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Overview: the
jobs that have to
be done

Most professional
builders commission
upholstery specialists to
make the seating.

Wiring loom
manufacture and
electronic installations
are usually entrusted to
outside specialists.

THE STRATEGIES

There are a number of approaches that you can follow when building a motorcaravan. Here are some of the options.

The point was made in the previous chapter that DIY and professional builders both use outside help. As a rule, manufacturers order specially made wiring harnesses, re-upholstered cab seats, modified chassis components and prefabricated doors.

In a similar way, a DIY builder can also buy-in products and skills. Without doubt, this is a logical way to proceed, but you still have to have a basic knowledge about practices and procedures. After all, it is essential to create a vehicle which is safe on the road and safe inside the living space. Comfort is also important.

To fulfil these objectives, you need to have an understanding of water services, electrical circuits, gas systems, heating, and refrigeration.

These topics are discussed in *The Motor Caravan Manual* and its content helps to underpin the practical procedures presented in this book. Even if you've gained experience



from carrying out DIY work around the home, bear in mind that many of the practices and products used in motorcaravan construction are substantially different.

Once a basic understanding has been acquired, you are then in a position to decide which jobs you're prepared to tackle yourself and which ones you will get others to carry out for you. At that point in your pre-planning, it's time to find out about the services available from specialists, and to reflect on different building strategies.

Strategy One: rebuilding an older model

If you choose the refurbishment route to ownership, be prepared for problems in tracing replacement parts. Sometimes you'll find broken plastic mouldings on the exterior like a split body panel on a coachbuilt and it is often impossible to buy a replacement. These problems become especially acute when the original manufacturer is no longer in business. So how can you solve a problem like that?

Should you have a difficulty replacing unavailable body panels, a specialist like V&G near Peterborough can come to your rescue. This company has skilled staff who are able to repair badly damaged panels and can also recreate replicas. Let's suppose that an acrylic-capped ABS plastic side skirt on a coachbuilt model is badly split and is beyond normal repair. The strategy adopted by V&G staff is to create a GRP mould from the remnants. Using this mould, they can then cast a copy moulding in GRP which is all ready to fit. By applying a colour-matched paint, the replacement will look like new. (See the accompanying Tip box)

In a lot of cases, internal components can similarly be replaced with recreated copies that V&G will build to order. Items like a shower tray, a moulded bathroom cabinet or a plastic kitchen sink can be built in GRP as a direct replacement for cracked units. What is more, these replacements are often more

Technical Note

TERMINOLOGY

- A mould is used to make plastic components such as a motorcaravan's external panels and internal items like shower trays.
- The product created from a mould is referred to as the moulding.
- GRP stands for glass reinforced plastic although many people use the imprecise term fibre-glass. This type of moulding is easy to identify because its reverse face is normally quite rough and fibres of chopped-strand glass mat can be seen.
- An acrylic-capped ABS moulding is usually shiny on both faces and it's a completely different material. Many modern cars have ABS mouldings for parts of the body such as the wings. However, some mouldings are created with a relief finish and these are commonly used for vehicle bumpers.

robust than the original components.

Strategy Two: using part-build specialists

In Britain, many different types of manufacturer are involved in the construction of motorcaravans. These range from the major manufacturers like Auto-Sleepers, Auto-Trail, Auto-Cruise, the Explorer Group, and the Swift Group, whose annual output accounts for hundreds of motorhomes, to the small-scale manufacturers who might build no more than a dozen vehicles a year; these specialists are important.

It is the small-scale operators who are often willing to help self-builders and you will see advertisements for their services in specialist motorcaravan magazines. Several of these constructors offer what is described as 'part-build' assistance to DIY enthusiasts.

This service can prove invaluable so it is helpful to get in touch with companies such as Rainbow Conversions in Cambridgeshire, Leisuredrive FG in Bolton, Magnum Mobiles in Grimsby, Middlesex Motorcaravans in Edgware, Young Conversions in Bletchley,



and many others who can carry out tasks that you don't feel qualified to tackle yourself.

The extent of assistance varies, of course, and you need to discuss your requirements with as many specialists as you can find. For instance, you might only want a GRP high-top roof fitted to a van. Several small-scale manufacturers will do this for you. Alternatively, if you want an elevating roof assembled, fewer companies offer this service, but Middlesex Motorcaravans is a manufacturer which can install one of these for a client.

When contemplating fitting-out the inside, many different tasks are involved. Let's imagine a self-builder who is a qualified gas engineer by trade and whose daily work often involves installations with LPG (liquefied petroleum gas). A person like this would have no difficulty fitting a gas cooker or connecting up the gas supply to a refrigerator. However,

A GRP mould is being prepared for the manufacture of a high-top roof moulding.

The part-build specialist, Young Conversions, tackles personalised projects for clients.

