

Buying Your RV

Buying a new or used RV is a very exciting life event. It may be as much excitement as you felt buying your first car or your first home. The excitement of achieving a dream of traveling in your RV to preferred destinations and experiences is a key driver to purchase the RV. The dream of your RV lifestyle is truly a dream, not a necessity. Buying that RV is something you really want to do, not something you have to do. Unlike a home or car that is needed for daily living, the RV is your dream for escape to a different style of life, if even for a short period of time. You have visions of seeing new places or visiting familiar places that provide a peace of mind away from the daily grind of life, a place to relax and forget all the troubles of the world or completely change your style of life as a “full timer”. The challenge to achieving this dream is buying the right RV for you and your family without buying “problems” that spoil the dream.

The Psychology of Buying a Dream

Even the most experienced RV enthusiast, me included, look at the RV we want to buy with a different pair of eyes than an uninterested third party. We get emotionally involved in the purchase process and begin to see all the positive aspects of this “dream” RV and begin to rationalize the negative aspects. It is even harder as a “newbie”, that buyer that has not had much experience with RV's and their components. The first time buyer is looking more at the RV from a comfort aspect and doesn't look “behind the cabinets” as a more experienced RV owner might. We tend to find all the things we like about the RV and ignore the things we don't like or know much about.

We do all the necessary research to determine load capacity, wheelbase, weight, features and functions to be well prepared for the identification of the unit we want. Or we may just find that perfect RV on a lot or in an ad while “just looking”. Whatever the method of locating that special RV, we get caught up in the excitement of finally achieving our dream of the RV lifestyle, whatever that may mean to us. In any case, this puts us in a very optimistic mindset to pursue achievement of our dream.

The Process of Buying a Dream RV

Once the dream RV is located, no matter how it happens, we pursue our inspection of the RV with the end objective in mind, accomplishment of our goal to purchase that RV. We consider the “asking price” against what our research has uncovered and the condition and positive aspects of the RV. We consider some of the negative issues concerning the RV, those that we see or know anything about, in relation to the price. Normally we spend a lot of time walking

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around, looking under, over and within the unit to satisfy ourselves that we have looked at everything. The seller has told us that everything works, or maybe some things don't, but we balance what we see against what we are told and what we know. We satisfy ourselves that we now know enough to begin negotiation of the purchase price to acquire this RV.

The Deal

We have done our research, inspected this RV, know the "asking price" and are now ready to begin the purchase process. We make a counter offer to the seller based on "our" knowledge of the condition of the RV and have adjusted for the negative aspects of the selected RV. The seller accepts or counters and the process repeats until a deal is done or you both walk away.

Once the seller accepts your offer you wonder if you really know everything about the RV that you should. You may or may not get a thorough "walk through" of the features and functions of the RV. Like many owners, the seller may not have shown you "everything" you need to know about the RV. You get to find those things out later as you use the RV.

The Better Way

The "better way" is to have an uninterested, qualified third party look at your selected RV to validate what you think you know about that RV and to disclose things you don't know. Another option is to have a very detailed inspection checklist and guide to methodically move you through all aspects of the RV inspection process. The RV Inspector, you or a professional, must look at the RV as an uninterested party and document everything that you discover about the RV. Once the inspection is completed, you then have the information that you need to make an informed decision regarding the purchase of the RV.

As a professional RV inspector, I inspect every aspect of an RV. The inspection takes approximately three to four hours to look at everything. All RV components are tested for working condition. The documented results are reviewed with the buyer and the buyer's questions regarding any aspect of the RV inspection are answered. The buyer can then determine how to proceed. A quality inspection takes time and proper equipment. Most of us spend time looking at the physical characteristics of the desired unit and may not inspect some of the basic components of the RV to know that "everything works". Simple things like testing every outlet to make sure there is power to the socket and that it is wired properly. Or testing the water pump and operating every faucet to make sure you have hot and cold water and that water is not leaking in the cabinets when the lines are under pressure. Or operating the water pump and looking at the fill inlet to see if water is backing out of the system due to a failed pressure valve in the pump.

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In many cases the seller is not well prepared for you to inspect the RV, especially if the RV is at the seller's home. The propane tanks may be empty so you will not be able to test anything needing propane. The amount of electrical current available to power the RV may be inadequate to run the air conditioner or other appliances to make sure that they operate properly. Conducting the inspection for a RV sold by an individual is a high risk proposition, unless you take your own propane and generator. It is difficult to fully test the RV when hooked to inadequate shore power when the A/C is running then quits because the feed line is melting or the circuit breaker keeps blowing or the house wiring starts smoking.

My recommendation is to have a professional RV inspector conduct the RV inspection for you. If you don't have access to a local inspection service, then purchase or develop a RV Inspection Guide or Checklist that can guide you through the process yourself. I have a detailed guide that I follow. I can't remember all the things that I have to check or haven't checked while conducting an inspection. The checklist provides a list of things that must be completed and until I have every thing checked, I still have work to do. It also provides a logical sequence of events that must occur for me to complete an inspection. If you don't purchase a checklist, at least create one of your own so that you know that you have checked everything that you wanted to inspect for that RV.

A Better Purchase Process

As discussed earlier, we are used to the process of researching, looking, inspecting and dealing. Once you have found the RV of your dreams, have inspected it and are ready to deal, I suggest the following process to give you more purchase negotiation options.

- Negotiate a sales price with the seller based on your initial evaluation, research and known facts, with the condition that you will have a thorough inspection conducted by a professional inspector or that you will return to conduct a more thorough inspection yourself. You have now stated that you agree to this purchase price, IF the inspection validates what the seller has told you and what you currently believe to be true about the RV.
- Following a thorough inspection, you now have several options:
 - Purchase – the inspection didn't uncover any significant issues that would result in concerns regarding the purchase. Shake hands with the seller and drive away in your RV.
 - Renegotiate – the inspection did uncover issues of concern that were not apparent during the initial inspection and may result in significant maintenance costs. Renegotiate a price to cover repair costs.

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- Walk away – the inspection identified significant issues that you do not want to address or the cost of repair no longer makes the RV desirable.

In any case, you have been able to conduct your initial evaluation of the RV and have negotiated a purchase price that is acceptable to you. In addition, you have been able to return to the RV to conduct a thorough inspection after properly preparing to do so. By defining the conditions of the purchase “up front”, you have created a situation where you can be better informed about the purchase of the selected RV.

About RVSurvey

RVSurvey provides a professional RV inspection service to RV buyers. RVSurvey was created to be the independent, uninterested third party to conduct an unbiased, structured and complete inspection of the RV selected by the customer, prior to final purchase. Our inspectors are qualified, experienced RV inspectors with the equipment to perform a complete RV inspection at the seller’s location. Our inspectors invite the client to be in attendance during the inspection process. Many of our client’s have stated that the experience of being present during the inspection has been worth the cost of the inspection alone, just for the educational value provided during the inspection.

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