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BATTERY FLOAT CHARGER

This article is about maintaining your Airstream batteries in a fully charged state with an automatic battery float charger. Batteries in a fully charged state last longer, give better service when used, and generally provide a more pleasant RV experience. An automatic battery float charger is different than a trickle charger, since the float charger senses a battery' s full state and does not overcharge. Trickle chargers send one or two volts continuously to the battery and tend, eventually, to overcharge and/or gas the battery.

It has always been my practice with trailers or more recently with the motorhome to keep the unit attached to electrical current at all times when not towing/driving. This can be dangerous to the equipment as several of my friends found out when they had to replace their converter due to electrical surges or nearby lightning strikes. When I am not running the AC unit or needing a major current draw, I have avoided this problem by running power to the motorhome through a surge protector strip like those used for computers, stereos and other sensitive electrical items.

Recently, I have purchased from **Harbor Freight Tools** an *Automatic Battery Float Charger, item number 42292* for keeping my single motorhome engine battery (no solar cell) fully charged at all times. This can be purchased online at www.harborfreight.com and if the item number is entered, it will take you directly to that product. The price varies between eight and fifteen dollars, depending whether it is on sale. It has an output of 15 volts at 600 milliamps (0.6 Amps).

The unit attaches to the battery poles with positive and negative clips and the wiring is carefully routed up into the coach and plugged into the most convenient wall electrical outlet. I have taken the additional security precaution of using a plastic tie-wrap to secure the spring-loaded positive clip to the positive pole of the battery. If the spring-loaded metal clip shakes loose on rough roads, I do not want it falling against a metal ground and shorting the next time I plug in to the electric grid. So far the float charger has been keeping my engine battery between 13.3 and 13.6 volts, depending upon the ambient temperature. Now my frequent use of the electric door lock which turns on the 15 second automatic floor-lighting bulbs does not weaken the engine battery which powers them. My diesel engine has a healthy start, even in December and January.

If you want to keep your battery(s) fully charged but do not want to risk inadvertently damaging your trailer converter or motorhome inverter/charger, turn it off and install a float charger. (Your motorhome may need two float chargers if your house battery(s) and engine battery(s) are not electrically connected at all times.) Then when the power is connected it will keep the battery(s) up at all times and not risk damaging the sensitive components. When you go camping, unplug the float charger(s) and turn the Airstream' s converter or inverter/charger back on, since you do not want both operating at the same time.