

# Used Motorhome Buyer's Checklist

## What To Look Out For - Questions To Ask

Whether you are buying a motorhome from an auction or from a reputable dealer you still have to take great care and spend a long time meticulously checking out all aspects of the vehicle to safeguard the purchase that could most likely be one of the largest in your life second to your house. Don't let yourself get rushed and take your time making notes as you go. Anything that needs attention or replacing should be written down (there will always be something) and the cost of the repairs need to be taken into account when negotiating the final price.

Take a reputable mechanic with you to look over the mechanical side of vehicle, preferably one who is experienced in RVs.

Here are some general points to look out for:

- **Batteries:**  
There are normally two lots of batteries in the motorhome. The house batteries for the living area and the vehicle batteries. The vehicle batteries should be able to hold enough charge to start the engine with little effort even from cold and after a period of non-movement.
- **Oil:**  
Check out the color and constancy of the oil. If the oil is burned then it is a sign that something is wrong with the engine. If the oil is thick and gooey and has a white foamy appearance then this might indicate that additives have been used in an attempt to seal up leaky engine gaskets.
- **Brakes:**  
The brakes should be tested thoroughly on the test drive making sure that they are responsive and bearing in mind that when fully loaded the vehicle will be even more difficult to stop. Check the handbrake will hold the vehicle well too.
- **Rust:**  
Make sure that the frame of the vehicle is not rusted as this is a sure sign that the motorhome is nearing the end of its life. Occasional small rust spots on certain parts of the bodywork might be possible to repair without presenting further problems but beware of bubbling under the paintwork as this signifies rust that has been painted over. At the first sign of rust you need to discover the extent of the damage and ask yourself how much work is involved in repairing it taking into consideration any paintwork that might need to be done at the same time. If you purchase a motorhome that has been used exclusively in the south of the USA then you can virtually eliminate all possibilities of rust.

- **Paperwork:**  
Ask to see as much of the paperwork as you can including the full service history along with receipts for any other work that might have been undertaken. Look for the number of previous owners and most important of all make sure that the VIN number of the vehicle itself matches that on the accompanying paperwork. Find out how much weight the vehicle can carry. There should be a notice inside (normally on the back of a wardrobe door) stating the net carrying capacity. This is the maximum weight the RV can carry. This is known as the CCC. There are actually many models that are so heavy in themselves that they leave very little margin for anything else and once loaded up with your family and their possessions there is a serious danger of overloading the rig.

Somewhere on the outside of the vehicle near to the door you should find the seal of the RVIA. This is the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association and their seal denotes that the RV has been made according to standards set by them. Do not buy an RV that doesn't have the seal.



- **House batteries:**  
The house batteries provide current for all of the internal electrical systems when an external hook up is not available. You need to discover if these are holding their charge. Check the battery terminals for corrosion. If the vehicle has solar panels fitted you need to discover exactly how much charge is being put back into the batteries.
- **Propane system:**  
Inspect the propane tanks, hoses, and regulators. There might even be certificates of safety for these. Make sure that the refrigerator switches over from gas to electric with no problems when an external hook up is connected.
- **Toilet:**  
The toilet needs to be able to hold water or the smell from the black water tanks will come back up into the bathroom.
- **Flooring:**  
Check over the floors very carefully especially around the sink and in the bathroom. Make sure there are no soft spots. Any damp or mold could lead to rotting of the wood or rusting of metal. Soft spots will most likely be as a result of a leaky plumbing system.

- **Ceilings:**  
As with the floors you need to check thoroughly for signs of damp or mold. This will most likely start to appear in hidden places, up the corners and at the back of the lockers. Any damp patches on the ceiling are more than likely a sign that the roof is leaking. A leaky roof can be extremely difficult and expensive to repair.
- **Heating:**  
Test out the heating system well making sure that there is enough power to heat all parts of the motorhome at once. Make sure that there are heating vents in all the rooms including that bathroom and that when on they blow enough hot air to keep the whole vehicle warm on a cold night as well as providing hot water.
- **Air conditioning:**  
As with the heating make sure that this is adequate and that it still blows cold air. Recharging an air conditioning unit can be quite costly.
- **Insulation:**  
Ask about insulation. How will it stand up to the cold nights? Are the water tanks insulated?
- **Comfort:**  
Spend some time sitting in the chairs and lying on the bed. You need to know if these are comfortable and positioned correctly.. Can you lie on the bed without your feet hanging off the end? Can you see the TV from the chairs without straining your neck? Is there enough room to eat comfortably at the table? Are there enough stove burners? Is the kitchen counter space adequate? etc.
- **Overall check:**  
Finally, make sure you do a thorough general check of everything. This includes tuning on and off everything you can. Make sure that all the lights are working, both inside and outside. Open every cupboard and locker, check all electric items and the electrical outlets. Are the electrical outlets located in sensible conditions and is there enough of them? Open every door, every vent, every window and panel, both inside and out.
- **Insurance:**  
Just before you make your purchase you should check that you are able to insure the vehicle by providing your RV insurance company with the exact make and model you will be purchasing. Be warned that there are certain models that for one reason or another are classed as un-insurable. This is normally due to recalls of certain models (see the post on vehicle recalls), weight and size restrictions amongst others.

### **A Word About Quality:**

Be aware of Cheap. Not all motorhomes are built to the same standards. Though most are quality build there are some models that are constructed with cheaper materials in order to lower the overall. The cheap models will probably be perfect if you plan to use them for a couple of camping weekends a year but if you plan on spending any long periods in the RV then you should go for a high quality model. Cheap motorhomes tend to have uncomfortable beds, noisy heaters, cabinets with sharp corners, drawers and doors that don't close properly and thin walls. If you lean against the walls and there is some give then the plywood is probably less than 1/4 inch thick, a good sign of a cheaper quality coach.

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This has only been a superficial checklist and should be used to give you an approximate idea of some of the things you should be looking for when checking over a motorhome. There are several guides, books and videos on the market which go into the whole process a lot deeper. The one we recommend is [RV Buyer's Guide](#) which is full of tips and useful information on how to purchase your motorhome without getting ripped off. It shows you exactly what to look out for and gives examples of some of the hidden tricks you might come across.

If you are looking for a list of Police Auctions or Seized Actions you should try the [Car Auction](#) website. They have a regularly updated list of auctions.