



Airstream Tech Help Group

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This group has been established by WBCCI to help the membership with any of their technical RV problems. Examples of questions that might be of interest to many members will be published in the *Blue Beret*. We will respond directly to you, in response to your email or letter describing a problem you are having. We hope you will find this new service of value in the care and feeding of your RV. You may contact us as follows: techhelp@wbcci.org or by mail: Howard Lefkowitz, 11508 Colt Terrace, Silver Spring, MD 20902

The Care and Feeding of Your RV

Water System

A common water system problem that I have run into many times is the tank drain valve. Many trailers have the drain valve at the bottom of the tank in the center so it sticks out unprotected. Of course, this breaks off when driving over a high rock, log or other road projection resulting in no more water. I remember when a caravanner had four spares and he used all of them to save his fellow campers on an Alaska Caravan. We carved a plug from a branch to save another camper. Carry at least one spare if your valve is under the tank. You should also purchase a brass plug, with the correct threads, as a backup solution. The plug will allow you to at least use the tank until you can get a replacement valve. A better solution is to move the drain valve to a better location that is protected. You should do this anyway to make it easier to drain your tank. I believe it is a good idea to drain all of the water tanks after every rally or caravan.

This results in cleaner tanks that do not have to be dowsed with Clorox so often. I had three drain valves in my motorhome, which required me to remove the bedding and unscrew several plywood panels. I installed a new drain valve underneath the RV, which could be easily reached from outside. I then permanently opened all of the hidden valves so that the external valve was all that was needed. I also installed a drain valve in my hot water heater in place of the fixed drain plug. Now I open two valves, easily reached from the outside of the RV, to drain all of the water. We are lazy creatures by nature, so we should

make it easy to do the important maintenance items.

Filtering our drinking and cooking water on a Caravan is of major importance. Most of the rigs have filters on a special kitchen sink fixture. A lot of these use very expensive cartridges that do an excellent job. I replaced mine with a simpler unit where the cartridge remains and you simply replace an internal filter. I get carbon filters which remove chlorine, odors etc. for about \$6 or \$7. These last over six months and are so inexpensive that you don't mind replacing them every year. I use these with my special kitchen sink faucet. I have also added an external RV cartridge filter holder, which hangs on my bumper. I use a sediment filter here before the water enters my RV or the water tank. There is another filter between my water tank and the water pump, which is built into the RV. Don't forget to clean this filter several times during the year.

I mounted the external filter on a wooden board that also has a separate water faucet available for washing the RV or any other external water needs. I used quick release fittings for easy and fast hookup. So part of my RV setup is hooking up my external water supply system along with leveling and electric supply hookup. I like to be completely hooked up, sitting in my lawn chair and sipping some refreshment as fast as possible. You can easily add a second filter holder and have both sediment and charcoal filters on the water supply to your RV. Make sure you get the filter holders that use the inexpensive standard cartridges available at Lowes, Home Depot or Sears.

If you live in the cold north and are planning on a Rally to the warmer cli-

mates then you should become an expert on fast and sure winterizing for your return trip. Winterizing is not only important but a necessity. If you are in an area that freezes, you will almost certainly blow up a water pipe, water pump and/or a fixture if you don't do this properly. If you are really unlucky you might even have a pipe blow that is under the belly skin, which will require drilling rivets to remove large sections of the aluminum skin at great expense. I have used two methods as follows:

1. Using a special valve and hose input, pump nontoxic antifreeze through your water pump to all outlets in the RV. You turn on the pump and open each individual faucet one at a time till pure antifreeze is coming out. This includes the toilet valve, its spray hose and the kitchen spray hose. You must do this for both the cold and hot water outlets. Then some antifreeze should be poured into each drain and the toilet to keep them from freezing. Open the hot water heater drain and fresh water tank valves and leave them open during the winter storage. Also leave all the faucet valves open. To be most affective you should have a hot water bypass kit installed so that you can bypass the tank. Otherwise, you will need 6 or 7 gallons of antifreeze to fill the tank, so you can fill the hot water lines. With a tank bypass you will only need about one gallon of antifreeze. In the summer just run clean water through everything and you are ready to go.

2. You can also use an air compressor to blow the water out of all the lines. I use about 50 or 60 psi and a clamp on air fitting. You can obtain a male water

hose connector to air valve hookup. Hook up the air hose and open at least one faucet before you turn on the compressor. Just make sure that there is always one open faucet. I usually start with the hot water heater and after it is blown out I shut off the compressor and turn on the heater bypass valve. I then open the bathroom hot water outlet and turn on the compressor. Make sure you open each individual outlet, including the spray hoses and water filter outlets, and allow them to completely drain. You should also blow out your external filter system and all of the hoses that have been used. Throw out your old water filters and add antifreeze to each sink, shower and toilet drain to protect them. This approach is the fastest and, if done correctly, will completely protect your water lines, fixtures and appliances. Be sure you have removed all of the water from the water pump. I use this technique because I camp in the winter and may have to re-winterize several times during the year.

Airstream uses both of the above procedures, blowing out the lines and then

pumping antifreeze through all parts of the system, to insure a complete winterizing. This is the safest approach but somewhat of an overkill if you have a trailer. However, if you have a motorhome with an Aqua-hot heater, fridge with ice maker, washer/dryer, dish washer etc., you need to pump antifreeze to insure that all of these units are thoroughly winterized. Check each appliance for winterizing recommendations.

Hitches & Tow Bars

If your hitch is installed properly and the bolts are tight than your major concern is a **loose ball mount**. This should be checked at least once per week. You need a very large set of channel lock pliers or a pipe wrench and an adjustable spanner wrench or deep socket. This set could cost in the \$50 to \$70 range. Hopefully, someone in the caravan has brought a set of tools that everyone can use.

You should have a ½ inch socket set with an additional 1 ½ foot handle to check all of the hitch platform and sway control bolts. If you don't want to carry or buy a full set just pick or purchase only the socket sizes you need along with the drive handles and carry those. Sears provides all individual sizes and drive handles.

You would be surprised how many hitch platforms are installed incorrectly. During our MAU Unit's annual maintenance rally, we have discovered dozens of incorrectly installed Units. There are very good write-ups on this for all of the types of hitches and sway controls. If you are uncomfortable with this find someone in your unit that knows or visit your local dealer. Learn the proper method for setting your brake controller and checking for correct operation. These concerns also apply to motorhome owners who tow cars.