

# GET PRACTICAL...

with Deputy Editor Rachel Stothert



*When you buy a motorhome, you are likely to push your budget a little, making sure you get the best for your money. That means, in the main, that you will want to pay as little as possible for whatever else comes after. But saving here can be a false economy (you should never scrimp on insurance or breakdown cover – just choose the best policy for you needs). However, there are some things you can do to save money – looking for site offers, driving under 60mph on motorways (ask Andy Stothert, who says it makes a big difference).*

*Indeed, fuel is possibly the most expensive part of motorhoming (after the initial purchase), with a full tank costing about £100. There's not much we can do about this apart from lessening the application of a right foot. This takes self control but can pay rich dividends.*

*Another way to save is site fees – by hunting out the bargains or wild camping responsibly you could enjoy your motorhome for longer by saving small amounts. Check out our selection of Premier Parks reader offers online at [www.mmm-premier-parks.co.uk](http://www.mmm-premier-parks.co.uk) and the great deals on page 90 for more.*

*And then there are the mundane but essential expenses like servicing (of the base vehicle and habitation), repairs and damp checks. If you're a handy person, then there is no reason why most of this can't be done yourself – although I'd always call in the professionals for gas and electrical problems.*

*Shopping around for spares may assist your efficiency efforts. The rise in companies offering mail order and people selling off unwanted items on eBay has made it easier to source replacement parts. However, fitting them might be another issue. DIY can be cost effective if you are confident. If not you may cause more damage than you fix.*

*On page 171, Jackie Paddison reveals how she saved by re-upholstering her motorhome's seats. I had thought that re-upholstery would be tricky, but Jackie goes about the whole process in a simple way that saves money and hassle.*

*And we follow the fitting of an awning (page 175). I'd always get an expert to do this for you, but if you know how it is installed you'll have more of an understanding on upkeep and repair processes.*

*We are in the darkest depths of winter but looking forward to spring, there will be more daylight during which you can do those DIY jobs – and save.*

Rachel Stothert

## SPARES FOR REPAIRS

Motorhome maintenance can be costly, as we found out when we had a slight accident in a recent long-term motorhome that resulted in the scraping of a wardrobe door. £200 and a new door later I was a little in shock.

The cost was high, but fully justified – it had to be shipped from Germany and, coming from a company with a 50-strong model range, it was probably made to order.

This replacement process is even trickier for older motorhomes, as it's unlikely that a particular woodgrain or upholstery style is still in production. Model updates take place regularly – some every year – and this means manufacturers and dealers often don't hold spares in stock.

## WHERE TO FIND OUT MORE

It's not surprising then that a lot of the queries we receive relate to where to source parts. Many readers say that contacting manufacturers has a mixed success rate. The spares department at Auto-Sleepers gets a lot of praise, mainly for the knowledge that its manager Alan Osborne can impart. Auto-Trail has an online shop for some of its stock and a contact form on its website.

The next port of call is owners' clubs and classic clubs if your 'van is a little older – these people will have found crafty alternatives and suppliers of unusual parts.

Internet forums such on [www.outandaboutlive.co.uk/forums](http://www.outandaboutlive.co.uk/forums) are also a good place to get advice. Motorhomers are a friendly bunch usually willing to impart a little home-grown knowledge.

## THE SUPPLIERS

Specialist suppliers should also be able to supply parts or offer advice.

If the original manufacturer of your 'van is no longer around, specialists can help. O'Leary Motorhomes, for example, buys a lot of its stock (which is all new) from administrators.

It currently holds parts from Autocruise before the Swift Group bought it in 2008 and pre-1994 Bessacarr parts. It also buys unwanted stock from across the industry. Carver heaters and fires, toilets, fridges, oven doors and Ellbee exterior motorhome doors are just a small selection of the products spread throughout six warehouses. The company also supplies manufacturers and dealers, so it's worth checking here first.

There's also Charles and Sons, which specialises in the older parts for Autohomes and older Elddis motorhomes.

Breakers are also a key source of spares. The Caravan Centre, located in Wales, offers a wealth of spares and parts. The Centre is always on the look out for motorhomes to break down into component parts. Freecycle may also be worth a look – it's mostly domestic stuff, but if you've noticed a lot of motorhomers living in your area, it may be worth a punt.

## NEW OR USED

When it comes to new versus used it's all about availability, price and aesthetics.

But one of the most important questions is always how much you can (or are prepared to) pay. For engines and base vehicles, there are a lot of high-quality pattern parts available, but there are also a lot of unbranded variable quality components knocking about.

As quality is more important than cost when replacing mechanical parts, you should always buy through a reputable source, such as Eurocarparts or Halfords. But remember to always check the price through a main dealer first as some older parts can actually be cheaper from them.

Our Interchange experts suggest that there are lots of sub-standard parts and unlicensed replicas on eBay. It's that old chestnut: if it seems too cheap to be true, then it often is.

As mentioned earlier, thanks to frequent model changes, motorhomes present their own unique problems. The key question is whether the product in question is still available new.

Seek advice from specialist repairers or suppliers who should be able to source specific parts or suggest a viable alternative.

But remember you don't have to always fit a direct replacement. If a part has broken (especially for things like handles, taps and other fittings) you may be able to source a part that's better suited than the original.

There are plenty of companies out there offering spares – simply head to [www.outandaboutlive.co.uk/businessdirectory](http://www.outandaboutlive.co.uk/businessdirectory) to search for more.

## TO DIY OR NOT

Before embarking on any DIY task, be confident that you can do the job and any unforeseen issues that arise during the work.

External graphics can be one of the trickiest items to repair yourself. So it's likely you'll have to go to a vinyl graphic producer and get them to replicate the decals.

It's often better to come up with a new scheme – if you want to apply the graphics yourself then take a look at the January 2008 issue, when we ran a step-by-step guide.

Graphic companies and your local bodyshop will also be able to advise.

Damp repairs can also be tackled yourself (see Matters in MMM Dec 2011). Russell Heath from specialist parts supplier, O'Leary, says:

"The most common query is about wallboards mainly for repairing damp. We keep 10,000 units in stock and offer 60 different types of board. Damp is an expensive thing to repair, but it can also be quite simple to do it yourself. We can talk customers through the repair process."

## CONTACTS

- **O'Leary Motorhomes**  
Woodmansey, East Yorkshire  
Tel: 01482-868632  
Web: [www.olearymotorhomes.co.uk](http://www.olearymotorhomes.co.uk)
- **The Caravan Centre**  
Blaenavon, Monmouthshire  
Tel: 01495-792700  
Web: [www.caravanbreakers.net](http://www.caravanbreakers.net)
- **Charles and Son**  
Poole, Dorset  
Tel: 01202-733772  
Web: [www.charlesandson.co.uk](http://www.charlesandson.co.uk)