How Driving an American RV Spoils You

Bev and I have identified 9 ways RV travel has spoiled us. Here's what we like most about travelling in our Vectra?

1. The high seats in the RV... We love sitting up high, over the road, with a huge panoramic windshield that lets us see the road, traffic, the conditions around us from a position much higher than in regular vehicles. We feel more "on top of things" in the RV, and can anticipate corrective moves when needed.

2. The fridge... In the RV, the fridge is always on, always cool and we have lots of water, snacks, fruit and refreshments on hand. A great road snack is chocolate biscuits kept in the fridge, so they don’t melt. I suppose we could have packed a ‘cooler bag’ for trips in our car. But the fridge in the RV is much more convenient.

3. The bathroom... This one is Bev’s favourite, especially when we are stuck in traffic. Have you stopped at a service station rest room, or fast food outlet lately? Our own bathroom in the RV is clean, you can take your time.... and it’s 'always' ready for business.

4. The kitchen... Eating on the road while driving in a car almost invariably means fast food, or lots of online searching and review checking to find nice places to eat on route. In our RV, we can quickly prepare anything – breakfast, lunch, dinner. We just pull over and eat off our own plates, with our own utensils and always, the food we prepare ourselves in the RV is cleaner, healthier and better tasting than what we’d find at a roadside eatery or fast food joint.

5. Being in control... This is a real intangible. But it provides a great sense of security. We are not dependent on anything other than fuel as we travel. We are self-contained. Everything we need is with us. This has to truly be one of the nicest things about RV travel.

6. Wardrobes... We have plenty of extra clothes with us in the RV. If the weather turns suddenly cooler, we can go to the wardrobe and replace shorts and T-shirts with long pants and sweaters. We have extra shoes on board the RV. Raincoats, jackets, hats and gloves. We are ready for most anything Mother Nature can throw at us. In comparison, a trip by car, where you have to pack everything in suitcases, it’s difficult to be prepared for different weather conditions.

7. A bed... I can not begin to say how nice it is while travelling long distances to pull over and lay down in the RV bed for a quick roadside nap. On our last big trip in our car, a few months back, we were challenged by torrential rains. We had to pull over three times and wait a half hour or so each time for the wild weather to pass. It's very hard to nap in a car. In our RV, with the patter of rain on the roof, a rain delay makes for a wonderful nap.

8. Big side mirrors... I’m talking here about the mirrors outside the driver and passenger windows. The RV side mirrors are big and cover a very wide area. We feel we really can see what is around us and behind us in the RV. The mirrors on our car are much smaller. I am not nearly as comfortable making lane changes in our car as I am in the RV. Besides, in the RV, everyone naturally gives way! Why is that?

9. Our Home on Wheels... Put all of the above reasons together and that’s what our RV clearly is... Our Home on Wheels. It has all the comforts of home because it... is our home, when we are away.
How to handle a blow-out

Blow-outs can be really scary things. No, we’re not talking about the kind that you get after a hot curry. The blow-out we’re talking about here is the kind that happens when you’re cruisin’ down the road minding your own business, and then out of nowhere, it hits you when you are doing a smiggin over 90 kph. You feel your tyre explode under you and know you’re in trouble. But it doesn’t have to be a scary experience. Here are some tips to help you deal with what could be a bad day. Dotted throughout this article are pictures of Class ‘A’ American RV’s that have all had blow outs and how it all ended up.

There she blows

A tyre blow-out might not be felt right away. It is sometimes heard first. It might be a loud boom or pop! After this you’ll probably hear something like a rush of air. This is your tyre deflating like the Grand kids paddling pool after your smart alec, 18 stone Uncle Mike tried to cannonball it last Christmas.

Next comes the flapping sound of rubber, as your flat tyre slaps against the road surface. You’ll feel your RV slowing down as it coasts along the road and probably a bit of a pull to the left or right depending on which side your tyre blew.

Front tyre blows are usually felt more in the steering and back tyre blows are usually felt more in the seats.

The RV pictured right had a blow-out, came off the highway, then ploughed right through the house in the background and then hit the front of the neighbours house. Both driver and passenger were killed.

Now what?

Instinctively when a tyre blows, you will want to do something about it! Brake, turn off, get on the shoulder as quickly as you can. But Hey... Don’t do it. Resist like you do when you go into an appliance or electronics store and you feel like you want to buy the whole place while you wait for your wife to finish shopping at the mall.

You should keep a good grip on the steering wheel, wait for your RV to let Mother Nature slow ‘er down and don’t press on the brake pedal.

Once you’ve slowed down enough, pull over onto the shoulder and turn on your hazard lights. If it’s safe, go ahead and change that bad boy, but if not, you should call some sort of roadside assistance.

Lex Ward has shown me he has a nationwide tyre shop on his phone speed dial in case of such an event, or just a simple flat. Below is a link to an RV tyre website sponsored by Michelin in the USA. In it they wire small charges to the outside edge of RV tyres, front and back and blow that charge to cause a blow-out in the tyre. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lkwOE1yKY5c
They actually recommend at the initial point of the blow-out, that you press down on the accelerator. What this does as they explain more fully is that the additional “drive” that the accelerator provides initially keeps the RV from swerving sideways.

I have below the Michelin video showing another of a beautiful 40 foot RV passing a truck towing a toad that has a blow-out in a front tyre and the following truck ‘Dash Cam’ records it perfectly. You must watch this if you’re thinking it will never happen to me!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LkLeljt4t0

The RV swerves from one side to the other initially and eventually the driver losses control and the RV rolls on its side initially, then on its roof. The driver never hit his brakes during the blow-out, which was a positive thing, but he probably never hit the gas either. Pressing the accelerator is probably the last thing any RV driver would want to do, but these experts say, it will give control back to the driver during the first few seconds after the tyre blows. After a very short while, you can take your foot off the gas pedal and allow the RV to slow down and stop.

**Anything else?**

Experiencing a tyre blow-out can’t always be prevented, but there are a few things you can do to reduce your chances of having one. The easiest way? Just make sure your tyres are full to the cold pressure level they’re supposed to be for your RV. You can usually find this magic number inside your door jamb, or in the user’s manual that came with your RV. Make sure your RV isn’t too heavy by not overloading it and putting extra stress on your tyres.

Speaking of which, maintaining your tyres is a must. You should check to make sure they are okay before hitting the road.

Blow-outs can be scary, but there is a lot you can do to minimise the chances of having one in the first place.

Learning the basics about what to listen and look for, and preparing yourself and your RV can help keep you from having a not-so-pleasant day while you’re out enjoying the open road.

**Tyre Pressure Monitoring systems**

A couple of years ago I arranged a deal with a tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) company that is Kiwi owned, but does most of it’s business in Australia and the USA. We were able to get special pricing and supply about a dozen or so TPMS’s to members of the American RV Group at that time. I’ve arranged a similar deal again for those that are interested in buying a TPMS for higher pressure RV tyres?
What are they?

A tyre pressure monitoring system (TPMS) is an electronic system designed to monitor the air pressure inside the pneumatic tyres on various types of vehicles, like your RV. TPMS report real-time tyre-pressure information to the driver of the vehicle, usually by a dash mounted electronic display.

The goal?

- Avoiding traffic accidents due to under-inflated tyres by early recognition of the malfunction of tyres
- Reducing rolling resistance, thus increasing overall fuel efficiency

Initial adoption

Due to the influence tyre pressure has on vehicle safety and efficiency, TPMS was first adopted by the European market as an optional feature for luxury passenger vehicles in the 1980s. The first passenger vehicle to adopt tyre-pressure monitoring was Porsche in 1986. Later in 1996 Renault used it, and a year later again, it was used on the Peugeot Citroen. In the United States, TPMS was introduced by General Motors for the 1991 model Corvette. The system used sensors in the wheels and had a driver display, which showed tyre pressure at any wheel, plus warnings for both high and low pressure. It has been standard on Corvettes ever since.

Firestone recall and legal mandates

A major Firestone tyre recall in the late 1990s (which was linked to more than 100 deaths, from roll-overs following tyre tread-separation), pushed the United States Congress to legislate the "TREAD ACT". The Act mandated the use of a suitable TPMS technology in all light motor vehicles (under 10,000 pounds, or 4.5 tonne), to help alert drivers of under-inflation events.

This Act affects all light motor vehicles sold after September 1, 2007. In the United States, as of 2008 and the European Union, as of November 1, 2012, all new passenger car models released must be equipped with a TPMS. South Korea, Japan, Indonesia and a number of other countries are moving in the same direction in regard to new vehicles.

After the ‘TREAD Act’ was passed, many companies responded to the new market opportunity by releasing TPMS products that use an obvious means of getting tyre pressure and temperature data across a vehicle’s rotating wheel-chassis boundary, using battery-powered radio transmitter wheel modules.

TPMS employ pressure sensors on each tyre, either internal or external. The sensors physically measure the tyre pressure in each tyre and report it to the vehicle’s instrument cluster, or a corresponding monitor. Some units also measure and alert temperatures of the tyre as well. These systems can identify under-inflation in any combination, be it one tyre or all, simultaneously. Although the systems vary in transmitting options, many TPMS products can display real time tyre pressures at each wheel location monitored whether the vehicle is moving or parked.

Limitations

There are many different solutions, but all of them have to face the problems of exposure to tough environments and the majority are powered by batteries which limit their useful life. If the sensors are mounted on the outside of the wheel, which is the case for some after market systems, they are in danger of mechanical damage, aggressive fluids and other substances, as well as theft. If they are mounted on the inside of the wheel rim, they are no longer easily accessible for service like battery change and additionally, the RF communication has to overcome the damping effects of the tyre which additionally increases the need for energy.

There is controversy regarding the compatibility of after-market tyre sealants with TPMS that employ sensors mounted inside the tyre. Some manufacturers of sealants assert that their products are indeed compatible, but others warn that, e.g., "The sealant may come in contact with the sensor in a way that renders the sensor TEMPORARILY inoperable until it is properly cleaned, inspected and re-installed by a tyre care professional".
Benefits of TPMS

The dynamic behaviour of a pneumatic tyre is closely connected to its inflation pressure. Key factors like braking distance and lateral stability require the inflation pressures to be adjusted and kept as specified by the vehicle manufacturer. Extreme under-inflation can even lead to thermal and mechanical overload caused by overheating and subsequent, sudden destruction of the tyre itself. Additionally, fuel efficiency and tyre wear are severely affected by under-inflation. Tyres do not only leak air if punctured, they also leak air naturally, and over a year, even a typical new, properly mounted tyre can lose from 20 to 60 kPa (3 to 9 PSI), roughly 10% or even more of its initial pressure.

The significant advantages of TPMS are summarised as follows:

**Fuel savings:-** According to the GITI, for every 10% of under-inflation on each tyre on a vehicle, a 1% reduction in fuel economy will occur. In the United States alone, the Department of Transportation estimates that under inflated tyres waste 2 billion US gallons (7.6 billion litres) of fuel each year.

**Extended tyre life:-** Under inflated tyres are the No 1 cause of tyre failure and contribute to tyre disintegration, heat build-up, ply separation and sidewall/casing breakdowns. Further, a difference of 10 psi (69 kPa; 0.69bar) in pressure on a set of RV duals, literally “drags” the lower pressured tyre up to 2.5 metres per kilometre (13 feet per mile). Moreover, running a tyre even briefly on inadequate pressure, breaks down the casing and prevents the ability for it to be retreaded. It is important to note that not all sudden tyre failures are caused by under-inflation. Structural damage caused, for example, by hitting sharp curbs or potholes, can also lead to sudden tyre failures, even though a certain time may have passed after the damaging incident.

**Decreased downtime and maintenance:-** Under-inflated tyres lead to costly hours of downtime and maintenance.

**Improved safety:-** Under-inflated tyres lead to tread separation and tyre failure, resulting in 40,000 accidents, 33,000 injuries and over 650 deaths per year in the USA. Further, tyres properly inflated add greater stability, handling and braking efficiencies and provide greater safety for the driver, the vehicle, the loads and others on the road.

**Environmental efficiency:-** Under-inflated tyres, as estimated by the Department of Transportation, to release over 26 billion kilograms of unnecessary carbon-monoxide pollutants into the atmosphere each year in the United States alone.

**Further statistics include:-**

The French Sécurité Routière, a road safety organization, estimates that 9% of all road accidents involving fatalities are attributable to tyre under-inflation, and the German DEKRA, a product safety organization, estimated that 41% of accidents with physical injuries are linked to tyre problems.

83% of tyre pressure loss is estimated to occur gradually - often without being noticed by the driver. Correct tyre pressure helps reduce fuel consumption, and reduces tyre wear, the risk of aquaplaning and lack of traction. The TPMS also helps save time, effort, and money with regular tyre check-ups and efficiently solves many current automotive safety problems.

**My own experience with a TPMS?**

I bought a TPMS four years ago and have done quite a few thousand miles up and down the country (including Auckland to Bluff return) with it and have had a few instances during that time when I had gradual air leaks from newly fitted tyre extenders, plus one nail that produced a slow leak, which I've written about previously.

We had done a two week trip from Auckland down to Tauranga, across to Taupo and were heading back home to Auckland. We had left Taupo and came through the forest and were about 5 kms short of Tokoroa on Highway 1 heading north when the alarm went off on my dash mounted TPMS, telling me the drivers side inner rear dual was down from my ideal cold pressure of 85psi to now only 65psi. I pulled over and used the TPMS to check the temperature of the tyre as well and compared it to the others on the RV.
The TPMS measures and monitors both temperature and air pressure constantly. Sure enough, the tyre temperature had increased a little to 28 degrees, with all the other tyres averaging only about 22 degrees during this fine winter's day. 28 degrees C isn’t high, but because it was running on lower pressure, there must have been a little more side wall flex and that increased the tyre temperature. I got out and inspected the tyre. But running my hand around the outside edge of the tyre didn’t reveal any nails and there was no obvious cause for the lower pressure? Previously, I had checked all the tyre pressures before leaving Taupo, with the TPMS, and they all were perfect.

We had only covered about 75 kms and been on the road for a little less than an hour. As I have an on-board compressor, I was able to slightly over inflate it to 95psi and get to our next overnight park at Rays Rest. It was nice to know that the tyre was being constantly monitored on the trip home. It was only when we got home I was able to use soap suds and a small paint brush to find that it was actually a new valve extender that was leaking air and I was able to replace it. It seemed that the faulty tyre extender only lost air while the RV was underway and the tyre was rotating?

We have had two blow outs with our RV. The first was in the middle of absolutely ‘nowhere’ in the middle of the USA. It cost us NZD$700 to buy a new tyre and have it fitted and the old casing disposed of by two enterprising Mexican tyre repair guys we had to call out, who only wanted ‘cash’. We were in the middle of what to us Kiwi’s looked like a desert... stuck between a rock and a hard place! It always pays to carry a little cash for situations like this when you’re out of your comfort zone, or country like we were. You just pay your way out of any trouble... It was a 3,500 kilometre journey across the States and some of it like this "blow-out" section, was in desert temperatures. We now know the tyre had lost some pressure before it blew-out and was overheating. We were very fortunate that there was no other damage done, as often a tyre breaking up can cause extensive damage. We have a huge LPG cylinder mounted just in front of our driver side rear dual tyres.

The second blow out occurred when we were only doing barely 5-10kms, just as we were turning into the Kaitaia RSA. In the previous one hour, we were nudging the legal speed limit, barrelling down sections of Ninety Mile Beach Highway 1. As it was a front tyre, we could have easily lost control of the RV, had it occurred on a corner, or while we were ‘humping’ along some of those l-o-n-g Northland straights. Our very own American RV tyre expert, Pete Jenkins said my tyre had what they call in the industry "Zippered". The most likely cause was the "old age" of the tyre. (10years +) I promptly replaced all 6 of my tyres after that incident.

I also drove about 150,000 kms over a five year period working part time for my son in law, driving what they term a six wheeler tip truck. It actually has 10 wheels, but lets not get sidetracked on that. Working on building and demolition sites, you’re always driving over nails and other odd stuff that isn’t tyre friendly material. I’ve probably had another 4 blow outs and maybe another 4-5 soft/flat tyres over that same period driving this truck. They always seem to occur at the most inappropriate time, like on the Auckland motorway system during rush hour traffic... So with all these tyre incidents over the last 6-7 years, buying an RV TPMS was a no brain-er for Bev and I. That purchase was primarily for our personal safety and just ‘peace of mind’ while we are driving. I’d like to also think that it has resulted in a few more of my last remaining black hairs remaining that colour and not joining the stampede to ‘grey’ like the rest of my thinning mop.

As I mentioned earlier, we have been using this TPMS for four years now and are thrilled with it. The only change I made about two years ago was to also purchase a ‘repeater’ unit that I’ve fitted under the RV, mounting it just in front of the rear axle and on the bottom rear of my water tank. Previously I suspect that sometimes the signal from the dual inside inners had not been making it to the master unit that is mounted on my front windscreen. We have also bought an extra two wheel sensors to fit to our ‘toad’, because if we had a flat tyre, we might not even notice it, even with regular checks looking at our rear view camera screen.
It is reported that the wheel sensor signals and enclosed transmitters can cover quite a large distance and even the biggest 5th wheelers that have rear tyres many metres behind the drivers position can still get perfect reception. However, with the arrival of smart phones, there has also been a corresponding increase in the level of signal interference. Our RV has more than its fair share of technology on board and the repeater at $95 for me took away any doubt, and ensures we get tyre pressure warnings, asap.  

I know for sure that my TPMS has covered its initial cost already preventing at least one potential tyre failure, and there have been other warnings as well. I guess I’ll never know if being warned early, has also saved Bev and I from some terrible accident. If you are thinking about being able to monitor your own RV tyres while driving your RV, Craig the owner of the company has offered American RV Group members a six tyre InnoTechRV TPMS for only $490.00 including GST, but more on that later.

Narrowing down the choices?

TPMS can have the sensors and transmitters mounted inside the wheel, or mounted externally on the valve stem, just like a valve cap. If you opt for a system mounted inside the wheel, you have to have all the tyres removed from the vehicle, and that’s an added cost that needs to be evaluated against any benefits internal installation offers. I really researched this on-line for many months before I bought mine, reading hundreds of user comments. The only advantage I could find for an internal sensor was that the sensor and transmitter are protected from external theft or damage. However, because only 1 in a thousand Kiwis know about TPMS, they are not likely to be stolen and anyway, the external wheel sensors have an anti theft device incorporated in them. Another internal disadvantage is that battery replacement requires the tyre to be removed and that’s not particularly cheap in NZ for all 6 tyres. Another disadvantage is that if you use internal tyre sealants, they can foul sensors. Sealants are used mostly by motorcyclists, after a flat or soft tyre is detected, just to get them home, as they don’t carry a spare.

This would not be an issue for most trucks and RV owners though. The big advantage using an external sensor system like the InnoTechRV TPMS system is that it only takes about 10-15 minutes to fit the complete system and about another 15min to program all six wheel sensors.

The Lithium button batteries replacement takes just a few minutes to replace all six tyre mounted sensors and they are readily available in NZ. For those that already have TPMS systems, you can buy new batteries from PB tech, $4.60, Bunnings, $6.88, on Trademe buying 20 at a time for $1.86 each or the best choice in my opinion is from a company called Photo Gear. At $2.50 each. I have bought no name batteries before and some don’t last 12 months, so now I stick to name brands and Panasonic CR 1632 from Photogear is my preferred choice. http://photogear.co.nz/panasonic-cr1632-lithium-battery-3v.html They are on the North Shore if you are in Auckland, but they do ship NZ wide. Make sure what you buy is a minimum of 140mAh.

The battery is securely mounted under a water and dust proof screw cap, that also includes an additional sealing gasket. After four years use, in all weathers, my inside battery compartments have remained dust and moisture free. Battery life is expected to be a minimum of one year for each tyre sensor. The master unit that is mounted typically on the front windsreen, using a suction cup provided with the unit, again only takes minutes to fix, with the hardest decision being, “Where will I mount it?” If you get an alarm situation occurring, the master unit flashes a red light and also beeps, showing on the screen which tyre has prompted the alarm. Speaking from experience, you don’t spend any time analysing the display to see which tyre is the problem, or how many PSI, or what the temperature is of the tyre when the alarm goes off. Instead, you’re looking at the road ahead, planning how you can get to the side and ideally off the road to investigate the alarm further. So the master unit needs to be visible to both driver and passenger and in my view, low down on the windsreen, so that your passenger can give you more information as to what the issue is, while you the driver, execute your pullover/stopping manoeuvre.
The InnoTechRV TPMS system is designed to continuously monitor your tyre pressure and temperature and offer both 'visual' and 'audible' blow out, or reduced pressure warnings.

1. It’s suitable for cars, tow vehicles, RV’s, 5th wheels trucks and caravans
2. It’s easy to install. Easy to use
3. Pressure range 0-225 psi
4. Temperature range -10C to 85C (14F to 185F)
5. Monitors from 4 - 22 wheels
6. Monitors and transmits even when stopped or parked
7. Accurate to within 2.7%
8. Visual & Audible pressure loss warnings
9. Temperature alarm if temperature rises above 75C (167F)
10. Replaceable CR1632 batteries (Minimum 1 year life expectancy)
11. Low battery warning
12. One year warranty
13. Kit Includes:- TPMS Monitor with mounting bracket, screw on pressure/temperature transmitters and batteries, 12/24v car charger, anti-theft locks and hex wrench.

Other features and benefits

The main display unit mounts on the dash or front windscreen, which means it’s easy to fit. The display has an internal lithium battery that can run the unit for about 12 hours, but it also has a cigarette lighter plug that enables the unit to be connected into 12 or 24 volt power and remain constantly charged all the time. The internal rechargeable lithium display has an added sleep feature, that shuts the monitor off on its own, after 20 minutes if it doesn’t sense any movement, saving battery power. It’s not recommended that the monitor be permanently connected to battery power. Only while it’s being used.

Those American RV’s that have a Spartan chassis will be aware that unless the steel brake calliper edges are kept lubed and clean, brake binding can easily occur. The TPMS can warn you if a calliper is dragging because it senses an increase in tyre temperature. For the astute driver, this gives you the luxury of additional time to either rest the brake, or take some other remedial action. This not a feature of the system. Rather it’s something I’ve noticed as it has warned me of a sticking brake calliper in the past.

From discussions I’ve had with most American NZ RV’ers, the majority say they are unable to change a tyre on the roadside, and that’s mostly because they don’t have the necessary equipment. The odds are that you won’t be driving past a tyre shop when you get your next flat or blow-out and for no other reason, that’s a good reason to consider a TPMS and the insurance it offers.

Our second blow out did about $300 worth of damage to the underside of our RV. That’s in addition to the $400+ we spent on a brand new tyre. Whenever you’re considering a purchase for your RV, obviously you need to consider the costs, against the likely benefits you might obtain. Everyone will do the sums and come up with different answers. I hope this information and my experience helps you evaluate obtaining a TPMS for your RV.

As already mentioned, I’ve also fitted a repeater so that my inside dual tyres and the toad tyres have perfect reception. I’ve wired the repeater in to the ignition circuit, so that its ‘on’ only when the engine is running. It only draws 0.2amps or 2.8 watts.
Here are some comments that other TPMS owners have made

- I've had the pleasure of thirteen years of "no worry of a flat tyre" driving. I've had a TPMS on my RV for many years and had three failed tyre experiences. One on an inside dual and two on my toad, that could have been disastrous. The problems would have surely gone undetected until too late, as I simply can't tell if I have a flat on my rig. My TPMS alerted me to pressure drops immediately however, and all three situations were corrected before any damage was incurred. Some aren't as fortunate. I've seen two RV's with their back ends burned out because of flats catching fire, as well as several toads missing fenders, or wheels due to the same.

- We own a 2006 Allegro and fitted a TPMS to both the RV and the toad. On a recent trip, we had not one, but two incidences where our monitor alerted us to tyre problems. First a tyre on our towed vehicle had a nail in it, which we discovered when refuelling and the alarm went off. The next day our outside rear dual tyre did the same thing. Either incident would have been costly and perhaps devastating if we had not had the TPMS. Because of our experience with the product, we have persuaded many fellow RV'ers to make the same investment in a TPMS. The cost is minimal compared to the cost of losing a tyre on either the RV or towed vehicle. We consider our TPMS our best investment yet!

- I have a TPMS on my 1998 RV which I tow a 2001 Grand Cherokee Jeep. All 10 tyres are protected which gives me a real sense of security while travelling down the road. Do you have any idea how much a blow-out on a dual tyre on an RV can cost? When it happens, without a TPMS, there is no warning. There generally is no spare tyre in the vehicle. The service company must come to you, bring a tyre, (or go back and find one of the right size and configuration if such is available, remove the old tyre and install the new one on the roadside). This can easily cost many hundreds of dollars. But that is only the small part. When a dual tyre blows, it tears up the underside of the RV, ripping out air lines, hoses, panelling, etc. This can cost several thousand dollars more. Recently, while driving on the motorway, the audible alarm alerted us to a problem and the display showed that the right front tyre on our 5th wheel was losing air at a rate of about 20 psi every 10 seconds. I hate to think of the damage to the 5th wheel that could have occurred if we had not been made aware of the flat tyre.

- Installation of the system is fast and simple, with the sensors simply replacing the valve stem caps. Some other TPMS systems actually require costly tyre dismounting and remounting just to install the sensors on each tyre! The system is also great for checking the tyre pressures before starting out on a trip. It takes just seconds to check that all of our tyres are properly inflated. The system includes an over-pressurisation feature that alerts the driver if the pressures in any of the tyres become dangerously high. You can't tell from looking at a tyre that it is down even 10psi. Bottom line, the system is easy to install, requires no maintenance, is easy to use, and works exactly as advertised.

- A TPMS is a must have for any truck or RV owner concerned with avoiding tyre problems. It is especially important when using super singles like I do, since a flat will likely ruin the tyre and wheel. My system paid for itself after the first low pressure warning, because I was able to pull over before any damage was done. I've had my system for nearly three years without any reliability problems. I would recommend it to anyone looking for some peace of mind.

- We had a concern about theft of the sensors since they sit on the stem, but we've never had a sensor stolen in the 3 years we've been using the system and they've more than paid for themselves.

- I took a trip on Boxing day and the TPMS alerted me to a leaking tyre. Since I tow a Caravan, I'm not sure how far I would have travelled before I would have known about the low/flat tyre without the TPMS. I feel the system saved me the cost of a new tyre and quite possible from being involved in an incident or accident.
Finally, I’ve found that my tyre temperatures and pressures rise once the tyre has warmed up and that the cold pressure I set all my tyres to of 80 PSI, increases to between 85-95psi when we are underway. Because we are towing our car behind us (on the Towit2 trailer pictured opposite) most of the time we are away now, I notice the rear tyres are usually running slightly warmer than without the toad on. We are going to have another go at getting to the South Island this summer and it will be interesting to monitor the tyres and the RV’s performance on long runs during high summer temperatures. If you’re comparing TPMS brands, make sure you’re looking at tyre sensors that are capable of reading well over 100psi, as some are available that will only sense up to 45psi and that our special price includes GST and delivery.

The InnoTechRV TPMS available is a 6 wheel unit suitable for high pressure American RV’s tyres and is available for $490.00 including GST. Additional wheel sensors are available at $95 including GST for a twin pack and a repeater is also available at $95 including GST. If your RV has dual rear wheels like ours and you want sensors on your trailer, an 8 sensor unit is $580. Craig said that he has sold thousands of these TPMS systems and had less than 10 monitor failures which were replaced immediately. The wheel sensors have a slightly higher failure rate at about 1%, which is actually quite good for an electronic product. The electronics industry generally budgets for a 2-3% failure rate on any piece of electronic equipment. Craig said they send replacements out without question if a sensor does go bad under warranty.

If you would like to get further information, or just talk about anything I have not covered here, call me any time on my mobile on 027 4366-077. If you’re in or around Auckland, I can demonstrate the unit to you on your RV. If you’re GST registered, these prices include GST, but a GST invoice will be issued so you can claim back the GST portion of the invoice.

No RV parking in Santa Barbara streets

I’ve written about this before and the ‘movement’ to get rid of RV’s parked in residential streets in the USA is continuing and more and more counties adopting this measure. It’s something we don’t want to see occur here in NZ and we are fortunate that we have the NZMCA with good connections, influence and most important, credibility with local bodies. We have friends in Santa Barbara and they sent me the story.

Last week, the Santa Barbara City Council gave final approval for an ordinance banning RV’s from parking on all city streets, thus paving the way for an all-but-inevitable legal showdown with ‘Homes on Wheels’, a non-profit organisation advocating for the rights of people living in recreational vehicles.

The new ordinance bans “oversized vehicles” rather than RV’s per se and does so based on issues of traffic safety caused by the presence of wider and higher vehicles on narrow streets, rather than the behaviour or character of the occupants. Critics of the new parking ban contend these new justifications constitute a legal smokescreen designed to camouflage a discriminatory intent based on socio-economic status.

Freedom camping in NZ?

Bev and I live in a beach suburb, just north of Auckland. There is a large beach car park in the centre of Orewa and most nights during summer there will be 3-8 RV’s parked there. Personally, we have no objection to other people enjoying our beach and township. However, we do get a little annoyed when we see those same campers hanging out washing. All of a sudden, the car park takes on a new and different look and it seems that most people, locals and others, feel the same way. When we are away, enjoying other people’s beaches, we keep our clothes washing activities for NZMCA parks and similar venues and try to be more sensitive to the locals. I don’t actually think there are council rules about hanging washing out in public, but most sensible people appreciate there are grey areas that you don’t want to enter, otherwise you risk spoiling it for everyone. I suppose this is why some of the foreigners holidaying here are prepared to regularly enter that ‘grey area’ and hang out washing. They are trying to make their dollars last longer and have no permanent investment in the good will of the locals here. I think the following story concerning the Tauranga Council demonstrates this rather well.
50 complaints in Tauranga over freedom camping

CONFUSED... Freedom camper Franz Zumpe says council signs are confusing. Freedom campers have prompted more than 50 complaints since last month in Tauranga - but no fines have been issued in three years.

The latest figures from Tauranga City Council show a busy start to the camping season, with 58 complaints lodged since the beginning of October. This compares with 216 complaints in nine months last spring to autumn and 138 complaints over the same period the year before. And yet, despite all these complaints, the council has issued no fines at all since 2014.

Stuart Goodman, the council’s team leader of bylaws and parking, said that parking officers conducted regular patrols to educate freedom campers about the rules. This approach had proven to be effective, as "we have seen very little re-offending". Many recent complaints have stemmed from Fergusson Park, Kulim Park and Marine Park, where residents and legitimate campers told the Bay of Plenty Times of washing strung between powerlines, rubbish and public defecation.

Many illegal campers pack up early to avoid council staff, but one uninhabited van on Woods Ave at 10am yesterday was surrounded by rubbish including two empty cans, a crushed soft drink bottle and wrappers from fish and chips and a burger. The van did not have warrant or registration stickers. A 71-year-old morning walker, who would not be named, complained about the number of freedom campers she had encountered at Fergusson Park recently.

"What I really object to is all those people hanging washing everywhere," she said. "The other day there were 14 freedom campers here. They’re only allowed three."

The woman confronted German backpacker Franz Zumpe, 28, about the scruffy-looking van he had slept in at Fergusson Park. But her wrath was misguided, as Mr Zumpe had gone to much trouble to certify his vehicle as fully self-contained and therefore eligible to freedom camp legally without being fined $200. "I have to be legal," he said. "Two hundred dollars is 40 pizzas."

Mr Zumpe said council signs at Fergusson Park were very confusing. A sign at the entrance to the park and another near a toilet block showed different locations for legal camping. Paraparaumu retiree Roger Smith, a member of the NZ Motor Caravan Association, was also camping nearby. He said illegal campers were taking up all the available spots at freedom camping sites, forcing members of his association to move elsewhere.

"It’s wrong," he said. "People squat behind a tree instead of going to the toilets. Our club is doing a lot of work with Councils and we don’t want people ruining it." There are many locations around Tauranga where freedom camping is permitted, but several rules must be obeyed. The main one is that vehicles must be certified as self-contained, with a toilet and fresh water. There are also restrictions on the number of vehicles that can be parked at each site.

I suppose if things do get really bad, we will be grateful that the NZMCA continues to buy and lease property all over NZ for the likes of you and I to park in secure areas with like minded people. That’s another reason to support the NZMCA as much as we can, using Covi and the other service providers they encourage into the NZMCA fold.

Correspondence

Margaret from the UK American RV Club wrote to us when they heard about the Kaikoura/Wellington earthquake and said... Hello Rob, Sorry to hear about the awful weather conditions in New Zealand, we hope that you are all safe and well and have not suffered too much damage. Our thoughts are with you and all of your members. Take care.... Jock and I replied that we were all okay and thanked them for their concern and comments.
American RV Group Flag

The question was raised on the American RV group Facebook page about getting a flag made up for the NZMCA national rally early next year. After quite a lot of discussion there is agreement that our current logo would be the perfect flag image. It’s simple and says it all. We are working on getting one made currently for the rally.

Regarding the operation of your RV fridge, Pete Jenkins wrote...

Hi Rob. A word of warning to those with a gas fridge in their motor home or 5th wheeler (which I suspect is most)

DON"T start or operate the appliance on a slope for any length of time!

We replaced our original Norcold in the Vectra with a 3-way Dometic about three years ago and have been in the habit of starting the fridge by plugging into 230v mains, as we pack up a couple of hours before heading away, so that the food and beer remains cold when transferred from the house. Our address is on a relatively mild slope (maybe 5 degrees) and the last time we did this the fridge failed. Everything looked fine including the gas flame operation. The lights were normal, but it failed to cool at all even after three days away.

Troubleshooting (when you can find someone who understands these things), revealed that the most likely cause was an accumulation of the ammonia-based fluid (or crystallisation of the fluid) in one corner of the radiator pipework, due to it being on the slope.

The appliance cooling occurs by the fluid being heated by the gas flame, or element, (depending on which energy source is applied) circulating through the pipework and cooling fins at the back of the fridge, resulting in heat transfer. The heating and cooling process apparently causes the fluid to circulate - not a mechanical pump - so if it is on a slope this action can’t occur naturally.

The solution:- Remove the fridge from the motorhome (groan) and roll it around the lawn in a set sequence being ten minutes on each side clockwise. Then reverse the procedure anti-clockwise. Leave for two hours on a flat surface, then power it up and hope this dislodges and locates the trapped fluid. As you can image, removal of a motorhome fridge is not a five minute job and even getting it through the door is a mission.

Our neighbours thought that fridge rolling was a new Olympic sport, but it has worked for us so far. Failing that, the fridge has to come out again (groan) and an entire new pipework and cooling fin panel can be fitted at a cost of around $1400!!

Dometic’s operations manual only casually mentions that the appliance should be operated in a level condition - which is unlikely for any length of time when on the road anyway. It does not mention how catastrophic the consequences of not, which I think is irresponsible. This is an expensive, time consuming not to mention stressful mistake which I will obviously be taking it up with them. Cheers, Pete.

Thanks for that information Pete. I’ve heard of a couple of people trying it previously. For some it was successful. For others, it wasn’t and they had to replace their fridge. For many 1990’s vintage American RV’s, all of those original fridges are around the end of their intended life. In fact, if yours is still original, its operating beyond its intended life span. Our 1993 Norcold was replaced in 2006 after 14 years of faithful service.
A totally unfounded rumour?

I’m guilty as charged! Last month I wrote that it was rumoured that the NZTA was looking to increase the maximum vehicle width to 2.6m based on reports that Fontera were building wide body tankers to 2.6m wide.

Fred Alverez who is a motoring journalist has looked into the rumour and has reported... “Confirmation that there is nothing re 2.6m width change anywhere.... it’s 2.55m.

Here’s what I got from an insider:
At this stage it has been stalled whilst a change is made to the VDAM rule regarding rear weights, but the proposal put to Parliament is for a 2.55m width but there is no allowance for strops so this would be for a box body type truck, a flat deck would have to have twist locks.

There is no indication that 2.6 forms any part of the change.”

Hey nothing like a rumour, but we may end up driving it out to 2.6m!

Your annual American RV Group subscription is due. Have you paid yours?

If you have not paid your $10 yet, please help Anne our hard working Secretary by using internet banking, straight into our bank account. This will save Anne making a special trip to our bank with your cheque, as some people still pay this way. If you don’t use internet banking, we still accept cheques, but its no longer our preferred way of receiving your annual sub. Thank you.

Please make sure you use your name AND your NZMCA number as a reference.

ASB 12 3162 0116288 00 American RV Group

At our annual rally in Rotorua, I made a lot of notes about things I was going to follow up on for many of you that attended. A week after the rally, we moved house and prior to that we were living in our RV full time. In the packing of boxes, some of my notes went missing and so if you have not heard from me and wanted specific information, please email or phone me again. Email is best, because I have a hard written copy of what you want.

Bev and I are going on a cruise this Saturday out of Sydney, via the Islands and end up back in Auckland on the 16th of December, so communications will be rather limited while we are on our cruise. In the meantime, the committee asked me to express our very best wishes to everyone in the Group and hope you all have a great Christmas and a relaxing new year in your American RV’s.

Our very best regards

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Comments in these Newsletters don’t reflect the views of the NZMCA. They are opinions expressed by owners of American RV’s and their experiences owning and maintaining their vehicles. Other owners may experience different results. For that reason American RV owners and others should conduct their own research and not make decisions based entirely on what is printed in these Newsletters.