even have to pay a re-test fee.

The habitation check is just as important as the MoT test, and it is a good idea to

combine the two. Not only will you know that your 'van is safe in both areas, but you'll only have to put one date (for renewal) in your diary. And, knowing that your ventilation systems are working well and that your electrical system will cut out quickly enough, will give you great peace of mind.

You can see the list of items that are checked during an MoT test at www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/OwningAVehicle/Mot/DG_10016070 – you may not be able to check all the things yourself before the test, but it will give you a pretty good idea of what to look for, to try and save some time, and money.



The MoT test

● The MoT test on this 2001 Swift Lifestyle 590RS was carried out by Marquis Motorhomes' Dave Butler.



Dave (pictured here) first checked the interior. He made sure the front seat belts were secure and undamaged, and similarly the seatbelts on the rear travel seats.



Dave then tested that the pedals were free, and had no play in them. He also ascertained that there was no restriction to the pedals' travel, and that they did go to the floor, or as far down as required.



The next check was on the handbrake: Dave pulled it up hard to make sure that it locked properly and that there was no slack in the cable.



The Lifestyle's steering wheel was wiggled backwards and forwards to make sure that there was no play in the steering column, and that it was therefore attached and working correctly.



Dave then tested the engine battery for the correct voltages, and made sure that it was not leaking acid, and that there was no danger of anything catching and shorting out.



Still under the bonnet, the fluid levels were checked – this included coolant, washer bottle water and brake fluid – making sure that each had the correct levels for proper functioning.



Next, the 'van was lifted on ramps and jacked up ready for the inspections underneath. Checking inside the wheel, Dave examined the ball joints.



Using a special digital tread-depth gauge, Dave was able to get a highly accurate reading to show whether or not the treads were in a legal condition.



Behind the wheels, the flexible brake hoses were examined, to ensure that these crucial items of equipment were not perishing or cracked.



A good pull on the steering rack ascertained that it was tight, and had no play that might potentially cause problems.



The front and rear suspension springs and struts were examined to check they are holding up, not leaking any fluids and that they are able to support the weight of the 'van, with no excessive bounce.



The next test was on the wheel bearings. Dave pulled each wheel top and bottom, to check for any play in the hub.



On a rolling road, Dave tested the brakes and then carried out an engine emissions test.



With all the relevant checks ticked off, the 'van is ready to be issued with its MoT Certificate.

DID YOU KNOW?

A motorhome MoT test is not always a straightforward business: it comes down to weight, and what you carry with you. It is possible that you are, in fact, driving an HGV.

According to the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA), a motorcaravan is "a motor vehicle (not being a living van) which is constructed or adapted for the carriage of passengers and their effects and which contains, as permanently installed equipment, the facilities which are reasonably necessary for enabling the vehicle to provide mobile living. It is a **Class IV** vehicle regardless of size or weight."

From here, it gets more complicated. If you carry goods not needed for the purpose of residence in the vehicle, and which the 1988 Road Traffic Act describes as "goods or burden of any description" then you are driving a "living van", which is classed as a 'goods vehicle'. It does not state that these goods have to be for reward or gain.

Under 3000kg it is a **Class IV vehicle**, the same category as a car. Between this and 3500kg it is in **Class VII**, so expect to pay more. Over 3500kg and, believe it or not, you're driving an **HGV**, and will have to get a special, annual test. Also, you will have to get a new motorhome tested after its first year (rather than just three), and at a specialist MoT station.

One note of caution: if you keep a motor scooter permanently in your garage, that scooter is classified as 'goods', as it is not essential to your residence, and so your motorhome will be classed as a goods vehicle. If you were to take that scooter out of your garage for the purpose of the MoT test, allowing you to have a test under normal Class IV rules, the police could in theory take issue if you were stopped at some time and they found that you had the wrong class of MoT certificate (for what in their view could be classified as a goods vehicle).

MoT COSTS

Class IV – £50.35

Class VII – £53.80

HGV – £49 (at a VOSA Test Station) or £61 (at a VOSA-Designated Premises) (see panel, right, for explanation of classes)

• The prices quoted above are the maximum prices an MoT testing station can charge. You may be quoted less, but never more than that.



How a habitation check is carried out

● Lee Howard, the garage foreman at Marquis Motorhomes' Northampton branch, carried out the habitation check on this 2007 Auto-Sleeper.



Lee (pictured here) went around the outside of the 'van and inspected the gas lines, testing the pressures: if they dropped, it would indicate a leak somewhere in the system.



Underneath the vehicle, Lee greased the threads on the corner steadies, winding them down to check for damage or potential problems with the mechanism.



As this 'van has a spare wheel, Lee checked its tyre tread depth then greased the retaining bolts. As he said, there is nothing worse than being stuck at the roadside, unable to release the spare!



Next it was the turn of the toilet cassette – to make sure it could be removed without resistance, and that there were no cracks or leaks that could cause unsavoury problems.



After checking their seals for cracks, Lee made sure that the flues were working. He used a probe to check the system emissions to ensure that there was no carbon monoxide, and that the flue was not blocked.



Inside the Auto-Sleeper, Lee checked for damp by running his meter around the various panels. He told me that a reading above 15 per cent would be considered severe, indicating that the offending areas were in need of attention.



The next test was to make sure the electrical trip switch was working effectively. Lee's RCD reader sent an electrical surge through the system to measure the time it took for the trip to work. Anything over 40 milliseconds (0.040 seconds) means the switch would need replacing.



Because this Auto-Sleeper has a sealed leisure battery box, Lee checked the voltage through an auxiliary socket and received a perfect fully-charged reading of more than 14 volts.



Next, the furnishings were checked. Lee made sure that the dinette bed could be assembled, using all the necessary pieces available, and that none of the set-up was stuck, loose or damaged.



Lee also went around each window to check the blinds: he was looking for any kinks or blocks in the runners that would cause them to stick, and not pull down properly.



When testing the appliances, the main check was on the gas-burning hob. Lee made sure the flames were blue, and did not turn yellow, or flare, which would be a sign of a blocked flue or stove plate, resulting in the release of carbon monoxide.



Lee also made sure that the vehicle's gas heater was working properly with blue flames, and no blockages that otherwise might lead to the formation of carbon monoxide.



The fire extinguisher was taken from its mounting to make sure it was free, and fully charged, just in case it is ever needed. (An important check for us all. See G. O'Neill's letter on page 29)



When he checked the doors, Lee found a gap that was slightly too wide and causing a problem with a catch. He adjusted it by moving the hinge across slightly, allowing it to sit better in the frame.



● Our thanks to service manager Chris Cash and his team at Marquis, Northampton for their help with this feature. Tel 01604 402888 Web www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk