

GET PRACTICAL...

with Deputy Editor Rachel Stothert



It's the height of summer and we should be out motorhoming.

Indeed I've heard from a number of you who have completed major projects in time for a summer season of fun in your newly

renovated or built motorhomes. We'll hopefully be reading about these in future issues of MMM.

So please keep your stories of DIY projects coming in, no matter how large or small. We'll consider featuring the details of any job from replacing a radio to building a complete motorhome.

All you need to do is document the process with before and after pictures and put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard) to describe why and how you did what you did. And include any details of where you sourced your parts if possible.

If you want more advice about writing a technical feature for MMM, please get in touch. Write to me at Warners Group Publications, West Street, Bourne, Lincs PE10 9PH, or email me at rachel@warnersgroup.co.uk

When you turn to the Interchange pages this month, you can meet our expanded technical team.

Seasoned motorcaravanner and journalist Terry Acreman has taken the helm as our new Interchange Technical Editor making sure your questions get to the right expert.

We have also brought in two more experts to help answer your Interchange questions. Nick Fisher and Barry Norris provide additional specialities in the areas of base vehicles and motorhome legislation respectively.

Meanwhile Peter Pan (sorry Rosenthal) continues to offer to-the-point (blunt) advice on a whole host of topics and is still joined by sparky Clive Mott-Gotobed and gremlin loving George Collings. Read on to find out what essential information they all provide this month.

And, as part of our quest for further technical knowledge of our motorhomes, John Wickersham explains the world of motorhome fresh water tanks and your 'van's plumbing.

With details on how general water systems work, you should be able to diagnose any simple problems or ponder the question of what system is best for your DIY/bespoke conversion, or for upgrading an older motorhome.

So here's to a great summer and to ensuring all your motorhome DIY projects go as smoothly as possible (with a little help from MMM where needed!)

Rachel Stothert

THE RIGHT REGISTRATION

I was reading the Outandaboutlive forums this month and the age-old topic of registration of base vehicles cropped up. And then a reader rang in and asked why his taxation class was light goods vehicle. So I felt this needed further explanation.

Dave, aka gdf, asks: does anyone know how to find out when a Peugeot Boxer panel van was built by Peugeot rather than when Autocruise 'built' the conversion part? Can you do it from the VIN Number and if so how?

There were plenty of useful suggestions and advice from forum members. For those of you who don't have internet access, or the inclination to explore the world wide web, we've summarised the advice and offer up some of our own.

CHECK YOUR VIN

VIN (vehicle identification number) numbers are very important. Each is unique identifier that stays with the vehicle for its life. Remember though that this only relates to the engine and the original base vehicle.

The DVLA still does not list motorhome manufacturers on registration documents. However, certain mainstream models built in the last few years may have been logged with HPI's Minder scheme for motorhomes.

This is a database that HPI holds and is limited to selected motorhome manufacturers who have signed up to the scheme. Basically, HPI attaches information about the make and

Check the dates on your tyres



Usefully, the VIN is also on this weightplate



model of a motorhome to its records of a VIN number.

However, not all motorhome manufacturers subscribe to this scheme, and it is more likely that an identity check on a motorhome will just bring back the base vehicle's make and year of registration. Be aware of this when buying a motorhome through any source.

However, your DVLA document should say 'Motor Caravan'.

The main benefit of this is often that higher speed limits (70mph on motorways, as opposed to 60mph for larger vehicles) apply to motorhomes that have an unladen weight

of less than 3050kg – the same as cars. We'll discuss the re-registration process later. But back to VIN numbers.

And so, where can you locate your motorhome's VIN number? You'll find your number on a plate, which should be located in the engine bay, on your registration document, and sometimes it can also be found on the windscreen and on a sticker in the cab.

All vehicles manufactured after 1981 get a 17-digit serial number, known as a VIN.

This unique number can provide buyers and owners with information that they can use to confirm a vehicle's true identity, as well as covering things like recalls, registrations, warranty claims, thefts and insurance coverage.

TRY DECODING YOUR VIN

The first character is usually the country of origin; V is for France, W for Germany, 9 is for Brazil and Z is for Italy as an example.

Character number two can refer to common manufacturers: B is for Dodge, F is for Ford, Fiat, Peugeot and Renault, D is for Mercedes and V is for Volkswagen.

The manufacturers get characters three to eight, defined by body type, engine, braking systems, etc.

The 10th character is often defined by year of manufacture – remember this mean base vehicle and not any habitation aspects. 1981 starts with B and goes through to Y in 2000. 2001 to 2009 are number 1-9 and then 2010 starts again with A. However, I have also read that European manufacturers are not required to assign an assembly year to a vehicle. So this goes some way to explaining the confusion many people come across.

The eleventh character represents the factory of final assembly. The final numbers are the unique number of that individual vehicle.

So the answer to Dave's question is that you may be able tell when the base vehicle was manufactured.

However this has no bearing to when the motorhome was converted and also no relation to when the vehicle was first registered for warranty purposes.

We also hear people checking tyre manufacture dates on newly purchased motorhomes, and one forum user suggested checking the date of manufacture on the seatbelt.

A couple of readers found that there was a gap of anything up to two years from the date of manufacture to the initial registration. This can have implications for tyres and other mechanical components.

But the best way to make sure your components don't fail early on new motorhomes is to check when the warranty period runs from. This should be the date of first registration. So when you turn up to pick up your brand new motorhome, you should confirm that the warranty has been transferred to your name and starts from your pick up date. You will need to liaise with the base vehicle manufacturer to confirm that the warranty is in your name and is still valid – also ask your dealer whether you are entitled to two or three years on the base vehicle warranty. This varies from UK to European-built motorhomes.

What if you've checked the V5 (log book) document and it doesn't say Motor Caravan under the body type box?

We've established that some motorhomes registered as vans, are subject to lower speed limits on motorways and dual carriageways. And a motor caravan V5 classification often doesn't affect much more than that. But we'd want to cross the i's and dot the t's.

All the forums I have consulted seem to imply that although vehicles weighing between three and three-and-a-half tonnes are technically a class VII for MoT purposes, motor caravans – irrespective of whether they are registered as such – should be MoT'd as a Class IV. However it would automatically be

done if re-registered as a motor caravan.

However to re-register your van as a motor caravan you have to prove that your conversion contains a few things, like seats, beds, kitchen and water. For specifics please contact your local DVLA office, or refer to our Get Converted guide from the July 2011 issue.

You need to change the body type from 'panel van' to 'Motor Caravan' on the V5 and return it to the DVLA, along with a covering letter describing your vehicle and photos of the converted vehicle. Make sure the number plate is clearly visible in a few of the photos.

If the DVLA is okay with the conversion, it will return your V5 to you with the body type changed. However, it may refer you to a local DVLA inspection office to confirm the conversion.

From all my research it seems that this can take some time to go through the process. It may take at least three weeks for the DVLA to register your request for a change of body type, and it quotes around six weeks for the final decision.

So, the moral of today's story is that you should make sure your insurance is correct, and check the paperwork on your V5. If you are buying a vehicle, it's clear to see that the VIN number and V5 should offer a few pointers to confirm if the vehicle is what it should be.

MORE INFORMATION

- www.direct.gov
- **DfT** - The following document offers up advice on what the DfT considers to be a motorhome – though this is not carte blanche for what the DVLA will expect www.dft.gov.uk/vosa/repository/Motor%20Caravans%20-%20Advice.pdf
- **Certification advice for Motor Caravan Type Approval** www.dft.gov.uk/vca/vehicletype/motor-caravans.asp