

# DIY surgery



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 210.

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

## ENGINE

### Ducato engine won't restart

**Q** I have a SWB 2.0-litre Fiat Ducato-based 'van. It starts first time when we begin our journey, but when we stop, after driving for a couple of hours, the engine will not restart and we have to wait another hour or so before we can start it again.

Three Fiat garages have told me that unless the problem manifests itself when they have the 'van on their premises, they cannot see the fault.



Heat compresses engine parts

A diagnostic test reveals no problem. Can you help?

Tom Tew  
Camberley, Surrey

**A** Paul Jakubiszyn of Lowdham says The engine refusing to crank over, or doing so slowly when the engine is warm, could be a sign that your battery is losing its charge. When the engine is hot, most of the components inside it are more tightly compressed than normal and so the battery needs to use more power in order to crank it up. When you leave the engine off for an hour or so, it cools and the components free-up a little, so less power is needed from the battery. Therefore, if your battery is underpowered it would not be able to start a warm engine but may be perfectly able to start a cold one.

Put a voltmeter onto the battery terminals and measure the voltage: it should read out at around 12.65V. If it is less than 12.45V, you may need a new battery.

## SEATBELTS

### How safe are child seats in a 'van?

**Q** We are currently looking at purchasing a motorhome. We have viewed an Auto-Sleeper Harmony with forward-facing rear seats, which we thought might be ideal as we have two young children - aged four and two - who travel in child seats.

Our concern was that on a motorhome's seats, which are upright with a short base (as opposed to those in a car, which tend to angle backwards) the standard inertia reel-type seat belts would not stop the child seats from tilting forward under normal driving conditions, and falling off. (We assume that under heavy braking, the seat belts would operate as legally required.)

I phoned a major motorhome supplier and spoke to a mechanic about my concern, to see whether he had heard of any such problems. He told me

that his children are driven in a separate car and that he is not happy for them to travel in the rear of his motorhome since the problem once manifested itself when he was driving down a small hill, braking lightly.

We are very interested in purchasing the Harmony we have seen, but obviously do not wish to jeopardise the safety of our children. Does this mean that families with children using child seats are excluded from purchasing a motorhome? Kevin Simmons (via email)

**A** Phil Curry says I assume that you are referring to the booster-type of children's car seat. If so, there are two solutions to your problem. One is to keep a roll of non-slip matting which can be laid over the seats of your motorhome before you put the child seats down: this should

stop them slipping but may still allow them to tip forward; however, if the matting is rolled over the seat, at least they won't slide.

The second option is to buy booster seats with backs. These will be strapped to the back of the seat, with your child, which should prevent tipping and slipping.

Of course, both methods together would be ideal.



Children's car seats can be used on the forward-facing rear seats of a motorhome - just ensure that yours are correctly secured

**TYRES**

**Twin-wheel tyre pressure poser**

**Q** We have finally collected our Geist Touring 718 and although we're still getting used to it, we reckon it was worth the wait! Unlike our previous 'van (a 2002 Auto-Trail Cheyenne 634L on a 2.2 Sprinter chassis), this one is on the Transit twin rear-wheel chassis.

This is our first experience of twin rear wheels, and my question is about tyre-pressure equalisation. Other than an electronic aftermarket tyre-pressure monitoring system (which I imagine would be expensive) is there an easy way to check the inside wheel tyre pressures? You can just look at a single wheel and see if a tyre is softer than normal but you cannot easily see the inner tyre without crawling underneath!

I'm sure I read, some years ago, about a Y-piece valve attachment that balanced the pressures of a pair of tyres so that they would both deflate and inflate at the same rate. However, I can't find anyone who knows about it. If there is such a device, would it be sensible to fit one, given that if one were punctured you would end up with two flat tyres?

I am aware that the inner wheel can (and possibly does) have a valve extender which pokes out through the wheel centre to the outer wheel in order to allow the pressures to be checked. Alternatively, even though I have no confidence in



Internal tyre sealant is great, especially for twin wheels: because it immediately seals a puncture, it reduces the need for a spare tyre

re-inflation kits which take the place of a spare wheel – if you have a blow-out, what is there left to re-inflate? – I am considering putting sealant 'gunge' into my tyres, to slosh around inside, ready to stem a puncture as soon as it occurs, thus preventing the tyre from going flat in the first place. What do you think of that idea? I have successfully used it in the tyres of a mountain bike but have never tried it with a motor vehicle.

Mike Docker (via email)

**A** Diamond Dave says I have never seen a Y-piece connector for twin-wheel tyres, Mike, and I don't like the idea very much because if one got punctured

they would both deflate, leading to problems in having to replace both at the roadside. It would be much better, and perhaps safer, to stick with the valve extension for the inner wheel and check all your pressures frequently.

The 'gunge' type of sealant you describe is generally considered to be a good idea because it seals any puncture as it occurs. It also means that you could consider leaving your spare wheel behind, at home, which would save some weight, which can then be added to your payload.

Interestingly, many people who have used this 'grunge' type of sealant have commented that they have subsequently never needed to adjust their tyre pressures.

**Q&A FOLLOW-UP**

**I need a mask for my speedo**

**A** Phil Curry says In our August issue, James Bonner asked us where to find a kph speedometer mask for a 1995 Fiat Ducato that had been imported from Europe. After some searching I found Lockwood Dials, which supplies a range of dial accessories (including coloured masks for cars). It also sells masks for old and new Ducato instruments.

For the 1995 model, James needs part number C021. For new-shape (2007 onward) Ducatos, the relevant part numbers are C120 or C124, depending on your dial layout. See the website [www.lockwoodinternational.co.uk](http://www.lockwoodinternational.co.uk) where you can print out the web images and compare them with the dials in your 'van before ordering. The masks are supplied with full fitting instructions.

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Kilometre-per-hour dial masks are available from Lockwood

**ACCESSORIES**

**Which DIN for me?**

**Q** The radio in my motorhome has recently expired and I'm in the market for a new one. Ideally, I would like one with a screen, which I can use for navigation and for watching DVDs while parked up. But when window shopping I am asked if I need a 'single DIN' or 'double DIN'. My vehicle is on a 1997 Peugeot Boxer base. Can you help?

Justin McKenzie (via email)

**A** Phil Curry says I certainly can, Justin. DIN is the German standardisation committee, and for vehicle radios they state that a stereo unit must conform to a size of 180 x 50mm – this is referred to as a 'DIN'. The 'Double DIN' is 100mm high.

There are two types of screen available: flip-out from a single DIN, or a simple Double DIN screen. For your vehicle, you will need a single DIN and I recommend the Pioneer AVIC-X3 which costs around £1050. It has a seven-inch flip-out screen, with a navigation feature and CD/DVD playback.



A standard-sized radio, otherwise known as a single 'DIN', is 50mm high. Those which are 100mm high are called 'Double DIN'

**ACCESSORIES**  
**Satellite suction**

**Q** I have recently returned from a touring holiday. While I was away, I noticed that a number of motorhomes (and caravans) had suction pads securing their satellite dish to the side, or roof, of the vehicle.

Although I have scoured the internet I am still unable to find a supplier of these devices. Do you have any idea where I can get one? And how much are they likely to cost?

**Ken Hallett**  
(via email)

**A** Diamond Dave says If you've got a smallish satellite dish, RoadPro (www.roadpro.co.uk) can supply a suction-cup mount for the Multimo or Arcon dishes – you simply bolt or clamp the dish to it. The entire



Suction cups help you mount your satellite dish to the side or roof of your 'van

thing can then be suction mounted onto your motorhome's roof or sidewall. The advantage of suction mounts is that you can keep them in position outside for the duration of your stay, without the risk of the dish falling over, or taking up vital pitch space. Suction cup mounting prices start from just £19.99, so they are a very affordable extra.

**SERVICING**  
**Who does the engine and cab PDI?**

**Q** I am looking to upgrade my motorhome and have settled on an Auto-Trail Cheyenne. I know that motorhome dealerships carry out a full PDI [pre-delivery inspection] on the living area, but as the base vehicle is a Fiat, I wondered who carries out the PDI of the engine bay. Are motorhome dealers qualified by Fiat to perform this, or is it done elsewhere?

**Simon Isaacs**  
(via email)

**A** Wayne Hemmings, of Marquis (Bagshot), says While motorhome dealers are able to offer a full, living-area PDI when you buy a new 'van, the Fiat cab and engine PDI is undertaken by a Fiat dealer. Sometimes, these checks are carried out prior to the delivery of the

chassis section for conversion, so when the new motorhome rolls off the assembly line the front-end PDI has already been carried out. This is something that we check with Fiat when we sell a motorhome, and if there is no record of a PDI, we will arrange a check to be carried out by the nearest Fiat garage (the most qualified people to deal with the engine and cab components).



Fiat chassis and engine PDIs are conducted by Fiat dealers before the chassis is delivered

**ENGINE**  
**Too hot to tow?**

**Q** We have a 2006 Mercedes Sprinter 313 CDI which we have had converted into a campervan. It has covered 26,000 miles and is still under the manufacturer's warranty. It is highly equipped, with air-conditioning, an up-rated alternator, and a calorifier which runs off the engine's water system.

On a recent trip to southern France we were towing a trailer. At one point our engine temperature rose to 100° so I pulled over and rested the 'van for around three-quarters of an hour. I then wanted to undo the radiator cap but was unable to because the water was boiling up.

Now, after our 2000-mile trip the radiator has lost no water at all, and when we're not towing the water temperature gauge sits nicely at 85-87°.

I notice that the air-conditioning fan covers most of the radiator, presumably

meaning that the engine radiator is not getting full cooling and therefore struggles to cope under a heavy load.

By the way, we have another Sprinter van, with factory fitted air-conditioning, that does the same!

Do we need to run the air conditioning every time we tow a trailer just to keep the engine temperature down?

**Simon Richardson**  
(via email)

**A** Diamond Dave says Ordinarily, Simon, an engine would boil over at 100° so my first thought is that the temperature gauge is not completely accurate (which is not unusual).


If you try to remove the radiator cap while the engine is still hot then it will boil up. However, an engine is only said to be 'boiling over' if it is blowing water out while running with the radiator filler cap still in place. As your engine has not lost any water, it has neither boiled nor overheated. So, as long as that



Always make sure that your engine is completely cold before removing the coolant tank cap, or the water within may boil up


is the case, there is no real problem because it is just running a little hotter while you are towing.

Using the air-conditioning will probably not help to cool your engine because on one hand it adds to the engine

load, while on the other it transfers heat from inside the 'van to the radiator in front of the engine-coolant radiator. In other words, doing this is more likely to increase the engine temperature when it is running than decrease it. 



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**GAS**

**Has my regulator packed up?**

**Q** On a recent holiday our gas system failed. We had no gas arriving at the hob, the fridge or the heating system. Luckily it was the last day of a warm week away, so we were not too put out by this.

We have read about regulator failures with Truma products, where the device was not mounted higher than the gas bottles, but ours is. Is there a more sinister reason behind our particular problem?

James Davidson  
(via email)

**A** Phil Curry says The problem concerning a regulator which is not fitted above the bottle, James, is that when gas is released, an oily substance can build up – but it is harmless and, if the regulator is mounted higher, it will

usually empty back into your gas bottle. You can also get a build-up in the pigtail, especially if there is a flat curve in the pipe, because the oil cannot escape back into the bottle. If you

merely remove the pigtail, you close a valve in the bottle connection end so the blockage still cannot escape. My advice is to fit a new pigtail – that will clear the blockage and allow the gas to flow normally again.

restricted gas flow, or a blockage, can be due to the build-up of an oily substance in a low-mounted regulator, or even in the pigtail



**ACCESSORIES**

**Bike-rack bother**

**Q** Can you tell me where I can buy a cycle carrier (for two bikes) that would fit onto my Autohomes Bedouin motorcaravan? The problem is that this 'van has a central, rear door and I need rear-door access while on site. So, I need a carrier which can be easily removed, or part-removed, from my 'van when I'm on site.

I have tried my local dealers without success so I wonder whether you can help?

Graham Lougher  
(via email)

**A** Diamond Dave says I quite understand your problem, Graham, because I run an Autohomes Highwayman which, as you may be aware, is a slightly less well-equipped model that shares the same bodywork.

I don't know of a suitable bike rack that is easily

removable but one possible solution is to buy a rack designed for the rear doors of a panel van, and mount it on a hinged frame which could be swung out of the way when necessary. Obviously, this would entail making the frame and then reinforcing the rear wall of your 'van to take the extra weight.

Another solution might be to just carry the bikes inside your motorhome and then store them outside, under lock and key, when on site.



A central rear door on your motorhome (right) will prevent the fitting and use of a regular bike rack (above), so you might have to consider mounting the rack on a custom-built hinged frame, instead



**BASE VEHICLE**

**Gearing and wheel change**

**Q** Having read the August issue Q&A, 'Is my Hymer under-gearred?' I now have doubts about my 2005 504CL, because I suffer the same problem of indicated speedometer speed and actual sat-nav speed.

After searching on eBay, I found someone selling a set of 16-inch Fiat alloy wheels for the Ducato. However, he states that these wheels "are not interchangeable with vehicles which have any other wheel size on them as standard, because the hubs are different". I'm confused!

I have not yet checked my Hymer's wheels (it's currently at a storage park), but if it does have 15-inch wheels, can I swap them to 16-inch versions?

John Holland  
(via email)

**A** Phil Curry says Firstly, John, the speed indicated on your speedometer will often be out when compared with that shown on a sat-nav system. This is because the vehicle generates the indicated speed by how fast the wheels are turning, while the sat-nav actually tracks you – the latter is far more accurate. I have had a sat-nav showing me travelling at 8mph slower than my speedometer was indicating.

However, in the case of the wheels, it depends what chassis your motorhome was built on. The wheels you have seen may be for the Maxi chassis, a heavier version from Fiat, which came with 16-inch wheels as standard. This used a different hub to the rest of the line-up, so won't be interchangeable with standard chassis wheels. However, you can still get 16-inch wheels: take a look at [www.tyresave.co.uk](http://www.tyresave.co.uk) for a range of aftermarket alloys that may be suitable.

**WATER SYSTEM**

**There's diesel fuel in my water tank!**

**Q** I've just bought a secondhand Elddis Sunseeker 100, and while bringing it home from its three-month check, my wife (who hadn't driven it before) put around five litres of diesel into the water tank. As soon as she realised her mistake she stopped, and carefully drove it home. Is there anything I can do about it myself, or am I looking at a huge repair bill?

**John Todd**  
(via email)

**A** Paul Jackson, of Marquis (Bagshot), says Even the smallest amount of diesel can have long-lasting effects because when it is placed in water it forms a slick, very much like oil slicks from a tanker spillage.

The first thing you must do is get the diesel out, without activating your water pump or the taps. Although you may find a number of remedies



If you mistakenly put diesel into your water tank, don't run the taps

suggested online, don't believe them – the diesel will eat into the plastic casing of the tank, as well as any plastic piping, or tap linings. If you turn the pump on, or use a tap, these will also need to be replaced and this will result in a massive bill. If you can, first use the fresh-water drain point, then take your Sunseeker to a garage.

It is best to get the tank replaced because the residue of the diesel, and its smell and taste can never truly be removed, only masked. You'll be looking at around £200 for

parts, before labour costs, but if you activate any part of the water system, your bill could run into thousands of pounds.



Diesel fuel will eat into the plastic casing of a water tank

**GEARBOX**

**An awkward engagement**

**Q** I have a 2003 Pollensa, on a 2.2 Boxer, with 39,000 miles on the clock. I am having difficulty engaging first and second gears from a standing start. Sometimes when I try to engage first gear, I find third. The situation is worsening with time. Having removed the gear-

stick shroud to look at the gate movement, I notice that the gears seem very close together.

**Alan Young**  
(via email)

**A** Diamond Dave says While not exactly a common failing on these 'vans, Alan, it does sometimes happen.

There are two possible causes: either the linkage at the gearbox end is dry, dirty and partially seized, or the cable fixings are

coming loose, allowing the wrong bits to move. Check the gearbox end of the cables, most easily accessed from underneath, just behind the nearside wheel. If any parts of the gear-change mechanism are loose, re-tighten them.

Next, lubricate all moving parts: start with a penetrating oil such as WD40; then, once you've sorted the difficult gear-change, give all moving parts a shot of spray grease to keep them dry and lubricated.

**BASE VEHICLE**

**Stiff door handle**

**Q** The handle on the front cab door of my 2002 Hymer B544 has become stiff when I open it. It will still open, but I'm having to pull it harder each time and I fear that at some point it will jam, or I will break it. I'm not as strong as I used to be, so is it something that's easy to fix?

**Michael Woodcott**  
(via email)

**A** Paul Jakubiszyn, of Lowdham, says It sounds as though your door catch has slipped, and that this is causing the lock to become engaged at a point further out than normal.

The simple solution, Michael, is to pull away the trim from that area to uncover two Allen-key bolts at the top and bottom of the lock. By loosening these, and moving the lock mechanism up and down, you should be able to find a position where the door is much easier to open. This does mean moving it a fraction, tightening it up and then testing it, and repeating the process until it is right, but it is a fairly simple fix. ◻

**Thanks to...**

Wayne Hemmings and Paul Jackson of Marquis (Bagshot) ([www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk](http://www.marquismotorhomes.co.uk)), and Ian Brown and his workshop team at Lowdham Leisureworld ([www.lowdhamleisure.com](http://www.lowdhamleisure.com))  
**...for their help with the compilation of these answers**

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