



RV 101[®]

Volume 7
Issue 1

Discover – Learn - Enjoy

RV Quality Questioned? the good, the bad & the ugly

*“Quality means doing it right
when no one is looking”
~ Henry Ford*



Special Edition

an unbiased
REPORT

RV Quality Concerns by Mark Polk



Most of you probably remember when our monthly newsletter was in a magazine format. About a year ago we changed to a more conventional newsletter format. At the time I told you, our readers, I would continue using the magazine format periodically when or if there was a topic of interest that concerns the majority of RV owners. Our first periodical covered the concerns campers had about the availability of campgrounds. You can read that issue here. [RV 101 at the Campground](#)

Another RV topic getting lots of attention lately is the quality of RVs manufactured today. Some would have you believe the majority of RVs coming out of manufacturing plants today are poor quality, while others don't seem too concerned about it. RV quality is the topic I chose for this periodical.

Make no mistake about it, there are quality issues in the RV industry, but just how bad is it, and what can be done about it? My goal with this special edition publication is to take an unbiased look at the quality and workmanship of RVs manufactured today and to highlight some causes, misperceptions and measures that could potentially improve RV quality.

Let's get started, **Mark**



RV Quality Questioned?

Page 6 Poor RV Quality & Workmanship

Page 7 Don't Mistake Poor Quality with Entry Level RVs

Page 8 RV Quality Control

Page 10 The RV Dealership Pre-Delivery Inspection

Page 10 What is Happening to the RV Industry

Page 12 Vehicles have Quality Issues too

Page 13 Research Before You Buy

Page 15 The Difference Between Entry Level RVs & Poor Quality

Page 16 RV Warranty & RV Service Plans

Page 20 What if your RV is a Lemon?

Page 21 Out of Sight, out of Mind

Page 23 What can be done about RV Quality?

Page 28 Epilogue



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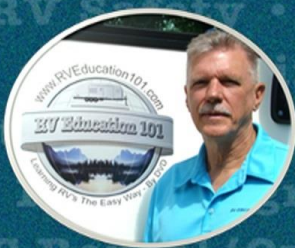
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Enjoy the RV Journey



Wherever it takes you

Poor RV Quality & Workmanship



The RV industry is enjoying a boom in sales, but faces some difficult challenges ahead as more and more RVs are manufactured and sold. There is a shortage of certified RV technicians, long waiting periods for service and repair work and there are serious questions about the quality of some RVs manufactured today.



I walk-through and look at hundreds of RVs every year, so I experience quality and workmanship issues firsthand. On one occasion I was installing a baseplate on a friend's tow vehicle and preparing their motorhome to tow the vehicle. The motorhome in question was brand new and it is what I consider an entry-level RV, meaning it is a less expensive model designed to bring new buyer's into the RV lifestyle. I was quite alarmed by the fit and finish on the RV. By fit and finish I am referring to the finished construction and trim work on the RV. Think of it in terms of your house; after the walls and windows are installed the dry-wall is completed and a finish carpenter comes in to install all the molding, baseboards and trim work. If the finish carpenter is good at his or her craft you are impressed with the finished product. On the other hand, if there are noticeable gaps and molding that isn't straight you are the first to notice the poor quality and workmanship.

I immediately noticed the poor workmanship on my friend's RV. **Notice the ragged edge of the plastic around the window.** This led me to look closer at the workmanship that went into the RV. I discovered other (more serious) construction and quality issues on the RV and pointed it out to the owners so they could have repairs made under the RV's warranty. I felt bad that my friends spent their hard earned money on an RV with so many defects.

These problems should never make it past the assembly line, and what makes it worse is the dealer didn't discover and repair the defects during the pre-delivery inspection. This is poor quality and workmanship, and it is unacceptable!



Don't Mistake Poor Quality with Entry- Level RVs

We have personally owned two new RVs and too many used RVs to remember. Our first new RV was an entry-level type C motorhome and the second one is what I refer to as a mid-line RV. To help simplify it, I like to make a comparison to the automobile industry. For example, you have the option to buy a Chevrolet, a Buick or a Cadillac. They are all built by the same manufacturer and if you decide to purchase a Chevrolet, you get a Chevrolet. There is absolutely nothing wrong with that, but don't expect a Cadillac when you buy a Chevy.

The same is true of RVs. We purchased an entry-level type C motorhome and that is what we got. At the time it was what we could afford and we were happy to have it.

The important thing is, even though it was an entry-level RV there were no real quality or workmanship issues with the motorhome.

When you buy an entry-level RV, components used in the manufacturing process are not the same components found in higher-end RVs. This is how the manufacturer keeps the price more affordable on entry-levels models.

One comparison (to illustrate this point) is a wood framed RV with a corrugated aluminum exterior, versus an aluminum framed RV with a gel-coat fiberglass exterior. The wood framed RV with corrugated aluminum siding costs less to manufacture than the aluminum framed hard-sided RV. Something else that's important to understand is even if an RV has fiberglass siding there are different price points between various levels of RVs.

This applies to almost everything you can and cannot see on the finished product. Later we will take a closer look at some distinguishing components that help define an entry-level unit.



RV Quality Control

I think it is the manufacturer's responsibility to have a quality control process incorporated into the manufacturing process. There is absolutely no excuse for the types of flaws I saw on my friend's RV, but don't mistake poor quality for an entry-level, lower priced unit. The fit and finish should still be done properly regardless of the price-point, but less expensive components go into building less expensive RVs.

I watch a television program where the premise is to purchase a property, renovate the property and sell it for a profit. The owner of the company hires sub-contractors to complete different areas of the renovation. Prior to paying the sub-contractors for work they completed, the owner walks through and inspects their work. He puts a piece of colored tape everywhere there is a defect in the workmanship. The sub-contractor takes the crew back in to make the required repairs and then the owner does another walkthrough. The process repeats itself until the quality and workmanship is up to the owner's standards, and only then do they get paid for the work.

This is just one example of a responsible person incorporating quality control into a process to get the best possible results in the end product.

Without quality control workers have no consequences when quality in the finished product drops. When I was in the military I was in charge of large fleet

maintenance operations. Upon arrival at a new duty station I quickly noticed the equipment was in poor shape. When I reviewed the maintenance records everything was there, as it should be, so it didn't make sense for the equipment to look the way it did. After some digging I realized it was just a paper-drill. The unit motor pools were turning in service paperwork, without completing the actual work.

To fix the problem I took three mechanics and created a quality control team that worked directly for me. I had them randomly inspect vehicles that just went through a service to ensure the work written on the paperwork was actually completed.

The consequences for turning in false paperwork would be reflected on the motor sergeant's evaluation reports, (something you don't want in the military). The unit's equipment readiness rating improved dramatically in a short period of time.

If an RV manufacturer's end product shows poor quality and workmanship they either don't have a quality control program in place, or they don't care!

Is it a simple flaw in the construction process, a failure of a component used in the construction process, or simply poor quality?

Lots of times RVs are sold with a problem that is nothing more than a

flaw in the construction process, or an oversight by an employee during the assembly process. RV dealer's perform pre-delivery inspections on RVs and usually identify and repair any flaws that are discovered. These are nothing more than small flaws, but on other (more serious) occasions a problem might exist across an entire line of RVs.

An important consideration is, the majority of RV manufacturers purchase the parts and pieces necessary to build the RV from other vendors and suppliers, while seeking the best price as well. Unfortunately this can translate into lesser quality products going into RVs, especially on lower priced entry-level units.



For example, when a manufacturer builds a travel trailer they purchase the frame, suspension, axles, brakes and tires from other vendors. It's possible for an entire run of trailer frames, or a component used on the frames to be faulty. This typically results in a recall. Was this the fault of the trailer manufacturer? No, but it was installed on their product. It's unfortunate, but things like this happen from time to time. When a manufacturer or supplier takes the steps required to correct a problem they are standing behind the product. Is it inconvenient for the consumer, absolutely but it's considered fair in the scheme of things. This may not sound acceptable, but it is the way of modern day manufacturing. The same thing occurs in other industries too, like houses, boats and automobiles to name a few.

There is a fine line between poor quality by an RV manufacturer and a recall. If the product being recalled is manufactured by a different company it is poor quality on their part, but does not directly reflect the RV manufacturer's quality.

The RV Dealership PDI

The second line of defense for quality issues after the RV leaves the manufacturing plant is when it arrives at the RV dealership. When the unit is sold to a consumer, RV technicians at the dealership perform a pre-delivery inspection (PDI) on the unit. If there were quality issues during the manufacturing process, many if not all of the problems should be identified and corrected during the PDI.

But keep in mind this is dependent on how well the service department at the RV dealership is managed. Again, a poorly managed RV service department has no consequences for not repairing shoddy workmanship by the RV manufacturer.

If you recall on my friend's RV I noticed some poor finish work on the trim around a window. This prompted me to look closer at the RV. The front hood, where you access the engine, would not open. The metal framework that operated the hood was a poor design. I saw rust on the bare metal and I noticed some broken off screws where someone attempted to reconnect the framework to the chassis. After lubricating all the moving parts it was still extremely difficult to open and close the hood. And, none of the 12-volt devices at the center of the dashboard worked, including the radio, 12-volt power outlet, heater fan and more. The closer I looked at the RV the more problems I found.

This was a \$120,000 motorhome that left the RV manufacturer with these defects, and left the RV dealership with these defects. Seeing this RV first-hand lets me know there are in fact quality issues with RVs today.

Unfortunately the owners were not that familiar with RVs when they started shopping for one. The other determining factor in their RV buying decision was the price. They knew they would not use the RV much and did not want to invest a lot of money in the motorhome. They chose an entry-level motorhome, without doing much research beforehand. I think lots of folks do the same thing. They know they will only use the RV a few weeks out of the year, so they choose an RV with a lower price-point.

Regardless of price, no RV should have all of these poor quality issues when it leaves the manufacturer.

What's Happening to the RV Industry?

Looking back at the industry; RV manufacturing companies were started by people who had a desire to build a quality and dependable RV. It was their name and reputation on the line. That used to mean something, it was important.

When you heard the name of the company or a particular brand of RV you automatically knew it had a reputation for quality. When one family member retired another family member stepped in and continued the proud tradition of manufacturing RVs. It was not uncommon to see second or third generations running the business.

This tradition ran far and wide in the RV industry. Back in the day, if an RV manufacturer put out an inferior product they didn't last long. All was well in the RV industry.

Fast forward to 2018 and unfortunately the good old days are over. During the economic downturn in 2008 RV companies were in trouble. Workers were laid off and large RV manufacturing facilities sat empty. Some of the larger more profitable and well funded RV businesses started purchasing smaller RV companies who were experiencing financial problems; much the same way well known RV dealers were being consolidated by Camping World. Investment companies bought RV manufacturers for pennies on the dollar, while others folded completely.

If you aren't careful, when an industry experiences changes, like with rapid consolidation, product quality typically suffers.

The individual pride of ownership and personal reputation for quality suffers. When companies are transferred from original owners and sold to private equity firms things like quality can take a turn for the worse.

One example of this is Born Free RVs. I was always impressed with the quality that went into Born Free products. The end result was the owner passed away, the company was sold to an investment firm and shortly afterwards they are out of business.

Another factor I think can be attributed to this is lots of consumers not wanting to pay the price for quality. Some people view RV ownership as a part time recreational asset, and they shop for the best price rather than the best quality. In this scenario I think it's important not to mistake RV quality with an entry-level unit. Ultimately you get what you pay for.

My personal account of this happened when we purchased an RV lot at the beach. I wanted to put a nice camper on the lot to use for destination camping, but with concerns about corrosion I didn't want to invest in a new RV.

After we bought the lot we started shopping for a good used RV. I was looking at the 2008 to 2012 year ranges. We looked at three units, and within minutes of inspecting them each one had serious problems. The biggest problem was water damage (we'll talk more about this topic in a minute). The roofs were damaged, and on one unit the rear wall suffered from water damage as well. Granted, they were all used campers, and I don't know how well they were maintained, but when you factor in the asking price (not cheap) and the cost to repair the damage it wasn't worth it.

In the end we found a 1998 (20-year old) Newmar Kountry Star 5th wheel. It was in excellent condition for its age. There was no water damage and it was built like a tank, at half the cost of the newer model RVs with damage. To further testify to its construction it survived a direct hit from hurricane Florence at North Topsail Beach in North Carolina.



Other RVs in the same vicinity of ours weren't so fortunate, some lost roofs and entire walls to the storm.

and soon discovered at least twenty other Ram owner's experiencing the exact same problems with their 2500 Ram trucks.

I owned three new Ram trucks prior to buying this one and never had a problem; but had I done more research on the 2500 series Ram trucks prior to buying the truck it is quite possible I would have known about the steering problems and could have avoided the purchase altogether.



Vehicles have Quality Issues too

Two years ago I purchased the most expensive truck I ever owned, a 2016 Ram 2500 turbo-diesel. It wasn't cheap, and I had serious issues with the steering on the truck from the day I bought it. I took the truck to two different Ram dealerships on eight occasions to have the steering inspected and repaired. Ram service centers could not repair their own product. They sent engineers from the corporate office to inspect the truck and still could not repair it. I was relentless in my research

I went through arbitration and the arbitrator's sided with Ram. I talked to an attorney about lemon laws. Long story short, in the end Ram offered me a cash settlement.

While all of this was unfolding I talked to the owner of a diesel repair shop, specializing in Ram diesel trucks. He was already well aware of the steering problems, and told me he could fix the truck. I settled with Ram for the amount it cost me to pay for the work completed on my truck. The diesel shop did solve the steering problem and I was pleased with the result, but only after two long and frustrating years of fighting with Ram.

We have a motorhome, but if my truck was my primary tow vehicle for a travel trailer or 5th wheel trailer it would not be

safe to tow a trailer with the steering issues it had. That means for the two years it took to correct the problem there would not be any camping trips.

The moral of this story is; we as consumers need to do thorough research prior to making big ticket purchases. Had I taken the time to search some diesel truck forums prior to buying my truck I would have known there were several years of Ram 2500 trucks with steering problems. Then, during the test drive, when the truck's steering pulled to the right I could have avoided what eventually turned into a two year struggle to get the truck repaired. I was guilty of not doing what I always recommend other buyer's do, research the truck or RV before you buy.

Research Before You Buy



Enough can't be said about researching a high dollar ticket item like an RV before you buy. The time you spend researching will pay dividends in the long run.

As for RVs, you can do a great deal of research online. You can research the

the RV manufacturer, different brands of RVs, RV specifications, optional equipment and RV dealerships. It's a good idea to do this type of preliminary research prior to shopping for an RV.

Another good online source is RV owner forums. If you have a specific RV manufacturer or brand in mind you can visit these online forums and discuss the brand or model of RV with current RV owners. Ask them about their experience with the RV and the RV manufacturer.

Ask them about the quality of the RV. If someone had a bad experience with a particular RV they will be quick to tell you about it.

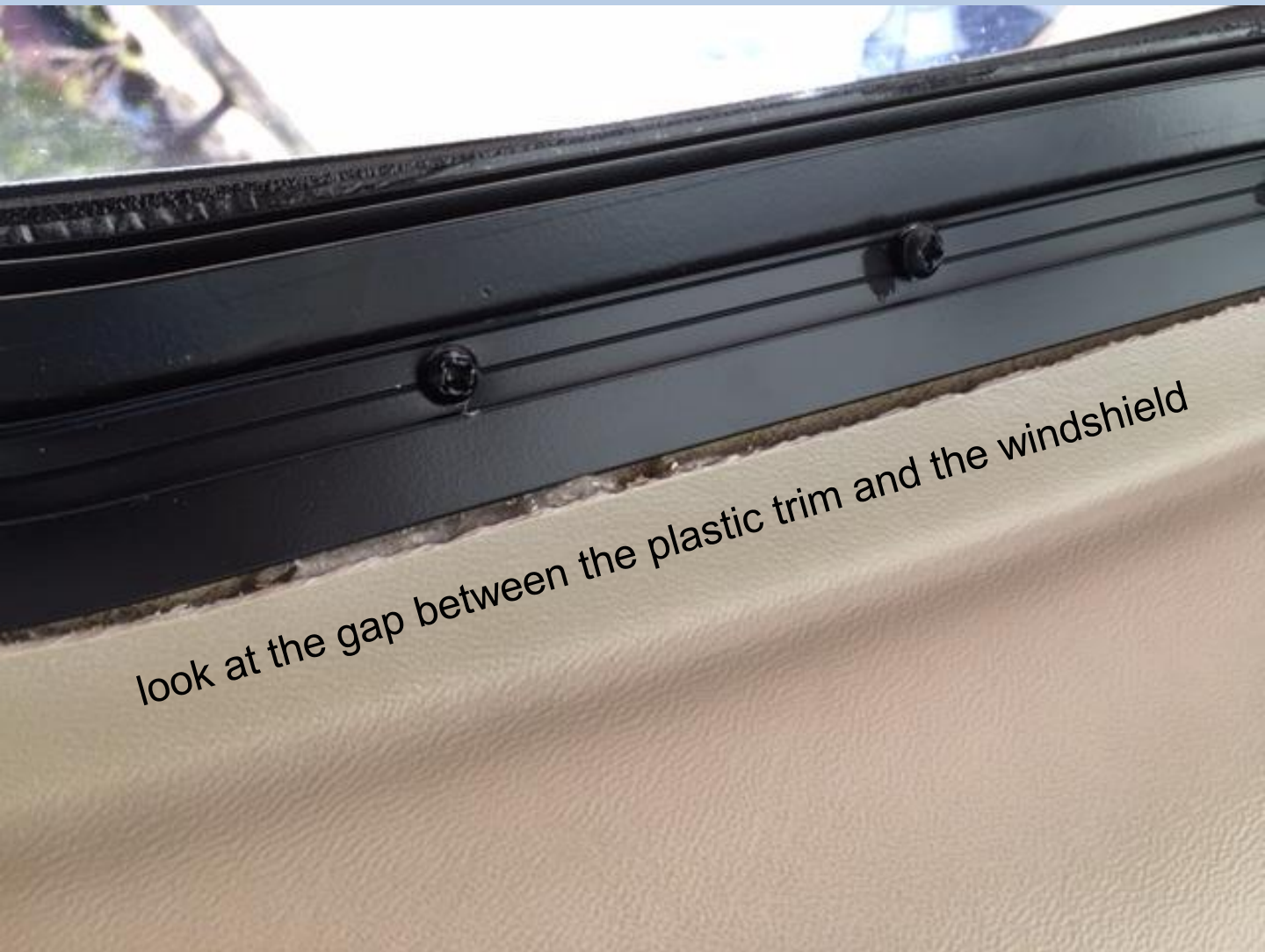
A third option is to visit the manufacturing plant where the RVs you are interested in are built. Most offer plant tours and you can watch the manufacturing process firsthand to see how the RVs are constructed and assembled.

A fourth option is to take someone with you who is familiar with RVs when you go shopping for an RV. If you don't know anyone who is familiar with RVs you can hire an RV inspector to evaluate the RV for you before you buy it.

Regardless of the method used, the important thing is you vet the RV manufacturer, the RV brand and the RV model you are considering purchasing.

There is always the risk of getting a lemon (vehicle or RV)

Unfortunately poor quality and poor workmanship exists in every industry. When people have a bad buying experience they are quick to vent, like I was with my Ram truck. You want to be heard, and you want the problem to be taken care of. When there is a problem you are more likely to hear from consumers who are dissatisfied, than those who are satisfied. That's why it's important to do your research, and why it's a good idea to talk to other people prior to purchasing your RV.



look at the gap between the plastic trim and the windshield

We will talk more about lemon laws, as it pertains to RVs later, but first I want to point out some of the differences between entry-level RVs and poor quality so there is no confusion between the two.

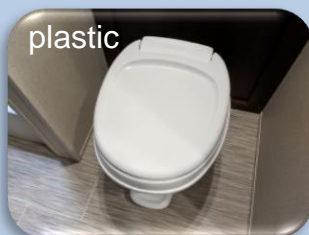
Entry-level RVs are not, and cannot be built to the same standards expected from a high-end unit simply because of cost. But, this is not to say an entry-level RV should not be built with quality commensurate to the price.

The difference between entry-level RVs and poor quality

I always say, and firmly believe, you get what you pay for. RV consumers have different tastes, different likes and different budgets. That's why RV manufacturers build so many different models at varying price-points. I mentioned a moment ago that just because an RV is entry-level doesn't mean it's poor quality. Poor quality is the fault of the manufacturer. I also mentioned a moment ago the components used in entry-level units are less expensive than the components found in a high-end RV.

For example:

The toilet used in an entry-level unit is typically made of plastic, whereas the toilet used in higher-end units is usually made of porcelain.



The roof vent fan in an entry-level unit is typically small and inexpensive whereas a higher-end unit uses a variable speed ventilation fan.



The air conditioner in an entry-level unit may not be ducted and might have less BTUs whereas in a higher end unit it is ducted with more BTUs



I could go on, but I think you get the point. Entry-level units use less expensive components; and it's plausible to say these components might have a shorter life span than the components used in higher-end units. **Is this a quality issue?** In one way maybe, because the parts are less expensive and could fail sooner, but when I think of quality in an RV I think about workmanship too. An entry-level unit might have a less expensive air conditioner, but the air conditioner does work. On the other hand if the less expensive air conditioner is installed wrong, and water leaks in at the seal that is a quality and workmanship issue. There are lots of components you can't see too, like the insulation in the walls, how the floor is constructed and what type of fasteners are used to hold it all together. Keep in mind the components you can't see in an entry-level unit are less expensive too. It is not necessarily a quality issue, unless a component used in the construction is defective, or a component is not installed properly. So, it's feasible to say, you could purchase an entry-level RV that is put together well, but is made up of less expensive parts. And it's possible to purchase an entry level unit that has shoddy workmanship. I can usually spot an RV

Pay Attention to the Details



with quality issues or poor workmanship quickly, and that is what I want readers to take away from this article. Look at the fit and finish in the RV. Look at the attention to detail that went into building the RV. If the finish work does not look good just imagine what kind of work went into areas on the RV you can't see. Like I said earlier, there is nothing wrong with buying a Chevrolet, but don't expect to get a Cadillac. What's not acceptable though is poor quality and poor workmanship.

Less expensive components should not be misconstrued with poor quality, it is lesser quality because it is less expensive. On the other hand if you see gaps between cabinets and walls, loose or leaking plumbing, bad installation of components, or items that don't work properly, that is poor quality and workmanship in the RV.

RV Warranty & RV Service Plans

When you purchase a new RV it comes with a warranty. If it's a motorized RV you have a warranty on the coach by the RV manufacturer, and a separate warranty on the vehicle chassis by the chassis manufacturer. If it's a towable RV the warranty is covered by the RV manufacturer. Prior to buying the RV its important you ask the sales representative



about the warranty. **How long is the warranty good for? What is covered under the warranty? Who will do warranty work on the RV?** It doesn't do much good to have a warranty if you cant get warranty work done when you are traveling in the RV. Ask to see the warranty in writing, and take time to thoroughly read and understand the warranty. The manufacturer will only do warranty work for the coverage period.

Something lots of people are unaware of is, most of the separate appliances and other components used to build the RV have their own warranty. For example the microwave in the RV might have a separate three-year warranty. So, if the RV has a

One-year warranty the microwave would be covered for two additional years after the factory warranty runs out. This can apply to items like the refrigerator, converter, range and oven, awning and more. What is important here is to understand you need to fill out each individual warranty card and mail them back to the manufacturers for the warranties to be valid. Go through all of the documents that come with the RV owner's manuals and complete all of the warranty registration cards.

Keeping Good Records

After you buy the RV and start using it I recommend you write anything down that needs to be repaired under warranty, so nothing is overlooked or forgotten. When you take the RV in for warranty work always get a copy of the work order showing all of the work completed. It's important to have good documentation, especially if the RV has problems that result more drastic measures.

In many cases if something is going to happen to a component on your RV it will happen during the time the factory warranty is in effect. So, it's important to use the RV while the warranty is in effect. If you don't use the RV, and it only has a one-year warranty, it's possible the warranty will expire before you have a chance to identify any problems with the RV.

RV Extended Service Plans

You have the option to purchase an extended service plan that serves as an extended warranty, for lack of better words.

I mentioned a moment ago that the warranty on an RV can expire quickly. If the RV has serious quality or workmanship issues beyond the warranty period you have little recourse to get the issues repaired by the manufacturer.

I recommend RV owner's consider purchasing an RV extended service plan. Replacing an appliance after the factory warranty period expires can get very expensive. And, RV appliance problems associated to infrequent use and constant vibration will typically occur after the factory warranties expire.

There are lots of service plans available so it's important you take time to research and review the service plan before you purchase one. A good plan that is recognized by service facilities regardless of where you travel can give you peace of mind knowing you are protected from unexpected expenses.

Most extended service plans can be purchased anytime up to when the factory warranty expires. Some extended service plans offer coverage on used RVs if the RV meets the plan's criteria, and if you purchase the plan when you buy the used unit. Coverage on a used unit will cost more than coverage on a new unit. Pricing is usually based on the age of the unit, and the mileage if it's a motorized RV.

The key to RV extended service plans is to purchase a good reputable plan. One that will be there when you need it, when you are traveling on the road away from home.

Take your time researching and comparing plans. Make sure you read and understand the extent and time period of coverage before signing any agreements. If you don't understand something, ask to have it explained. You also want to make sure the company offering the plan is reputable and the plan will be acknowledged by other RV dealers and RV repair centers when you are traveling. It should offer coverage in all of the USA and/or Canada.

Ask how a claim is paid. I have seen cases where you pay for the repairs up front and get reimbursed when you send a copy of the service order or repair bill in. If the repair facility agrees to file the claim most plans only require that you call for approval before any repairs are made.

Pricing for these plans is based on several factors, including the length of the plan, the extent of coverage, if the RV is new or used, the age and mileage, and the deductible you choose.

The deductible can range from \$0 to over \$200. This is not bad considering a \$1,000 average repair bill if an appliance fails.

Some items on the RV, like slide-outs, awnings and entertainment systems may not be covered unless you pay an additional surcharge. Make sure you

read and understand what these items are, and if you want them to be covered by the plan.

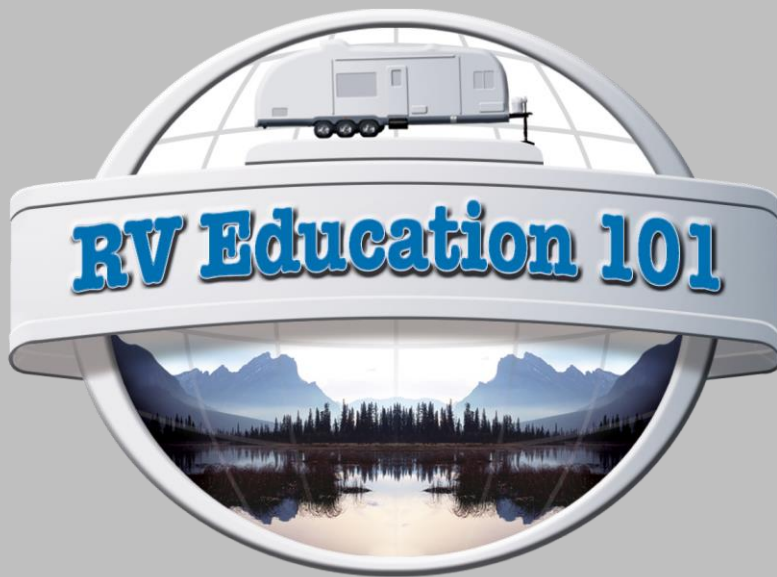
Do not be pressured into purchasing a plan. Ask your RV dealer to give you a price on the plan they offer and then you can shop around and compare pricing on other plans. Just make sure the plans you are comparing offer similar coverage before making a decision.

A good plan should be transferable if you sell your RV, renewable so you can extend the coverage and it should offer a pro rated refund if coverage is terminated during the term of the contract.

How does a plan work when there is an existing factory warranty?

Let's say you purchase a 7-year extended service plan when you buy your new motorhome. Let's say the motorhome came with a 1-year warranty on the coach and a 3-year warranty on the chassis. Your extended service plan would cover the coach for 6 additional years after the factory warranty expires, and it would cover the chassis for 4 years after the chassis warranty expires.

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What if your RV is a Lemon?



Lemon Laws for RVs

Every state has different lemon laws for vehicles and RVs. Some states cover all RVs after a number of repair attempts are made. Others do not include motorhomes, or exclude a vehicle that is over a certain Gross Vehicle Weight Rating (GVWR), or might only cover the vehicle chassis.

The point is, it's important you check the lemon laws (pertaining to RVs) in the state where you reside and purchase your RV. If the RV is defective and cannot be repaired after several attempts, or in a reasonable amount of time you need to be aware of your rights. You can contact a lemon law attorney to check on RV related laws.

Click below for a brief summary of what each state covers under lemon laws. For a better understanding of lemon laws contact an attorney familiar with RV lemon laws in your state.

[State by State Lemon Laws](#)

What if your state doesn't have RV lemon laws?

There is a small light at the end of the tunnel for people whose state does not include lemon laws for RVs. There is a federal statute called the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act that can assist in

financial relief if you purchase a defective RV. This warranty act is in place to protect consumers when an RV manufacturer fails to repair an RV in accordance with the manufacturer's warranty. Regardless of whether you pursue your state's lemon laws or the Magnuson-Moss Warranty Act it's important to keep good records on repair attempts and the length of time it takes to fix the RV.

Based on my personal experience with my truck here are some helpful tips:

- 1) When you take your RV in for warranty work for the same problem keep good records of the dates and number of attempted repairs.
- 2) Get copies of all completed workorders showing what the problem is, any parts that were ordered and what was done to repair the problem.
- 3) If you discuss the problem over the phone keep records of who you talked to, and what was said during the phone conversations.
- 4) If one dealer tells you they cannot repair it make sure it is documented.
- 5) If you talk to the manufacturer about the problem document the person's name, the time and date you called and keep notes about what was discussed.
- 6) Take pictures of the problem if possible. The more documentation you have the better it is for you.

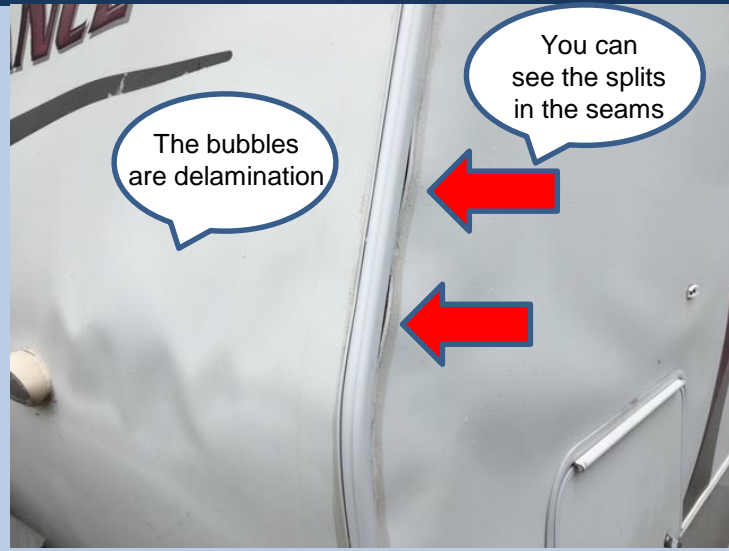
Water Damage

One of the biggest problems with RVs is water damage. You can take a well-constructed RV and after towing it or driving it down the road mile-after-mile the vibration and flexing eventually starts to separate the seams and sealants.

As RV owners we are responsible to periodically inspect all of the seams and sealants on the RV, or to pay someone else to do it. I like to explain it by saying any opening cut in the RV, and every seam on the RV has the potential to leak, and all of these areas need to be inspected periodically.



Maintaining the seams and sealants on your RV will help prevent water damage and extend the life of your RV. When water breaches a seam or seal it will continue to slowly spread, behind the walls where you can't see it, doing more damage until it is noticeable inside the RV. At this point it is very costly to repair the damage.



What is Delamination?

If your RV has a fiberglass exterior finish you need to be aware of another water related problem commonly referred to in the RV industry as delamination. When there is a breach in the sealant allowing moisture or water to get between the fiberglass sheeting and the backing material the water breaks the adhesive down causing the fiberglass to separate (or delaminate) from the backing.

It's important you inspect and reseal seams as required to prevent delamination. In the photo above it was most likely caused from the corner molding separating and allowing water to penetrate the seal. This type of damage to an RV is difficult and expensive to repair. You can't duplicate the pinch roller or vacuum bonding processes that are done when the RV is manufactured, so serious cases of delamination may not be repairable. This can be avoided through periodic inspections and resealing seams.

Living Full-Time in an RV



During my time as an RV sales manager I was always in contact with RV manufacturer representatives. Those visits were helpful in learning more about RVs from a manufacturing aspect. I remember one conversation in particular, discussing full-time living in RVs. The rep explained that some of the soft-goods and white-goods used in the construction of RVs like mattresses, furniture and appliances are not the same quality you typically find in your home.

He explained some of the reasons for this:

- 1) The majority of RVs are designed for temporary recreation, not full-time living.
- 2) Another reason is, these components are designed to be lighter than conventional products, in an attempt to keep RV weights manageable.

There are some manufacturer's who are more agreeable to full-time living than others are. But, regardless of how you use the RV, as owners there are lots of preventive maintenance procedures that need to be followed to keep an RV in good operational condition. If neglected, the result is costly problems that could have been avoided.

What can be done about RV quality?



thousands upon thousands of RVs every year. That's understandable, but along with selling RVs comes the responsibility to build a solid and dependable RV, and stand behind it after the sale.

Building hundreds or thousands of RVs does not excuse the manufacturer from building a quality product, and no manufacturer should sacrifice quality over production numbers.

When I looked at my friend's RV, with all the quality issues, I was embarrassed how it reflected on the industry as a whole, and I was mad. Placing money and greed over quality and customers is despicable. My friends, like many other RV buyers work hard for their money. They work eleven months out of the year for one month of enjoyment. They spend their hard earned money on a new RV only to discover it is defective.

I have talked to frustrated owners who have problems with their RV and can't get the repairs done in a timely manner, or in some cases at all.

I talked to other RV owner's who complain the RV is basically worthless before the RV loan is paid in full. I understand maintenance plays into this, but if an RV doesn't last 10-years something is wrong. I have a 20-year old RV that is in great condition, so I know it can be done. They did a better job 20-years ago than they do today. (long term financing is another topic for another time)

What isn't acceptable is poor quality and poor workmanship when it's avoidable. Shame on RV manufacturers who knowingly allow inferior quality RVs to get in the hands of the consumer. In many instances an RV is the second largest investment a person will make in their lifetime. It is inexcusable to manufacture and sell a poor quality RV.

If 400,000 RVs are sold in one year and 20% of RV owners are dissatisfied with their RV that translates into 80,000 unhappy customers.

I agree the RV industry needs reform when it comes to poor quality, especially when consumers have little recourse to correct the problem.

What RV Manufacturers need to do

I mentioned earlier, the RV industry is facing many challenges, but the number one concern should be to improve the quality of the RVs manufactured. Nothing will put a smile on a manufacturer's face quicker than selling

If you are an RV manufacturer and the shoe fits then put it on!

It's really pretty simple, if you have quality problems building RVs you either don't care, or you don't have an effective quality control program put in place. I talked about quality control throughout this publication, but I think it deserves mentioning it again.

The quickest and easiest way to fix a quality problem is to inspect what you expect.

When you mass produce something you better have some quality control.

“Quality means doing it right when no one is looking” ~ Henry Ford

The reason Henry Ford's assembly-line was so successful, and the reason he sold over 20-million model A and model T cars is quality and efficiency. There are still model A and model T cars running and driving today, more than a hundred years later.

Many years ago, when I worked for a dealership we went to the Louisville RV trade show every year. One year I met the owner of a new start-up RV manufacturing facility. After looking at some of this company's RVs we made an agreement to stock several of them the following spring. After the RVs arrived at the dealership a problem was discovered while doing a PDI on one of the sold units. The problem wasn't serious enough for a recall, but I decided to call the owner of the company and tell him what we

found wrong with his units. As soon as we got off the phone he walked out and shut the entire manufacturing line down. They corrected the problem on the spot, and then he paid every RV dealer who stocked his units to correct the problem under warranty. He called me back later, thanking me and told me if I ever see another problem with one of his units to please call and tell him so he can get it fixed. I continued doing business with that company until I left the dealership to start RV Education 101.

I was impressed with how the owner handled the situation, and I wonder how many other RV manufacturers would do what he did?

It's easy to incorporate quality control in any organization, but there needs to be an overseer of the program, and there needs to be consequences when quality problems arise. If you are missing one, or both of these components the program will fail.

Something this important should not be about money. A company will realize more profit after more consumers purchase their products because you have a reputation for quality.

If I was an RV manufacturer I would have QC teams in place at every plant to randomly inspect completed units as they come off the line. I would most likely pay year-end bonuses to the sections with the least quality issues reported, and on the flip side of the coin start releasing managers in charge of sections with consistent quality issues reported.

Something else I would consider doing is publishing the requirement for semi-annual and/or annual maintenance services in the owner manuals, similar to a vehicle. This would not only provide information to new owner's about what routine maintenance needs to be done, but it would provide a profit center for dealerships when people bring the RV in for these maintenance services. Some but not all maintenance topics would include roof inspections, testing appliances for proper operation, LP gas system testing, battery inspections, seams and sealants inspections, and brake and bearing inspections on trailers.

There are lots of ways for RV manufacturers to improve quality and customer service, but the first step is wanting to improve it. It's unfortunate that some manufacturers choose production over quality.

Here is a significant problem I see in the RV industry

When a manufacturer acknowledges there is a market for entry-level units because consumers are price driven, so the manufacturer takes advantage of using inexpensive sub-par components and takes a relaxed attitude about the quality of the end product over production numbers.

When you combine this with a one-year warranty that expires before the new owner takes their third RV trip, it leaves the consumer in a bad situation. The real focus should be on trying to keep

people in the lifestyle so they come back and buy more RVs. I know, some people would argue an entry-level unit is a stepping stone to purchasing a better more expensive unit down the road. But I can tell you from experience on all sides of this topic, the way to get return business is to give the consumer the best possible experience the first time around. And the way to do that is through quality and attention to detail. I said earlier (more than once) just because it's an entry-level unit doesn't mean you can or should sacrifice quality.

And for those RV manufacturers who continue to have quality issues on more expensive RVs too, don't expect to be around long with today's more educated buyer expecting more for their money.

What do RV consumers need to do?

With all of that said there is always the possibility you will end up with a lemon, it happens, but the odds are exponentially reduced through proper and thorough research prior to purchasing the RV, and through a good preventive maintenance program after you purchase the RV.

The entry level type C motorhome we bought many years required more visits to the dealer for warranty work than our mid-line type A motorhome did, but it was never due to serious flaws in construction or workmanship. It typically involved some of the less expensive components that went into the construction of the lower priced RV. Fortunately everything was covered under the warranty.

Based on my extensive background in maintenance I keep up with all the routine and preventive maintenance on our motorhome, and whether it's just luck, or the in-depth research we did prior to buying the RV we never had any quality or workmanship related problems with this RV.

I do think sometimes when an RV owner experiences problems (like a leak in the roof) some are quick to call foul against the RV manufacturer. But when I question new owners about the last time they cleaned or inspected the roof I get blank stares.

Back in the day when transportation was by horse and wagon if a wagon wheel started squeaking it got immediate attention from the owner, hence the term, the squeaky wheel gets the grease. This is still true today, and sometimes rightfully so.

But, and this is a big but, as an RV owner you need to understand RVs require preventive and routine maintenance. You might get away with not doing any maintenance on a new RV for say a year, or maybe longer, but I guarantee it will catch up with you. Eventually the tires are under-inflated and you will have a blow-out, or you will wonder why you are replacing the battery every spring. This list only grows more as time passes. I am not trying to give the manufacturer an out, they have their own problems to deal with. I am merely saying some of the fault for maintenance related problems falls squarely on the owner's shoulders.

With that said I understand not every RV owner knows how, or wants to do the work necessary to keep the RV in top operating condition. What's important is you understand there is a need for routine and preventive maintenance and you have the work done one way or another.

After years of experience working around RVs my advice is; if you are going to buy an RV you have to be willing to maintain it. If you do, you can extend the RV's life and enjoy it for many years to come.

To sum things up for the consumer: Before you buy research, research & research the RV. Next, you or someone familiar with RVs should inspect the RV before you buy it. After you own it have a good preventive maintenance program in place. Keep the RV clean and learn how to properly store the RV when you aren't using it.

It's unfortunate some RV owners will buy a defective RV, and in some cases have little to no recourse. I will say, RV manufacturers are aware people are questioning the quality of some of today's RVs and that is good.

Take my business for example, if people constantly questioned the quality of our products we would probably be out of business. The same applies to any business that relies on customers to buy and support their products. Hopefully the RV industry will take note they are being questioned, and will do what is necessary to correct the problems. 26

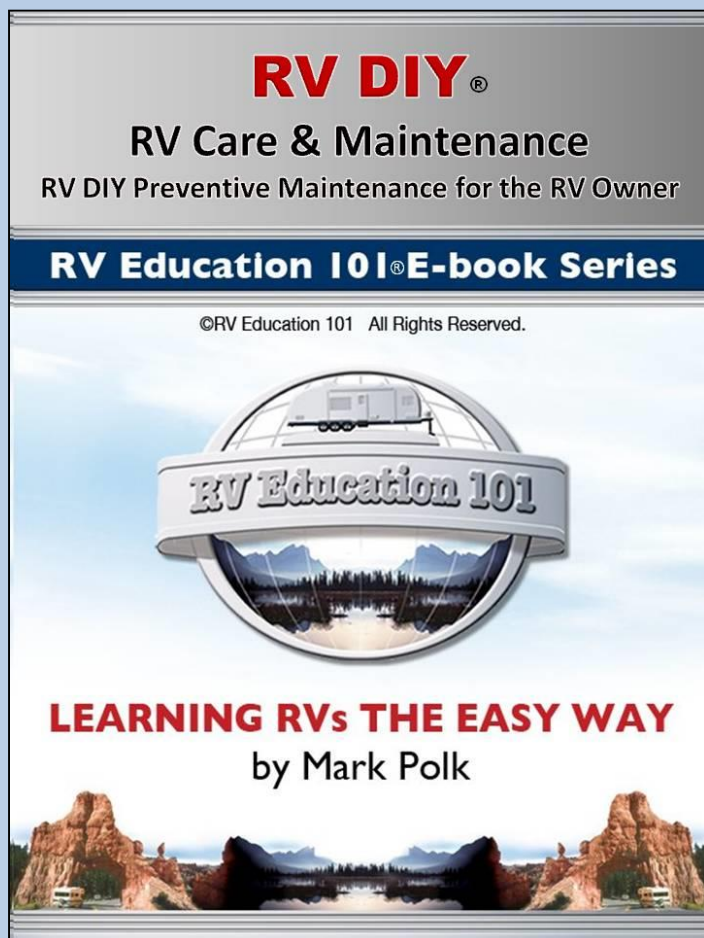
Purchasing an RV is a major investment, similar to your automobile or home. To protect your investment and get many years of reliable service and use from your RV there are certain measures you need to take. There are three types of maintenance for your RV. Preventive maintenance, which is the purpose of [this e-book course](#), scheduled maintenance and emergency maintenance.

Preventive Maintenance is maintenance you perform on your RV before a problem exists. These checks are designed to prevent or identify potential problems that could lead to mechanical breakdown, malfunction or failure of a component or system on your RV. Preventive Maintenance consists of cleaning, inspecting, lubricating, adjusting and servicing your RV.

This is an RV 101 online e-book training course that can be viewed from computers, tablets, and smartphones. When you enroll in our training course you have the option to simply download the e-book and read it at your leisure and/or you can participate in the actual course. I wanted to add more than just an e-book, so the course material includes the written text, short video segments, related articles written by me, helpful tips & tricks, fun RV University play & learn crossword puzzles and quizzes to help you retain the information.

[The purpose of this course](#) is to give you some easy to follow preventive maintenance checks that you can perform on your RV. These checks can help towards enjoying trouble free operation of your RV. They do not supersede any scheduled maintenance recommended by the chassis and RV manufacturer and it is imperative that those schedules and recommended intervals for are followed. Some of the scheduled maintenance for your RV must be performed by an RV dealer, chassis manufacturer or authorized service center. In many situations emergency maintenance is required because preventive maintenance and scheduled maintenance were not performed.

Take a minute to [check out all of our RV video and e-book training courses](#)



“Quality doesn’t come easy, if it did everybody would have it in their products”

Mark J. Polk

I selected “RV quality” as the topic for this special edition publication because quality is important to every RV owner. I am in a unique position to write about RV quality. I sold RVs, I was an RV sales manager for many years, and I have owned, used and repaired RVs for most of my adult life. As a sales manager I only wanted quality built RVs in our dealership’s inventory. I met and talked with RV manufacturing sales reps and owners of RV manufacturing companies at RV trade shows. And I helped make the decisions on what units we stocked and sold to our customers.

Now, after 20 years of owning RV Education 101 I have the opportunity to walk-through hundreds of RVs every year, I get to talk to RV owners about RV quality firsthand, I install products on RVs, I inspect RVs and I still work on RVs.

My goal with this wasn’t to simply say RV quality is good or bad and leave it at that. My goal was to take an unbiased look at RV quality and workmanship, try to highlight some causes for poor RV quality, talk about some misunderstandings, and look at some measures that might help improve RV quality.



*Happy Camping,
Mark*