



Basic Information for the GMC Motorhome Copilot

ESSENTIALS FOR GMC MOTORHOME DRIVERS

These 35-year-old coaches are not familiar machines to most of the younger service attendants. They can service most components if you can show them where they are. Seldom do non-GMC specialist service personnel know that there are four lube fittings on the rear suspension system. They are easy to get to for service but they will be missed if you do not point them out, as will the two places on the steering column.

Things you should know as a driver of a GMC Motorhome:

1. Fill it with gasoline. Fill it when it is down to 1/4 full on the main tank. When filling the tank, set the nozzle at its slowest setting and when it shuts off, let it “burp”, then fill some more. The filler neck is close to the driver’s window, and the tanks are in the rear. It takes a while for the air in the tanks and filler tube to vent.
2. Know how to open the front hoods and be familiar with what is there.
3. Know how to check the engine oil and be able to add oil if it is needed. Oil should be checked each morning before driving and every 300 to 500 miles while driving. The dip stick is long and you need to have a rag in your hand to handle it properly. Some parts of it are hot enough to cause you to get a bad burn and it is so long that it is difficult to see the marks on the end without having both hands available. If the engine is hot you need to pull the stick out and wipe it off and then re-insert it and pull it out in order to get a good reading on the markings. If it reads at the bottom or low mark it takes one quart to fill it. Never overfill it.
4. Know how to open the engine hatch (under the raised floor in the cockpit.)
5. Be able to check the automatic transmission fluid and add if needed. The transmission is checked when the engine is warm. The engine must be running and the shift lever in the park position. Here again you will, need a rag to wipe the stick and to keep from getting burned or dirty. It takes one pint of transmission fluid when the stick “reads” low; obviously more if it is below the low mark or doesn’t register on the stick at all. If the transmission is working properly seldom does it need fluid added. Being able to put fluid in it may enable you to get it to a place where it can be repaired.
6. Check the coolant and add, if needed, when serviced or when the temperature gauge shows a hot condition. Water or antifreeze is added to the overflow tank – never ever open a radiator when it is hot. The cooling system is under pressure like a pressure cooker and will boil over violently when the cap is removed if it is hot.



7. Check the tire pressure and add air if needed. Visually check each day or if driving feels different. Typical pressures range from 50 to 60 pounds, depending on the tires. Check when tires are at ambient temperature.
8. Be able to check the power steering fluid and add if needed.
9. Know where the brake master cylinder is located. When handling brake fluid, please be informed that *brake fluid is a good paint remover* so be careful not to spill it on painted surfaces.
10. Know where the rear bogies are lubricated — four places. Note that not all owners have installed the proper fittings to make them easy to lubricate.
11. Know where the steering column is lubricated — two places.
12. Know where the engine and house batteries are located and that there is a difference between the two. The automotive batteries provide cranking energy and can lose amperage quickly. The house batteries provide an even level of amperage over their charged life but little cranking energy.
13. Be sure the ride height is correct while traveling. One of the reasons for the leveling system is to keep the coach at a proper ride height while traveling. Measuring the distance from the road surface to the lower part of the frame just behind the rear wheels is a good way to be sure that it's adjusted properly. For traveling, the rear should appear to be lower than the front of the coach. When adjusted correctly the coach is easier to steer and improves handling of the vehicle in crosswinds or when being passed by a large truck.
14. Some owners have installed Schrader valves to put air into the air bags separate from the compressors built into the leveling system. This manual method of adding pressure to raise the suspension can be very helpful, especially if there's been a failure of the leveling system.

THE HOUSE PART OF THE MOTORHOME

Most GMC motorhomes have had many modifications made to the living areas. If you're a new owner it may be necessary to check with the previous owner for any non-standard things to do or tasks to perform.

Keeping things as simple as possible saves time. When arriving at a suitable campground location get reasonably level and plug in the electricity. Be sure the circuit breaker is off on the utility box before plugging in. After plugging in, turn the circuit breaker on. This procedure will reduce the risk of getting an electrical surge and harming the system.

Hooking up to shore water can make an enormous amount of water pressure available. If the coach plumbing should develop a leak you'll have a huge mess to deal with. If it doesn't leak, the high pressure in some campgrounds can cause a leak to develop in the motorhome's plumbing. For this reason some owners use the onboard water and pump instead of depending on the city system. That way, if there is a leak, you can hear the pump working continually. Even if you do not hear it, there are only 35 gallons of water that will seep should there be a leak while you are away. The safest thing is to turn off the water before leaving your coach. That includes turning



off the water pump and, if connected to the campground's supply, turning off the spigot. Using the water tank regularly keeps the water fresher and reduces the possibility of having nasty things growing in it.

It is better to dump the holding tank if the coach is driven a little distance to agitate the material in the tank. Hooking the sewer and leaving the drain valve open will cause the solid wastes to clog the holding tank. It would then take a fair amount of water to cleanly flush the tank of solid material. At the campground the best practice is to empty the holding tank(s) when necessary and never leave the valve open. This allows the tank to fill with a sufficient amount of waste water to properly remove the solids. Having a macerator makes the dumping process much easier and cleaner in addition to the other benefits of a macerator. Several owners do not put toilet paper in the toilet but have a small covered container and empty it every day or so with the other trash. However, if using RV toilet paper and following the practice of dumping the holding tank(s) when full then one shouldn't encounter a clogging problem.

DRIVING TIPS

Keep in mind that the GMC is larger than an automobile. This means that it needs more room for making turns, a wider and longer space to fit into when parking. Likewise, it requires more room when slowing down or coming to a stop.

1. Sit in the driver's seat and adjust everything for your comfort — seat position (distance from pedals and steering wheel), position of steering wheel, and outside and inside rearview mirrors should all be adjusted for your convenience and comfort while driving.
2. Before starting just sit there and look around to locate all the controls and gauges. If you don't know what something is, ask the primary driver to explain thing so you understand. The most important gauges are oil pressure, water temperature and gas. If your coach has a transmission temperature gauge check it occasionally. If your coach has a tachometer and vacuum gauge or separate gauges that perform the same functions, understand how to read them and what they mean for driving. For instance, the GMC will get better fuel economy if the vacuum is kept as close to normal as possible.
3. The way you see the road will be different than in your car. This is difficult to explain. When you are in your car, you are used to seeing the road and your position on the road in a certain way using the dash as a reference point. If you see the road the same way in the motorhome, your right side wheels will be off the road and you might be taking down mail boxes as a result. *It is better to feel like you are crowding the centerline that to be running off the right edge of the road.* If you have the standard GMC dash, line up the top left corner with the center line and you will have the coach about centered in the driving lane.
4. To make a turn you should feel like you're driving further into the intersection than you would in a typical automobile or light truck. The reason for this is the fact that you're sitting above the front wheels. They aren't in front of you.
5. Make wider turns. Because the GMC is longer, the tail end tends to cut across the turning arc more sharply than a car or light truck. You can take out a gas pump or pull into a tree rather



easily if you handle it like a typical automobile. If you get too close and hit the curb you might bend the bogies, which will cause handling problems and irregular or excessive tire wear.

6. Get familiar with the mirrors on both sides of the vehicle. The rear view mirror in the cockpit isn't much help with a vehicle of this size.
7. Keep in mind that the coach is tall. If you don't know it's total height (including air conditioner and storage pod) get help and measure it. It's a good idea to have the height posted somewhere near the driver seat for handy reference. Be careful when pulling under canopies or parking structures.
8. Allow yourself extra distance between you and the car in front (when rolling down the highway) or when bringing it to a full stop. Because the GMC weighs three or four times as much as your everyday vehicle it requires more room to stop. As long as you bring the coach to a typical stop you'll have breaking energy on all six wheels. If, however, you have to make a rapid, emergency-type stop the inertia and physics of the GMC results in having breaking energy on four wheels at best. Do yourself a favor, always keep this in mind and drive appropriately. If your coach has the new reaction arm system installed you'll notice a definite difference in braking. However, don't put yourself in danger of having an accident. Be sure not to tailgate.
9. When towing all wheels down or pulling a car on a dolly you can't back up without unhooking the towed vehicle. Keep in mind that you need to be able to pull through when parking the motorhome or stopping for fuel.
10. If you do unhook the tow and can back the coach, make sure the driver and the spotter agree on hand signals. Also, make sure the driver can see the spotter in a mirror. It is helpful to use walkie-talkies or cell phones for verbal instructions. One more thing, when backing have the spotter also watch the roofline of the GMC. It is easy to get so focused on where the body is going that one can forget about what is higher than the head. Don't just look down and around but also look up.

Many thanks to those who have contributed to this handout over the years.

