

# GET PRACTICAL...

with Deputy Editor Rachel Stothert



*It's time to get technical. Now you'll have had a chance to get out and about after the rather grotty winter, you may have realised that some smaller jobs will need doing on the motorhome over the next couple of months. Now the days are longer, it's an ideal time to make a few minor fixes and improvements, before you head off on your next adventure.*

*Interchange Editor, Peter Rosenthal, has finally got his motorhome back after a longish period in the bodyshop and has immediately started improving it. In between the task of finding the solutions to your motorhoming problems, he has already managed to do a battery upgrade.*

*Batteries and 12 volt power are one of the most common questions we get at MMM, and so Peter tackled this job on his Eurostyle coachbuilt. We've also got a list of suppliers and servicing for electrical parts and lighting. Maybe it's time for an overhaul, especially with the current craze for LED lighting.*

*Take a look at the questions and answers in Interchange this month and you're likely to pick up some valuable tips, or you may even have your own ideas about some of the technical issues surrounding motorhomes - if so, let us know.*

*Also this month, we investigate restrictive covenants, which are preventing some motorhomers from parking their 'van on their own driveway.*

*And, in keeping with our active theme, I offer tips on choosing and fitting the right bike rack. Having now had a rack fitted to the long-term test motorhome, I'm on the hunt for a new cycle - I've currently got my eye on a classic shopper-style bike but I'm off to weigh Andrew's bike, so I can find out how much my new bike can weigh.*

*We always love to hear about your projects, big or small, so write to me at the usual address or drop me a line at rachel@warnersgroup.co.uk*

Rachel Stothert

## LONG-TERM TEST UPDATE

The bed has been playing up a little - I've heard a clunk on the driver's side mechanism and it comes loose, but stays up as the passenger side mechanism stays locked. However, on particularly bumpy roads with the driver's side bouncing a little, the passenger side can become unlocked.

In this case, the bed slowly drops down to rest on the back of the habitation seats. This actually doesn't cause much of a problem on the road. However, while back at Camper UK having a bike rack fitted, I

## FITTING A BIKE RACK

In tune with our 'get active' theme this month, MMM's long-term test Bürstner Ixeo returned to Camper UK to have a bike rack fitted.

In the case of the Ixeo, the choice was a relatively easy one - the motorhome rear panel had been designed to accommodate bike racks. A high level rail - concealed with a moulded plastic panel - provides the uppermost fixing point and Bürstner recommends a specific model of rack that the rail has been designed around. For me this was a Thule model.

Before selecting a bike rack, we advise consulting your dealer and the motorhome manufacturer if possible. We had a limited choice with this motorhome, and others may be subject to similar design restrictions.

The first job is a weighbridge visit to work out if your motorhome has enough payload to be able to take a bike rack and the resultant bikes. Weight the whole vehicle, with all your touring kit on board, all passengers and a full tank of fuel. And also weigh the back axle to check whether the axle weight can accommodate the extra loading of a rack and the bikes.

This has an added complication; as bike racks fitted to the very rear of motorhomes, have a greater downforce than their actual total weight, with bikes included, so you'll also have to factor this in too (see further reading).

Camper UK also offered this advice: "Bike racks have a weight limit. If you overload them, they can bend and twist - they are only made of aluminium tubing. On this rack the limit is 50kg. And remember the extra length out back - when in use or even empty."

So, weigh your bikes and work out what your bike rack will need to carry before you choose which one you need.

There are many other options out there, which differ from 'van to 'van depending on the type of camper you have and other such considerations. It's quite a complicated issue. Look at the Fiamma catalogue - the range is massive.

Your choice might also be restricted by what's at the back of your motorhome - windows, vents, access hatches or pre-installed fixing points. A whole host of companies supply racks for mounting on towbars, but remember

asked them to have a quick look at the bed.

The technician promised to have a look at it and came back to me, stating that the mechanism seemed to be slightly loose and so he tightened it up. The bed then performed impeccably on a five-hour drive up to the Lake District - it did dislodge at the very last minute, but the road from Ulpha to Eskdale was incredibly bumpy and the 25 degree hill with hairpins won't have been kind to any motorhome (not that this is really an advisable route for larger 'vans - you're better to take the coast road).



that towbars have a maximum load that can be placed upon them.

## STAYING SECURE

Once you have narrowed it down to the right rack, you'll need to get it fitted.

Manufacturers should be able to guide on the best place to drill, as it is essential that any drilling through the back wall is considered - you don't want to drill into a gas cooker or shower cubicle. We strongly advise fitting spreader plates on the inside of the wall to spread the load of the rack at the fixing points.

Fiamma also recommends that you check the bike rack and its fixing points regularly - especially after the first ten or so miles.

Finally, when it comes to fitting you have to make sure the bikes and rack don't obscure number plates and lights. If they do, you'll need to fit an extra number plate and lighting board. This will need wiring up and make sure you opt specifically for a board that is designed for bikes.

## THE IXEO RACK

On its first outing, the rack fitted to the Ixeo performed superbly - I used it to deliver the Powabyke prize from the March 2011 issue to the winner, Rowland Rowark. The rack sits high on the back of the motorhome, but lowers to about my waist height with an awning-style winder. The bike wheels sit within brackets, a bar fits around the frame and there are plenty of straps to ensure nothing moves. And then you simply raise the bike rack back up to a high-level.

Simple. Rowland was as impressed with the operation of the rack as he was with his new electric bicycle, adding that he really didn't expect to win, as he'd entered online.

Keep an eye out on subsequent articles to find out how we get on.

## FURTHER READING

For comprehensive advice refer to John Wickersham's article in June 2009 MMM (page 171), which states unequivocally what not to do and therefore how to go about choosing and fitting the right bike rack.