



RV 101

**A BASIC GUIDE FOR
DUMMIES AND DIMWITS**



| DON'T BE A DUMMY

What's the difference between a travel trailer and a fifth wheeler?

What is winterization, and how do I do it? And do I need to wax my RV?

If you find yourself asking questions similar to these during the RV buying process, boy do we have the guide for you!

Maybe you're not quite ready to buy, and you're just doing research to try and find which RV is best for you. Quickly, you're realizing that there's a lot of lingo, models and maintenance basics that you need to catch up on before you make your big purchase. Once you step on the lot and walk through some RVs that you're interested in, the last thing you want is to sound like an RV novice. Or even worse.... an RV dummy.

After reading this guide, you will know:

- » Different types of RVs
- » Best practices for towing, driving and storage
- » How to maintain your:
 - Water tanks
 - Slideouts
 - Roofs and awnings
 - Siding
- » How RV insurance coverage works
- » Campground and hookup basics

There's no time like the present to raise your RV IQ and ensure that you are not an RV dummy.

| TYPES OF RVs

The first thing to know about RVs is something you've probably already noticed.

And that is that they come in all shapes and sizes. Why are some mounted in a truck bed while others are on a hitch? What does “toy hauler” even mean? This overview will provide you definitions of each style, and what makes them unique.



FIFTH WHEELS

Attached to an installed hitch in the bed of your truck, this RV literally becomes the fifth wheel of your truck. Because of this hitching location, the amount of sway is reduced compared to a travel trailer.

TRAVEL TRAILERS

Attached by hitch on the end of your truck, a travel trailer trails you as you travel down the road. Some travel trailers include up to three slideouts – areas that move portions of the RV's exterior outwards to create more room and more spacious living areas when you are at your campground.

BUNKHOUSE

This type of floor plan is found in many varieties of campers. RVs that have a bunkhouse have a room in the rear, front or middle of the RV, with 2 to 4 bunk beds designed for kids. In bunkhouses, sleeping capacity can be up to 12!

LITE/HYBRIDS

This RV floor plan looks just like it sounds. The main differentiator with lite or hybrid models is that, you guessed it, they're not as heavy as typical RVs. They have been designed specifically for towing behind many six-cylinder family vehicles, like a minivan, SUV or V6 cars.

TOY HAULERS

Another floor plan variation, an RV with “toy hauler” in its name is essentially a travel trailer with a large garage door in the back that also acts as a ramp to haul around all of your “toys.” From a four wheeler to a motorcycle, toy haulers allow you to easily transport your traveling sidekicks with you.

| TOWING TIPS

It's one of the biggest things on your mind. How are you going to tow your RV?

To tow safely, you need to pay attention to the towing capabilities of the vehicle with which you want to tow your RV. When you think you've found the RV your heart desires, make sure you take a look at the weight sticker found on the unit. Take this number, and estimate how much cargo you will be adding while being mindful of the GVWR.

You can find how much weight your vehicle is capable of towing by looking at the vehicle's data plate, which is

typically located on the inside of the driver's door frame, on the fuel door or in the glovebox.

Weight distribution hitches are also important when you are ready to tow your rig. They take some weight off the bumper of your vehicle and move it to the front of the truck and rear of the camper. There are several kinds of weight distribution hitches you can use like drop chain, built-in sway, cam and drawbar.

Here are the things that you need to pay attention to when you are towing your RV:

GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING (GCWR)

The maximum allowable combined mass of a towing vehicle. This includes passengers and cargo, plus the weight of the trailer.

GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING (GVWR)

The maximum operating weight of a vehicle that is specified by the manufacturer. This refers to the weight of the entire vehicle without any trailer attached, but includes passengers and cargo.

GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATINGS (GAWR)

Found on both the trailer and vehicle, this number represents the maximum amount of weight a particular axle can carry, including the wheel and tire.

MAXIMUM TOW RATING

The manufacturer provided weight limit for towed loads. This number usually includes a hitch weight limit as well, and for fifth wheels, the pin weight is used to the truck's GVWR and rear axle GAWR.

TONGUE WEIGHT

This number should be somewhere between 10 and 15 percent of the total loaded trailer weight.



| DRIVING TIPS

HANDLING

Drive cautiously when you are hauling your RV. Avoid sudden stops or starts that can cause your RV to jackknife, skid or slide. It's also a good idea to make wider turns at corners or curves. Your trailer's wheels are closer to the inside of a turn than the wheels of your tow vehicle, so they are more likely to hit or ride up over curbs.

BRAKING

Allow plenty of space for braking. Your RV has added a lot of weight to your towing vehicle, so you want to give yourself extra time to slow down. If you have an electric trailer brake controller and sway occurs, activate the trailer brake controller. Do not attempt to control trailer sway by applying the tow vehicle brakes.

ACCELERATION

Avoid passing vehicles on hills. When possible, pass on level terrain. Do not pass on roads with a soft shoulder. Accelerating on loose terrain could cause your trailer to jackknife or lose control. If needed, downshift for improved acceleration or control.

BACKING UP

Always back up slowly. If you can, have someone outside the RV at the rear of the trailer to guide you. You can also buy mirror extensions for your side mirrors that will give you some extended visibility.

PARKING

Always avoid parking on hills. Just like when you're backing up, have someone outside of your trailer guide you into the space. When uncoupling a trailer, place blocks at the front and rear of the trailer tires to ensure that the trailer does not roll away when the coupling is released.



| STORAGE

So where does my RV live when I'm not living in it?

The answer to this question lies in your personal preference. Most driveways are not long enough to house an RV in its entirety, and some neighborhoods don't allow you to have it parked around your home. If you have a large amount of land and have a place where you can easily store your RV, that is one method of storage.

If you're unable to store your RV at your home, you can choose to park your vehicle at a storage lot.

When you do this, you're making the decision to trade convenience for security and space. Most storage lots feature well-lit parking lots and an abundance of security cameras. Depending on the type of lot you choose, your vehicle can also be protected from any severe weather that may come your way.

If possible, you want to store your RV in a covered area, chock the wheels in the front and rear and leave the parking brake off.

When you're leaving your rig parked for a while, make sure you turn off all liquid propane appliances, and inflate the tires to recommended manufacturer specifications. Make sure you do your housekeeping before you leave your RV, too. Make sure there are no perishables, and that you have cleaned out the filters and cabinets.





| MAINTENANCE

HOW DO YOU MANAGE YOUR RV'S BATHROOM FUNCTIONS?

It's not the most fun activity associated with your RV, but maintaining your black and grey tanks is very important. Proper maintenance will extend the life of your wastewater system, prevent costly repairs and control odors before they begin. You should flush your black tank with freshwater after every trip!

So what exactly is a black tank? The black tank holds all the solid and liquid waste from your RV's onboard toilet. Understandably, it's not the cleanest place in your RV, but its maintenance is not to be overlooked. There are two types of flushing you can do to maintain it:

Automatic Flushing:

Many trailers have automatic black tank flushing systems, as do most motorhomes. Near your black tank, there should be a small valve that connects to a city water source, such as a garden hose. Connect a hose to this inlet, turn the water on and let the system do its work. The water is sprayed in all directions inside the tank and should dislodge most stubborn waste inside the tank. Make sure to empty the tank again after you wash.

Manual Flushing:

While automatic black tank flushing may be a necessary thing to do, it likely won't be enough. For added cleanliness, RVers should invest in manual black tank cleaning tools, such as a rinsing wand with a high-pressure head. Connect a cleaning wand to your garden hose, and place it down your RV's toilet and give a secondary rinse to the tank to knock down any difficult-to-remove solids.

You don't want to cause a clog, so make sure you only use special RV toilet paper that is designed to break down easily.

SO, WHAT ABOUT THE GREY TANK?

The grey tank is what collects all other water you use while you're in your RV. From showering to cooking and washing dishes, your grey tank collects all water that isn't from your toilet. After you have emptied your black tank, open up the grey tank water valve and begin draining it by connecting a sewer hose into a grey water dumping hole. After it's empty, rinse out your tanks with clean water by refilling them and draining them again.

| MAINTENANCE

HOW DO I WINTERIZE?

When RVing season has come to a close, and cold weather is on its way, it's time to start thinking winterization. You know that just like your house, water systems are vulnerable during cold weather because water inside pipes expands when frozen and can burst your pipes. Fixing burst pipes is costly in your RV, so you will definitely want to winterize your rig before old man winter breaks your pipes.

The first step is to drain and clean out all of your water tanks. This includes fresh, grey and black tanks. Then, you need to drain your water heater. There are two types of water heaters: those with anode rods and those without. Anode rods are metal sticks that extend the life of your water heater by attracting corrosive elements in the water. If your heater has a rod, simply remove it and set it aside until spring. Once you set aside your rod, consult your owner's manual to locate the valve system that routes water away from your heater.

The next step is an important one. In order to get all the water out, use an air compressor to dry all of the pipes thoroughly. First, screw the blowout plug on the city water hookup on the outside of your RV. You'll notice the tip of this plug has a valve on it, similar to a bicycle valve. Connect this valve to your air compressor. Make sure that all faucets in the camper are closed, then turn the compressor on. Open each faucet and catch all the water that comes out in a bucket. Continue this until no water comes out.

After the tanks are clean and dry, close up their valves. Then with all of your faucets closed, use the inline RV antifreeze draw tube to suck antifreeze from its container. One by one you will need to open the faucets until you only see antifreeze flowing. For good measure, pour a few cups of antifreeze into each sink or shower trap to ensure it replaces the standing water inside.



| MAINTENANCE

SLIDEOUTS

Slideouts are well designed to keep maintenance to a minimum. But there is still some routine upkeep you need to do to keep them sliding smoothly. When you're ready to leave the campground, the last thing you want is for your slideouts to be stuck in the "out" position. To avoid this, you need to keep them properly lubricated. For most RVs, the best lubrication for slideouts is a dry lubrication applied to all moving parts of the slideout mechanisms. Along with keeping your slideouts well lubricated, you must inspect the rubber seals periodically for wear and tear. If the rubber begins to crack or not completely seal, you must replace the damaged rubber to prevent water or air leaks.

ROOF, AWNING & SIDING

The rubber roof of your RV keeps you protected from the elements. To maintain your roof, you must clean it a minimum of once a year. Use a soft brush and rubber roof cleaner to clean your roof, and then protect it with a UV blocker.

The awnings on your RV require proper care too. Make sure you always put the awning away if there is severe weather, and clean the entire awning at least twice a year with awning cleaner and degreaser.

Keep the siding on your RV clean, just like you would regularly wash your car. Be sure to use special RV soap so that you don't damage any decals. Regular cleanings, and waxings will keep your RV looking nice and glossy.





| INSURANCE

One aspect about RV ownership that you certainly don't want to be a dummy about is insurance.

We know it's not the most exciting aspect of owning an RV, but it is absolutely necessary. We hope you don't experience any problems in your RV, but it's best to be prepared for whatever rolls your way while you're on the open road.

The first thing you need to understand when choosing your RV insurance is that there are two types: auto insurance and separate RV insurance. If you decide to just use an auto insurance policy, you should note that it does not cover many of the unique aspects of your RV. Even though individual states mandate required minimum coverage rates, there are many coverage features that you should consider to fully cover your RV.

Different insurance companies offer similar policies for RVers, and the cost of coverage varies greatly depending on a few factors. When it's time to get your insurance policy, providers will look at:

- » Make, Model, and Year of your RV
- » Average number of days per year you intend to use your RV
- » Age
- » Gender
- » Driving record
- » Credit score
- » Marital status

| INSURANCE

All of the above factors will help calculate your RV insurance payments. Along with understanding the factors that determine your payment, it is important to understand the different coverage policies available. Most of the policies have the same elements with different phrasing or names, but the basic added coverage options are broken down into these categories:

EMERGENCY EXPENSE

If you're away from home, and something happens to your RV that doesn't allow you to stay in it, this coverage pays for your lodging.

PERSONAL EFFECTS

This coverage protects you from theft. If someone breaks into your RV and steals your personal valuables this coverage will protect stolen items.

FULL-TIMER

If you reside in your RV full-time, this comprehensive plan is for you! It is comparable to a homeowner's insurance plan.

VACATION LIABILITY

Even when your RV is parked on a campsite it's considered a temporary residence, similar to a condo. Vacation coverage protects you from the liability of someone getting hurt on the property where your RV is parked.

ATTACHED ACCESSORIES

This is for all the accessories that can sometimes get overlooked. Antennas, awnings, rooftop air conditioners, and other attachments may not be covered in a basic policy, so this covers damage to accessories.



CAMPGROUND HOOKUP BASICS

Now that you understand the basics of your actual RV, it's time to hit the road. Before you do, there is one more thing to know: how to hook up your RV when you first get to your campsite. Having features that utilize water and electric calls for having the smarts to hook your RV up to get these amenities.

LEVELING AND STABILIZATION

When you arrive at your campsite, you will want to stabilize and level your rig. To begin the leveling process, make sure your slideouts are pulled out. Then, back the RV over a set of leveling blocks until the trailer is level from side to side. Next, use the level indicator installed inside your RV to raise or lower it using the tongue jack on the front of your camper.

Now, to stabilize your RV, you must use the jacks installed on the side of your camper. Many RVs have automatic processes for both stabilizing and leveling.

ELECTRICITY

Of course, you will need to power up all your gizmos at your campsite once you've arrived! Most RVs use large 30 amp or 50 amp plugs, and each campsite will offer different services of power. When you dock your RV at the campground and plug into the campsites "shore power," it's a good idea to keep a power plug adapter handy. These adapters will convert the power for you if your RV requires a different amp plug than the outlet available at your campsite. Before you plug anything in, make sure the breaker is turned off. Then simply plug in, and flip the switch!

Another helpful safety tip is to wrap the cord around the cord strain reliefs, usually located on the side of the load center. This will keep everyone (and your RV) safe if the plug accidentally comes unplugged. If your RV doesn't have a built-in surge protector, that is another wise investment that can save your RV's electrical system in case of a power surge.

CITY WATER

When you pull into your campsite, you will definitely want some quality H₂O during your stay. Many campgrounds have fresh water hookups at each campsite. To prevent RV pipes from bursting, it's a good idea to use a flow restrictor to control the water pressure coming out of the ground. Using a carbon filter is also a good idea if you don't want to worry about different water qualities when going from campsite to campsite.

After you've taken these steps, simply take your hose and plug it into the city water hookup on your RV. Make sure your bypass valve is turned to the "bypass" side instead of the "fill tank" option, and turn off your water pump. Now, just turn on the city water and you are good to go!



| YOUR RV IQ JUST GOT HIGHER

After reading this guide, we are positive that your RV IQ has increased by at least a couple of points.

Now that you understand RVing basics from maintenance to driving tips and storage, you are one step closer to buying your very own RV. With all of this information, you can feel confident when you step on the lot to do walk-throughs and make your big decision.

Once you have your own RV, check out our Good Life Travel Guides, where we provide you some of the best places to take your ride and live the Good Life! You can download all of these guides and more at glrv.com.

HAPPY RVING!

