



THE INSPECTION CHECKLIST
I GIVE MY OWN CUSTOMERS

Pre-Purchase RV Inspection Checklist

What to look for before you sign anything — from a working RV salesman.

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HOW TO USE THIS CHECKLIST

Most buyers walk through an RV without a system, get distracted by the new-car smell, and miss things that cost thousands later. Forty-five minutes with this checklist will tell you more about a unit than a two-hour walkthrough without it. Print it. Bring it. Use it on every unit you look at.

1. Exterior — Roof, Slides, Body

Roughly half of every expensive surprise lives outside. Spend 10-15 minutes here.

Roof

- Walk the roof if it's rated to support you (or use a tall ladder). Look for spongy spots, depressions, or soft patches.
- Inspect every penetration — A/C unit, vents, antennas, refrigerator vent, plumbing stacks. Sealants should be smooth and pliable, not cracked or pulling away.
- Check the seam between the roof membrane and the front/rear caps. This is the #1 leak point.
- Note any patches, recoats, or eternabond strips — those mark previous problem areas.

Slides & Body

- With the seller's permission, extend every slide-out fully. Listen for grinding or struggling motors.
- Wipe slide seals with your hand — should feel pliable, not dry or cracked. Tears = future leaks.
- Slide topper fabric: extend and look for sun damage, sagging, or pinholes.
- Sidewalls: look at the panels in raking sunlight from a steep angle. Waves or bulges = delamination (\$3K-\$8K to fix).
- Trim and seam caulk on all four corners, top and bottom.
- Awning: extend it fully. Check fabric for tears and the arms for play.
- Open and close every window. Check rubber seals.

TIP FROM STEVE

Run your hand along the roof seam where the AC unit mounts. If it feels sticky or you see discoloration, that's an active sealant breach. Walk away or get a written estimate before you negotiate.

2. Tires & Undercarriage

Five-minute inspection. Saves more lives than any other section.

Tires

- Read the DOT date code on EVERY tire (4-digit number after "DOT" — first two digits = week, last two = year).
- Tires older than 5 years are suspect. Older than 7 years will fail you on a hot highway, regardless of tread.
- Look at sidewalls for spider-web cracking, bulges, or dry rot.
- Tread depth and EVEN wear across the tire (uneven wear = alignment or axle issue).
- Spare tire exists, is inflated, and isn't itself ancient.

Undercarriage & Frame

- Underbelly material: any tears, sagging, or visible repair tape mark prior problems.
- Frame rails for rust, especially at welded crossmembers and around the axles.
- Suspension components: leaf springs, shackles, equalizer, U-bolts. Look for cracked or missing parts.
- Hitch / king pin (5th wheel) for wear and grease.
- Tongue jack (travel trailer) operates smoothly through full range.
- Stabilizer jacks: extend all four. Check for bent shafts or seized motors.

TIP FROM STEVE

Tires under 5 years old SHOULD be safe. Tires over 7 years old WILL fail you on a hot Texas highway. Don't trust tread depth — trust the date code. If a seller pushes back when you ask about tire age, that's your answer.

3. Interior Systems — Electrical, Plumbing, Propane

Bring an outlet tester (\$5 at any hardware store). It pays for itself once.

12V & 110V Electrical

- Plug into shore power. Test EVERY 110V outlet with a 3-light tester. Many used RVs have at least one mis-wired outlet.
- Disconnect shore, switch to 12V battery. Test all interior lights, fans, water pump, slides, jacks.
- Check battery age sticker; voltage at rest should be 12.6V+. Below 12.4V = sulfated/dying.
- Inverter / converter operating? Listen for fan; check the panel readout if equipped.
- All USB ports work?
- LED control panel readouts (tank levels, battery, water pump) function?

Plumbing

- Water pump primes within 30 seconds and holds pressure when no faucets are open.
- Run hot and cold at every faucet. Hot water within 20 minutes (gas) or 45 (electric).
- Check under every sink for drips or water staining.
- Toilet flushes, seals, and holds water in the bowl.
- Outdoor shower / kitchen works (if equipped).
- Black tank flush valve operates without leaking.

Propane

- Tanks present, secured, and not past 12-year recertification date (look for stamp).
- Propane detector beeps when test button is pressed.
- Stove ignites on every burner.
- Furnace lights and runs to setpoint.
- Water heater fires on gas mode.

TIP FROM STEVE

Bring a \$5 outlet tester from the hardware store. Half the used RVs I see have at least one outlet wired wrong — and you won't notice until something fries. Test every plug, every time.

4. Appliances

If the seller won't let you run things, that tells you what you need to know.

- Refrigerator: should be running when you arrive. Should hold 38°F or lower after 24 hours. Test on both gas and electric if it's a 2-way.
- Microwave runs a full minute and the turntable spins.
- Range / oven works on gas (and 110V if dual). Check the broiler.
- Roof A/C(s): every unit blows cold within 5 minutes. Big rigs may have two.
- Furnace cycles to setpoint. No popping, no fuel smell.
- Water heater works on BOTH gas and electric (if dual-mode).
- Washer / dryer: run a short cycle if seller permits.
- TV, stereo, sound system, exterior speakers all work.
- Awning lights, exterior LED strip, security lights.

5. Tanks & Water Systems

Open every valve. A stuck valve is a \$300-\$600 fix.

- Fill the fresh water tank. No leaks, water clear from spigots.
- Grey tank: drain valve operates without leaking.
- Black tank: drain valve operates without leaking. Bring an outdoor sniff test.
- Tank monitor reads accurately (test by adding water).
- Hot water heater drain plug accessible and not stripped.
- No signs of past freeze damage on lines (split PEX, repaired joints).
- If equipped: heated tank pads operate when toggled.

TIP FROM STEVE

Two non-negotiable rules of mine. One: if the seller won't let you run the fridge for 24 hours before you commit, walk away. A bad fridge is a \$2,000 surprise. Two: open every tank valve before you buy. Sellers will swear a stuck valve "just needs lube." It usually doesn't.

6. Paperwork & Documentation

The 10-minute section that protects you for years.

- VIN on title matches VIN on unit (door jamb sticker AND frame stamp on travel trailers; data plate on motorhomes).
- Title is clean: no salvage, no flood, no lien-holder.
- All keys present: ignition (if motorhome), entry door, every storage compartment, propane lock.
- All remotes accounted for: A/C, TV, stereo, awning, slides, exterior lighting.
- Owner's manual present (or accessible online — write down model numbers).
- Warranty documents: what's transferable to a second owner?
- Recent service records, especially for major components (axles, generator, slides).
- Recall verification: search the VIN at [nhtsa.gov/recalls](https://www.nhtsa.gov/recalls) before you sign.
- Registration current and tags valid through your buying month.
- Insurance transition plan in place (don't drive it home uninsured).

A LITTLE EXTRA FROM STEVE

Always run a free VIN check at [nhtsa.gov](https://www.nhtsa.gov) before you sign. Open recalls don't always show up on dealer paperwork — and a recall on a major component can change your math completely.

7. Walk-Around Photo Checklist

Take every shot below BEFORE you sign. Phone storage is cheap. Surprises are not.

- All four exterior corners.
- Roof from a ladder, all four directions; close-ups of every penetration and the front/rear caps.
- Each slide fully extended (one shot per slide).
- Awning extended.
- Every tire's tread, sidewall, AND DOT date stamp.
- Hitch / king pin and tongue jack.
- Underbelly: front, middle, rear.
- Each interior room (wide shot).
- Each appliance running — short video clip is best.
- Tank monitor panel reading.
- VIN sticker (door jamb) and frame VIN stamp.
- Title (front AND back).
- Odometer / hour meter (motorhomes).

Walk-Away Criteria

Any one of these = pass on the unit. No exceptions.

- Soft spots in the roof.
- Tires older than 5 years AND seller won't replace them.
- Title not clean (salvage, flood, or active lien).
- VIN on title doesn't match VIN on unit.
- Refrigerator doesn't reach 38°F after 24 hours of running.
- Any tank valve leaks during your test.
- Slide seals are torn or hardened.
- Active sealant breach on the roof that the seller won't repair before purchase.

Want a second opinion?

Text me your stock # before you sign anything. No pressure, no obligation — I'll tell you what to ask, what to walk away from, and what's a fair number.

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This checklist is provided for educational purposes. It's not a substitute for a certified RV inspection on a unit you're seriously buying — for any RV over \$25,000 I recommend hiring an NRVA-certified inspector (~\$300-\$500). Steve Flowers / ArkLaTexRV.com is independent of any specific dealer.