

Specification Rules Need Overhaul

The Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) claims to be the watchdog for the RV industry, yet we believe there are some specific areas in which they are falling down on the job. One problem in particular that we deal with every year when updating our RV ratings is the chaotic nature of brochure information. There's no standard when it comes to specifications. While some manufacturers do very well and include all the essential data for their RVs, many do not. Some provide sketchy information and even leave out critical measures such as overall length and GVWR. Others vary their terminology, making a guessing game of comparing data on different brands. Some provide no specs at all. If this is a headache for us, we can imagine what a nightmare it must be for you, the consumer.

One of the most serious areas of confusion among RVers is determining the actual weight of trailers and motor homes. Many manufacturers seem to take maximum advantage of that confusion, in part by using terms such as dry weight and curb weight and defining them as they wish. The RVIA promotes the term Unloaded Vehicle Weight (UVW) and defines it as the weight of the RV with full fuel, engine oil, and coolants (if required). Since current guidelines do not, however, address brochure information, most manufacturers print the UVW of their RV without options. In reality, when you drive the RV off the lot, it most probably will weigh more than the printed UVW — especially when it's built by a company whose brochures feature that great oxymoron, the "forced option".

RVIA has also promoted another term, Cargo Carrying Capacity (CCC), which is defined as the cargo capacity remaining after options, fuels and fresh water have been loaded. Motor home builders must also deduct the weight of passengers — based on sleeping positions — from the CCC. Few companies include CCC in their brochures, apparently because it makes their payloads appear smaller than when they use less realistic terms.

Since the RVIA does not enforce the use of consistent standards, any manufacturer trying to realistically represent their product is put at a competitive disadvantage because their numbers do not look as good as another manufacturer's to the typical consumer. For example, since many trailer buyers use the GVWR to determine what they can tow, some companies print unrealistically low GVWR's or simply don't print them at all. Problem solved! A lack of enforced standards has again left the company off the hook and left the consumer in confusion with no reliable reference points for making a comparison.

Has the RVIA — as an organization of supposedly concerned and conscientious RV manufacturers who desire to maintain and improve quality in the industry — become merely complacent and self-serving? It appears they have. They could take action to eliminate the chaos of brochure information by setting standards for specifications that need to be included in a manufacturer's brochure. They need to standardize terms so that everyone can understand them while discouraging such tactics as disguising old information to make it appear new. If the RVIA is to be effective, it needs to take a firmer stand on matters that directly affect the consumer. No one in the industry wants the Federal government to step in. However, as consumer complaints and accident statistics pile up, that may just happen. ■

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