How to Spot a Well-Built RV

By

JR Consumer Resources Inc.

The information contained in this RV Report is a sample of our construction chapter taken from our best-selling RV Comparison Guides. “Motorhome Comparison Guide” and “Travel Trailer Comparison Guide”.

If you find the information in this report to be helpful we are confident you’ll find our RV Comparison Guides to be a wealth of information. Remember this is just a small section taken from our books.

About the Author – Hello my name is Randall Eaton, President and senior editor of JR Consumer Resources Inc. I am a research analyst and a best-selling author. My specialty is uncovering the truth about a particular industry and publishing the results. I published two best-selling books regarding manufactured and modular homes in 2000. Both books were the first of their kind and have helped tens of thousands of home buyers. Both books did the impossible by rating individual housing manufacturers throughout the United States and Canada.

It’s ironic that many of our readers who purchased my housing publications suggested I write a comparison guide on RVs. This confirmed my initial thoughts about such a task, so with the help of my research team, I decided to start researching the RV industry in 2004. Our goal was to rate popular RV manufacturers in the United States and Canada. What started out as an idea turned into a reality when we published our first RV Comparison in 2006. Today we rate over 105 different RV manufacturers in North America. We are constantly updating our RV Guides to bring our readers relevant information and provide what we feel to be fair and balanced reviews from an objective point of view.

Motorhome Construction Methods

What matters most?

A common misconception with most new RV buyers is they rate the floorplan as the most important aspect in their RV purchase. It is estimated that over 90% of new RV buyers focus more on floorplans then anything else. With experienced or educated RV buyers it is estimated that over 90% focus on the chassis or frame, drive train, engine, suspension and exterior construction when selecting a particular brand. Bottom line, what’s underneath your motorhome, trailer or fifth wheel is the most important aspect and should take top
priority in your decision process. Focusing on these important features will ultimately determine how satisfied you are with your purchase.

What components of a motorhome constitute the chassis?

A motorhome can be divided into two main components the body and the chassis. The chassis basically includes the frame, engine, transmission, axles, wheels, brakes, cooling system, electrical system, steering system, suspension and instrumentation. Looking at a motorhome chassis is like looking at a home that has not been constructed yet.

We wish there was some type of comparison chart or consumer guide for motorhome chassis but there is not. Each chassis design is extremely difficult to evaluate because there are so many variables. It’s also subjective depending on who you talk to, thus the reason for no comparison guide. We will attempt in this report to provide some needed information that will hopefully shed some light on the subject.

**Frame Rail and Semi-Monocoque**: The chassis under all Class A motorhomes today starts out as a basic **Frame Rail**, as the picture above shows. 99% of all RV manufacturers will take the basic frame rail chassis and incorporate cross braces and bridge-like construction in the bottom half of the chassis, so the strength lies not in the narrow center of the frame, but throughout its weight distribution. By doing this, the steel structure absorbs and resists the twist and turns of the road ahead without relying on non load-bearing components to do the work. This advanced engineering is challenging and time consuming but results in a safe, reliable and high-performance motorhome. This type of chassis is referred to as, “**Semi-Monocoque**”.

Semi-monocoque construction technique is like that of a steel bridge with support elements diagonally placed between vertical and horizontal elements. Today most manufacturers use a semi-monocoque type chassis as the picture to the left shows. Many consider a full or semi-monocoque design superior to a standard frame rail design. This type of design has become common place in the industry and is considered to be main stream.

Each manufacturer has their particular chassis that either they have designed and built, purchased from a reliable chassis manufacturer or purchased a chassis and then modified it for their motorhomes they are selling. There is also a difference between Class A Diesel and Class A Gas chassis and who builds them. All of this is important information for the consumer to understand before purchasing a motorhome.
Motorhome exterior wall construction - What to look for?

**Aluminum or steel versus wood exterior construction:** Both framing materials have their good points and bad points. Wood has traditionally been the material of choice for lower-costing RVs because it’s cheap and easy to work with using inexpensive tools and non-skilled labor. Yet, wood framing can also be found in upper-end units, because it’s also a good choice for RV construction. Wood framing can last as long as aluminum or steel framing assuming it does not get wet.

Aluminum or steel framing has long been associated with more expensive RVs, at least partly because it generally costs more to work with aluminum or steel and requires some specialized equipment and skilled labor. Aluminum and steel are commonly used for RV framing, but due to the extra costs involved with the material and fabrication they usually apply to mid-range-and-above products. Steel is almost always welded, but you may find aluminum that’s welded, screwed or riveted together. All such systems work. The picture to the right shows aluminum construction, (6-sided).

**Travel Trailer Construction Methods**

What to look for in a quality trailer frame

There is no question that what is underneath your trailer or fifth wheel will determine how it preforms over time and the ability to withstand the rigors of use, enabling you to get the biggest bang for your money. There are many different types when it comes to trailer frames but the most common are:

- Tubular frame, (steel or aluminum)
- I-beam, (steel)
- Stamped frame (steel)
- C-channel frame (steel)
- L-Channel (steel)

The structural integrity of any frame or chassis will vary depending on the size, length and floor plan of the unit and its classification. For example; **lightweight** trailers with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 5,500 lbs. or less will probably use a 2”, 4” or 6” aluminum tubular frame.

When it comes to larger trailers or fifth wheels most manufacturers will use tubular steel, I-Beam, C-Channel or L-Channel construction for their frames. Tubular steel is the most rugged and is used primarily in upper-end products. I-beam construction is more prevalent in the industry followed by C-Channel or L-Channel construction. The strengthening members or cross members that crisscross the frame can be made out of steel or
aluminum. This is a good question to ask your salesperson and how far apart the cross members are set. The closer set they are the more stable they will be.

Another important aspect of any frame is the quality of welds and technique used. Some manufacturers may tack weld portions of the frame while other factories will use a bead weld at all intersections and cross members to the frame. You may ask your salesperson about this but the only way to know for sure is to visit a factory to see for yourself how the frames are welded.

**Aluminum siding verses fiberglass siding**

Travel trailers and fifth wheels use different types of siding on their exteriors to protect the unit from weather and provide some insulation to keep the interiors at livable temperatures. The two most common siding materials are aluminum and fiberglass, both of which have benefits and shortcomings.

**Aluminum Siding Types:** Aluminum trailer siding is either corrugated or smooth. Corrugated panels attach to the exterior of the trailer in interlocking sections and are typically found on inexpensive or low-end trailers. More deluxe trailers with higher price tags usually have smooth aluminum siding attached by rivets or other metal fasteners. Airstream RV is one manufacturer that uses smooth aluminum siding on all their units, which makes them unique and the exteriors seem to hold up over time.

**Pros and Cons of Aluminum:** Corrugated aluminum siding panels are easy to replace, but smooth or polished aluminum replacement usually requires the skills of an automotive technician. Aluminum siding is lighter than fiberglass, so trailers can be pulled behind vehicles with lighter tow capacities. The light weight of aluminum provides the option of buying a bigger trailer than compared to laminated fiberglass siding that increases the weight. Aluminum siding is generally less costly than fiberglass. Aluminum is prone to denting and this can be an issue if stuck in a hail storm. Another problem with aluminum is the rivets used to secure the panels can become loose over time and allow water to enter the unit which many cause water damage.

**Fiberglass Siding Types:** Although fiberglass is available in many styles, the most popular siding used today is laminated fiberglass, which is typically used on upper-end models. Most factories offer an upgrade by adding Gelcoat to the finish which protects the fiberglass, maintains a shiny surface and prevents fading to some degree. Fiberglass without a Gelcoat finish is not as smooth and a bit rougher. Another type of fiberglass siding is called, “**Fiberglass Molded Shell**” which is typically used on smaller light weight or ultra-lite trailers.
Authors Comments: My staff and I hope you enjoyed this short but informative report. I thought you would enjoy this RV article I recently wrote, you may find it interesting:

Is an RV Right for You? RVs are gaining traction again as the industry is rebounding after the economy’s plunge drove previously growing sales off a cliff.

Now 8.7 million American families own RVs, according to the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association. If you're thinking about joining this crowd, consider carefully. Buying one is a big investment. RVs can cost more than many people pay for their homes, and with higher gas prices life on the road can be a bit more expensive.

RVs were once thought to be the toys of older drivers. But the industry association now says most RVs are owned by drivers from 35 to 54 years old and the largest percentage-gain in ownership is for people 35 years and younger.

Whatever their age, owners say it's all about freedom. RVers go where and when they want, bypass airport security, avoid luggage fees and restrictions, tow the family car, and have room for kids and pets. So, is an RV right for you? If you can answer yes to most of the questions below than an RV may be in your future:

- Do you desire to see the country?
- Do you enjoy visiting with people and making new friends?
- Do you need to relax and enjoy the outdoors?
- Do you enjoy preparing your own food?
- Do you like sleeping in your own bed?
- Would you like to take your pet(s) when you travel?
- Do you have hobbies like ATVing, skiing, golfing or mountain biking?
- Have a desire to spend more time with family in the great outdoors?

Best Regards,
Randall Eaton
Factory Ratings – Not Sure Where to Start?

Find the best manufacturers and avoid the rest. Our RV guides rate all the major manufacturers that build: (Click on links below to learn more).

- Class A
- Class C
- Class B/B+
- Travel Trailers
- Fifth Wheels
- Toy Haulers
- Ultra-Lites

Our RV Comparison Guides will help you select the best and most reliable RV manufacturers from the last 9 years. We rate all the major RV manufacturers in the United States & Canada.

RV Buying Secrets

What the Dealers Don’t Want You to Know?

The key to getting the lowest price on a new or used RV is to know how much negotiating room you have.

Our E-book will empower you with the information you need to negotiate the best deal possible.

To learn more Click Here

Here is what is included in our in our E-book:

♦ What is a fair profit for the dealer?
♦ Top 10 biggest buying mistakes!
♦ 8 Steps to follow when shopping for an RV.
♦ How to determine my RV dealer’s invoice.
♦ Tips for securing the best RV loan.
♦ How to negotiate an awesome deal.
RV Model Ratings:

Having model specific ratings to determine the overall quality of unit along with dealers invoice or true wholesale values is a win, win situation. Our reports will help you select the right model with detailed ratings. There is no other service that provides this type of information.

Our RV Reports will help you make an informed purchase decision with:

- Construction ratings
- Dependability ratings
- Customer satisfaction ratings
- Payload ratings
- Intended use
- Design & style ratings
- Warranty issues or recalls
- Factory article with comments
- 15-year depreciation chart
- Dealer’s invoice, new models
- Real wholesale values, used models

To learn more about our RV Reports Click Here

Find Reliable RV Dealers – Top-100 Dealers in U.S.

Because RVs have so many different components, electrical, plumbing, appliances, generators and electronics they tend to have more problems as compared to automobiles. As an RV ages, problems can increase with more use due to traveling. Although this risk is always present, you can minimize it somewhat by dealing only with reputable RV dealers.

To learn more Click Here
RV Extended Warranties

For some, an RV is a major investment; costing as much as a home or even more! Extended RV Service Contracts - or "Warranties" as they are commonly referred to - can be an excellent way to protect your investment.

Discover which warranty companies provide the best coverage at the lowest price. There is a huge profit margin for RV dealers and many buyers end up spending a lot more for this service.

To learn more Click Here

JR Consumer Resources Inc.
DBA: RVReviews.net
Phone: 888.770.2830