

ROUTE 66 Q&A: RV Performance

By Victoria Sampson, salesperson, Little Dealer, Little Prices, a ROUTE 66 RV Network® dealership in Mesa, Ariz.

Q&A EXPERT ADVICE ON RV AWNINGS, TIRE SAFETY AND SLIDEOUT MAINTENANCE

Q. I've been thinking about putting an awning on my trailer, but everything that I've seen looks like I need an engineering degree to operate it. I also wonder about durability and what kind of long-term performance I can expect in an awning. Is there anything that you might recommend as far as aftermarket installation?

A. There are many aftermarket awning manufacturers who have created products that are durable, easy to operate and maintain. In our dealership we carry the Carefree awning, among others, and have been very satisfied with the durability.

Check your hardware for operation at the beginning of each season, lubricating buttons, handles and threaded knobs. Be careful not to get petroleum-based lubricants on your awning fabrics. Remember to lower your awning if you are going to leave it extended during rainstorms and roll it up when leaving the awning unattended or during periods of high winds. Most awning damage we see is related

to water pooling on the fabric or awnings torn loose in high winds. Generally speaking, neither of these conditions is covered by manufacturers' warranty.

Vinyl awning fabrics are mildew-resistant. Mildew will form on the tree sap, dirt and dust that accumulate on an awning in normal use. Periodic cleaning can prevent this. Clean with a commercial awning cleaner. Extend your awning and swab the fabric using a soft brush, mop or sponge, and rinse well with fresh water. Repeat if necessary. Let dry before rolling up for storage. Awnings are wonderful to have and easy enough to use every time you camp. (Editor's note: You also might look for an awning that has pitch adjustment as well as wind sensors that automatically retract the awning in high wind conditions that could cause awning and RV damage.)

Q. My wife says I'm a certified worry-wart, but I'm concerned about safety with my truck and trailer, especially on our longer trips. I've seen so many accidents on the road involving blown-out tires. What's the best thing I can do to prevent blowouts?

A. The best thing you can do to prevent blowouts is to check the air pressure in your tires before heading out on your camping trip. Underinflation, combined with high speeds, can create excessive heat in the tire and can lead to tire failure. The maximum recommended pressure is usually printed on the sidewall of the tire. It is also a good idea to look at your tires occasionally to check the wear pattern. Overinflated tires will wear in the center, while underinflated tires will show more wear at the edges. If you see scallop-like patterns around the edges (also called "cupping"), you may have a loose wheel bearing or possibly an alignment problem. Also, check for sidewall cracking, bulges, and/or dry rot. Tires that have been out in the

sun and/or sitting for a long time can develop these symptoms. If this happens, it is time for new tires. You may want to consider investing in tire covers to protect the tires while they are sitting in the sun. Also, don't overload your vehicle; stay at or below the GVWR (Gross Vehicle Weight Rating).

Q. When I'm pulling our 30-foot trailer, I just get the feeling that the mirrors on my truck aren't doing the job — that I'm not getting maximum visual coverage. At this point, what can I do to improve my view and decrease my frustration?

A. The whole point of vacationing is to relax and have a good time, so we can understand your frustration with the feeling of limited view of the trailer you are pulling behind you. One thing that many RVers do is use mirror extensions on their existing side vehicle mirrors. Mirror extensions will extend your vision without blocking your existing mirrors. They are easy to install, no tools are required. Another option is adhesive mirrors that can be attached to the trailer itself anywhere you feel you need more vision.

Q. Now that we've made the step up to a motorhome with slideouts, I want to make sure we keep them in top working shape. What kind of routine maintenance should I be looking at for slideouts? Should I be worried about rust?

A. With RV slideouts, routine maintenance is the key. Depending on what kind of slideout you have — hydraulic, electric or manual — the maintenance will vary. Before your trip you will want to check your lube gear, check your seals for cracking, check hoses and connections, and check fluid level (for hydraulic mechanisms). Owners' manuals for your RV will give you routine maintenance instructions, and it's very important to keep a journal of your routine annual maintenance for warranty purposes. Our service department maintains these records for our customers. You will also want to consider awnings over your slides to keep debris and snow from piling on top of the slideout. They are permanently mounted and extend/contract with the slide. 

ROUTE 66 RV Network® dealer service managers share knowledgeable opinions in this column, but their advice is not intended to supersede specific recommendations from manufacturers. Have a question about RV maintenance or performance? Send it to: Scenic Route Q/A, Cygnus Business Media, 1233 Janesville Ave., Fort Atkinson, WI 53538. Or, e-mail your question to: scenicroute@cygnusb2b.com.



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