

\$5 + GST



## Recreation Vehicle Owner's Handbook

# Foreword

**W**elcome to the wonderful, exciting world of RV'ing. This booklet is designed to help you experience all the benefits of the RV lifestyle, whether your recreation vehicle is a tent trailer, camper, travel trailer, fifth wheel, Class "A" motorhome, Class "B" motorhome or Class "C" motorhome. All it takes is a little time to make sure you understand how the various appliances and devices work on your unit, to understand and follow safe driving practices, and to do some planning. The tips in this book, compiled through almost 30 years of RV'ing, will help you enjoy your RV experiences to the fullest.

Those of you who have RV'd for a number of years will know what I'm talking about. Those of you who are just embarking on this lifestyle cannot imagine what wonderful, memorable experiences you are going to enjoy in the years to come.

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## Shakedown Outing

Recreation vehicles are often not used, and are therefore ignored, for months on end. It's important to examine closely the condition of the unit and its systems and appliances before you start your RV adventure.

Get your unit checked each spring and have any deficiencies brought up to standard at any facility with staff trained to perform the necessary checks and repairs (i.e. certified mechanics or certified RV Service Technicians).

Or take advantage of one of the free RV Safety Checks, sponsored by the Alberta Safety Council and the Recreation Vehicle Dealers Association of Alberta, held in many Alberta communities throughout May and June.

If you haven't driven your recreation vehicle in a while, take it to an area free of traffic and practise pulling, driving and backing to familiarize yourself with how your unit handles.

## Getting Ready

### Trailer

- Make sure your tow vehicle is fitted with an adequate hitch for the weight of your trailer.
- Make sure your electric breakaway switch is hooked up and operational.
- Make sure the safety chains are crossed under the hitch assembly.
- Load your trailer so 10 to 15% of its weight is on the hitch.

### Fifth Wheel

- Make sure your tow vehicle is fitted with an adequate hitch for the size and weight of your fifth wheel.
- Install the hitch so it is attached to the frame of your truck and not just to the box.
- When hooking up, make sure the jaws are locked on your fifth wheel receiver before starting to pull your unit. Many fifth wheel owners have experienced a condition referred to as “fifth wheel box dent,” which occurs when the jaws are not locked properly. The fifth wheel pin comes out of the receiver and the fifth wheel drops into the pick-up box, causing dents to both top rails of the box.
- Make sure your electrical breakaway switch is hooked up properly and in working condition.
- Load your unit so 25% of its weight is over the

## Getting Ready

### Campers

- Make sure the tie-downs and chains used to attach the camper to your pick-up truck are approved and are strong enough to ensure that the camper doesn't become detached from the truck.

### Motorhomes

If you are dinghy-towing a vehicle behind your motorhome:

- The hitch, draw bar or dolly must be adequate for the weight being towed.
- Two safety chains must be used to attach the vehicle (if a hitch-drawbar is used) or the tow dolly.
- Two safety chains should be used between the tow dolly and the vehicle on it.

## Basic Equipment

Regardless of the type of recreation vehicle you own, you should always carry some basic tools and equipment with you. You may be many kilometres from help when something

breaks down, so your best defence is a strong offence.

The following lists detail some of the basic equipment you need. If you think of anything else, add it to the list so you won't forget it.

### Tool Kit

- assorted screwdrivers
- assorted pliers
- set of Allen keys
- socket set
- set of combination wrenches
- 12" pipewrench
- rubber mallet
- hammer
- flat and round files
- assortment of self-tapping metal screws
- assortment of wood screws, nuts, bolts and washers
- portable drill and bits
- level

## Other Equipment

- flashlight with spare batteries and bulbs
- spare fuses
- spare fan/serpentine belts
- spare engine oil/filter
- spare transmission oil
- booster cables
- spare 12V bulbs for both living areas and vehicle(s)
- wheel chocks
- a couple of tarps
- ropes
- assortment of bungee cords
- duct tape
- electrical tape
- tire gauge
- proper tire wrench(es)
- levelling blocks
- small shovel
- jack with sufficient capacity to lift weight of unit(s)
- adequate fire extinguisher (1A-5BC rating)
- axe and hatchet
- emergency road kit with flares or reflectors
- adequate extension cord
- first aid kit
- small saw
- Coleman funnel and fuel if necessary
- holding tank chemicals
- biodegradable paper towels
- hand cleaner compound
- window cleaner
- biodegradable toilet paper
- cellular phone

## Pre-trip Check

Before you take your unit on the road, take the time to walk around it to ensure everything is clean and

working properly. Use the following Pre-trip Checklist to make sure you don't forget anything.

## Pre-trip Checklist

### Transportation Unit

#### Check from Driver's Seat

- horn
- turn signal indicators
- gas gauge
- windshield wipers
- high beam indicator
- windshield clean on inside
- mirrors adjusted

#### Check Under Hood

- coolant levels
- radiator cap properly seated
- water level in battery
- battery terminals corrosion-free
- hoses pliable, connections tight
- fan belts/serpentine belts snug
- transmission oil

- engine oil
- transmission cooler connections
- spark plug leads
- air filter
- windshield washer fluid

#### Walk Around Check

- headlights
- front signal lights
- tail/brake/signal lights
- hitch ball (nut loose)
- hitch pin (clip installed)
- tires (tread, air, valve caps on)
- muffler and tailpipe
- outside mirrors clean
- fifth pin hitch jaws and lock
- fifth pin properly attached to bed or bed rails

### Recreation Vehicle

#### Walk Around Check

- clearance lights
- tail/park/signal lights
- sewer drain travelling cap on
- awning travel locks on
- safety chains crossed under hitch
- breakaway switch operating, lanyard hooked to tow vehicle
- coupler travel pin installed
- equalizer hitch bars installed
- 12-volt umbilical cord attached properly to tow vehicle
- propane tank(s) shut off
- enough propane for trip
- tongue jack/fifth wheel legs retracted and locked
- tires (tread, air, valve caps on)
- all doors closed and locked
- TV antenna lowered
- roof storage pod closed, locked
- fifth wheel hitch jaws locked
- wheel chocks removed, stored
- holding tank damage
- leak test all propane fittings

## Campground Departure Check

As well as going over the Pre-trip Checklist, check the following before leaving a campground:

- store 120-volt electrical power cord, close travel cap
- remove and store water hose and water regulator
- shut off water pump
- remove loose items from counter and table tops
- remove sewer hose and install travel cap
- lock windows
- lock front window rock guard
- install and lock bumper travel cap(s)
- lock fridge/freezer doors
- close roof vents
- turn off interior lights
- shut off all propane appliances
- lock outside door
- store and lock steps in travel position
- remove/raise and store stabilizer jacks
- pull out of stall, stop and make sure nothing's been left behind

## Driving Tips

You must adjust your driving habits to allow for the unaccustomed weight, length and width of most recreation vehicles.

### Clearances

Allow more clearance for parking, turning, braking, passing, being passed and overhead clearances. To prevent damage to your unit by a low overhang, measure your unit's clearance, including air conditioners and roof storage pods. Transfer these measurements (in

both metric and imperial) to dyno tape and place them within your normal driving field of vision for quick reference.

### Passing

When passing another vehicle, allow three to four times the distance you normally would with a non-recreation vehicle. Give vehicles a break when they are trying to pass you; move as far to the right of your lane as possible, and slow down to let them safely back in.

## Driving Tips

### Travel Speed

Since most people buy a recreation vehicle to travel and enjoy their surroundings, getting there quickly isn't the point. Your level of enjoyment will increase and you'll see more of the countryside if you keep your speed to 90 kmh (55 mph). If you feel you're going too slow on the highway, then find a slower road. Secondary highways often give you better scenery, friendlier people, lower fuel costs and a more leisurely pace.

### Stopping

Since your recreation vehicle is probably heavier than your usual vehicle, you must leave more distance between you and the vehicle ahead of you in order to stop safely. The easiest way to calculate this distance is to use the one-second rule. For every three metres of length of your recreation vehicle, leave one second of clearance.

For example, if your recreation vehicle is 15 metres long, leave a five-second clearance between you and the vehicle in front.

### Entering a High-speed Highway

In the interest of safety, use your unit's maximum power if you have to pull on to a high-speed highway. This is the only time it's worth sacrificing mileage and putting the extra strain on your power train.

### Backing

Backing is as easy as going forward if you put one hand at the bottom of the steering wheel. The direction the hand moves is the direction the trailer will go. Always use a spotter when backing up. Recreation vehicles have blind spots that

can only be covered by a spotter. Remember: If the spotter can see the driver's face in the outside mirrors, then the driver can see the spotter. If the driver loses sight of the spotter, the driver should stop and wait until the spotter comes into view.

## Driving Tips

### Downhill Driving

Never go down a hill faster than you can go up a similar grade. To reduce the risk of brake fade, gear down and use your engine and transmission to slow your vehicle rather than relying only on your brakes. If you overuse your brakes, they could heat up and fail. If you do have to use

your brakes, use them intermittently and for only a short time to give them a chance to cool off.

### Uphill Driving

On uphill grades, downshift to avoid overheating or straining your engine. Do not exceed the recommendations for maximum allowable speeds for each gear in your owner's manual.

### Gravel and Rough Roads

If you find your recreation vehicle is hard to handle on a rough road — **slow down**. Take your foot off the brake pedal before you hit a pothole or other obstruction

to reduce damage to your tires and brake system. Slow down on gravel roads to reduce the possibility of stones being thrown up and damaging your recreation vehicle.

### Curves

The centre of gravity of your recreation vehicle is usually higher than your usual vehicle, so slow down more than you normally would before entering a curve. Once into the curve apply steady power. It is critical that the trailer hitch is set up to insure there is ade-

quate weight on the rear wheels of the tow vehicle for stability.

### Night Driving

Avoid driving at night as much as possible. Why take chances? We buy recreation vehicles to see the country, which is very difficult at night. Also, as a person ages, the ability of the eye to absorb light is diminished, which can expose you and your family to risk.

### Parking

Try to get a pull-through stall at campgrounds, as this manoeuvre is easier than backing in. Always use a spotter to cover the blind spots.

## Driving Tips

### Highway Hypnosis and Fatigue

To help reduce highway hypnosis or driver fatigue, take frequent rest stops — approximately every two hours; use a good pair of sunglasses; keep your eyes moving

(don't stare at the road); and look at least 200 to 250 metres down the road, not at the road immediately in front of your vehicle.

### Weather

If you encounter high winds, find a safe, sheltered area. If none is available, try to find a place where you can either turn or back your unit into the wind. If caught in a large down-pour or hail storm try to get under shelter, such as under an overpass. Listen to local weather forecasts, as they can warn you of bad weather before you're caught in it.

### Country Roads

If you have to drive on country roads, use caution, take your time and stay alert for the unexpected, such as domestic and wild animals. Keep in mind that curves on country roads can be anything from super-banked to having no bank at all. Be on constant lookout for farm vehicles on the road, road allowance, or entering and exiting the road. Watch for washboard roads, potholes, dust clouds, blind curves, restricted visibility at intersections, trees and shrubs near the roadway and mailboxes.

## Safety Tips

- Never use a propane range or oven to heat your recreation vehicle. This could cause carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Don't let your propane tank be overfilled, which could damage

the regulator. Learn how to read the information on the collar of the tank. Always make sure the attendant keeps the 80% open valve when filling chassis-mounted tanks.

## Safety Tips

- Never plug your electrical cord into an ungrounded electrical outlet. It's a good idea to carry a 120-volt circuit tester in your unit.
- If you get an electrical shock from your unit, immediately unplug your electrical cord and determine what is wrong.
- Periodically check your propane system for leaks.
- Periodically check and tighten all nuts, bolts and screws.
- Carry a fire extinguisher(s) with you. The recommended rating is 1A-5BC.
- Have your unit weighed, loaded and unloaded, to make sure you don't exceed the vehicle's Gross Vehicle Weight Rating; its Gross Combined Weight Rating; or its Gross Axle Weight Rating.
- Periodically check your hitch, "A" frame and spring shackles for cracks.

## Documentation

- Make sure your driver's licence and vehicle registration don't expire while you're away from home.
- Carry your vehicle's insurance and registration with you.
- Carry copies of your medical records with you.
- Make sure you have maps and campground directories for the areas you plan to travel through.
- Make sure you have the necessary papers if you travel with a pet.
- Leave a travel itinerary with someone at home so they can get hold of you in an emergency. Be sure to advise of any changes in travel plans.
- Carry proof of purchase of items such as cameras and jewelry. Bring spare film and batteries for your cameras.

## Personal Limitations

- Always wear seatbelts.
- Take frequent rest breaks.
- Avoid driving in an urban environment during rush hour.
- Plan your route each morning before you leave your home or campground. Make sure both you and your navigator know the day's route and plans.
- Know both your own and the vehicle's limitations.
- Always use a spotter when backing up.

## Code of Ethics

### When Parking, I Will

1. Dispose of sewage in recommended places only, such as approved sanitary dumping stations, and not throw plastic bags into toilets or garbage pits.
2. Discharge my kitchen sink and shower waste water only in designated and approved places, and watch my drain pail to see that it doesn't overflow.
3. Not pollute streams, lakes and other water supplies.
4. Use extreme caution with fire, leave no campfire unattended, and put out my campfire before leaving it.
6. In campgrounds, I will place all garbage and other refuse in the receptacles provided, leaving no bottles or broken glass.
7. Not damage trees, shrubs, or other natural beauty.
8. Leave my campsite as clean or cleaner than I found it.
9. Place my recreation vehicle so it doesn't interfere with others.
10. Keep my propane bottles away from fire.
11. Ask permission to park on private property when no other facilities are available.
12. Comply with all rules of the forest and parks where I am staying.
13. Encourage my neighbours in parks to follow this Code of Ethics.

## Code of Ethics

### On the Highway, I Will

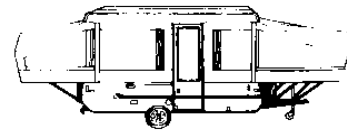
1. Pull off two-lane highways periodically if I see a string of vehicles behind.
2. Not be a litter bug.
3. Use my ashtray and not toss flammable materials from the vehicle window.
4. Drive in the right lane except when passing, and allow extra room for passing.
5. Comply with and study recreation vehicle traffic regulations.
6. Watch my speed.
7. Make every effort to prevent swaying by proper driving, by distributing weight properly in the recreation vehicle and by using an equalizer hitch for trailers.
8. Make sure no one rides in a trailer while in tow, a camper while in motion, or a fifth wheel while in tow.

### About My Recreation Vehicle, I Will

1. Make sure my tow vehicle has enough power to pull my recreation vehicle.
2. Check the recreation vehicle and tow vehicle brakes frequently.
3. Properly secure my propane bottles.
4. Use suitable rearview mirrors for safety and compliance with the law.
5. Check lights, signals and wheel lugs daily.
6. Carry sufficient insurance to protect others in case of an accident.
7. Attach my safety breakaway chains under the hitch in a crossed manner.

*“Remember that people will judge all RV’ers by your actions.”*

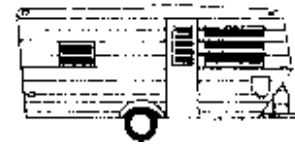
## Types of Recreation Vehicles



Tent Trailer



Camper



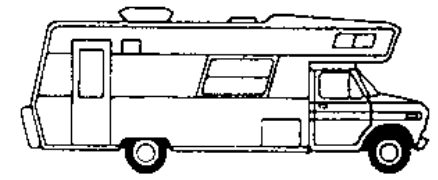
Travel Trailer



Fifth Wheel



Class “B” Motorhome



Class “C” Motorhome



Class “A” Motorhome



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