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TRACKING DOWN MATERIALS

Purchasing materials for a self-build project isn't always straightforward and this chapter looks at ways of finding the parts that you need.

With so many well-stocked DIY superstores established in our towns, you'd imagine that getting hold of materials for a motorhome project would be fairly easy. But that is not the case. The problem arises because many of the products used for home improvement work are *not* appropriate for use in motorcaravans.

This usually boils down to the matter of weight. Take veneered chipboard, for example, which is frequently used by DIY enthusiasts. Here's a timber-based product which seldom twists or warps. It is readily available, surprisingly inexpensive, and chipboard panels can be found in cabinets, tables and shelves in our homes. However, this product should not be used in motorcaravans because it is heavy and that is why professional manufacturers use special lightweight plywoods instead.

Many years ago, hardboard was also used by caravan constructors, but that is comparatively heavy as well. In its place, the material used for lining interiors is 3mm faced plywood. The product is shown in the concluding photo sequence of the previous chapter as a lining for an internal wall before the installation of a Seitz S4 window. The material is incredibly light and on one face it carries a decorative finish. Sometimes a plasticised print resembling woodgrain is used; other times it is finished in a light pastel shade appropriate for walls or ceilings. Not surprisingly, it is a product used by virtually every caravan and motorhome manufacturer but you won't find it stocked in your local DIY store.

Looking for product suppliers

Finding the right products can be difficult and searches have to be conducted in many different directions. For example, you will find that some of the products used in boat building and coach conversion can also be used in motorhome projects.

Oddly enough, some motorcaravan manufacturers seem reluctant to pursue alternative supply avenues; others are more thorough in the search for components. Murvi Motorcaravans, for example, came across salt and water-resistant external TV fittings designed for boats that were ideal for installation in their award-winning Morello conversion. In the Auto-Trail 2006 range of coachbuilt motorhomes, domestic door handle assemblies have been fitted instead of the less-sturdy catches more commonly specified. Similarly, AutoCruise CH has recently been fitting brushed stainless steel taps normally only fitted in expensive boats.

It certainly pays to look far and wide for the parts that you want and one of the best ways to start is to attend a range of exhibitions and shows.

Exhibitions and outdoor shows

Exhibitions present more than an opportunity to see finished products like boats, motorcaravans, coaches or cars; they also draw attention to individual components. Here are some events to consider when your project is at its planning stage.

■ **BOAT SHOWS** present an excellent opportunity to see fixtures and fittings that can be used in motorhomes. Of course, keeping a close watch on the weight of accessories isn't such a critical issue when you're building a motorcruiser. There's no doubt too, that the prices of components used in the marine industry are often higher.

That said, there are still many items worth noting. For example, LED internal lights are starting to appear in motorcaravans but they have been fitted in boats for several years. Other products like water pumps, solar panels,

chargers, power inverters, bunk bed systems and so on are also worth checking.

These are some of the obvious items; others are rather more subtle. For example, when the author built a Starcraft campervan, considerable time was spent searching for a flexible 'D' section to cover an untidy external joint where the GRP roof moulding was bonded to the sides. Eventually, a black rubber moulding was found on sale at a marine suppliers. The trim was sold from the roll and used as a rubbing strip to fit on the gunwales of pleasure boats. In that context it protects the side of vessels that are moored against a quay; on the Starcraft, it effectively covered a joint that had been poorly manufactured.

■ **KIT CAR SHOWS** are usually outdoor events and these are attended by a variety of component manufacturers. There's usually hardware on sale like door handles, stainless steel fixings, road lamps, upholstery trims and so on. Here are further examples of products worth noting.

In the previous chapter, reference was made to a flexible 'P'-trim material that's often called wing piping. This was used when the body of the Mystique was coupled to the cab. Then there's the paddle-type door catch used on the Mystique which was also purchased from Europa, a kit car component specialist. So, too, were the marker lamps which are mounted near the roof on the rear wall of the vehicle.

Also bear in mind that the owners of kit cars are usually allowed free entry to these shows. This concession brings them out in force and their parked vehicles are an attraction in themselves.

Accordingly, if you were to visit one of the larger shows, you might see examples of Rickman Rancher and Starcraft self-built campervans. A chat with the owners is often quite revealing.

■ **BUILDING EXHIBITIONS** like Interbuild are normally intended for members of the trade, but there's seldom any check on the credentials of visitors. The truth is that people seeking an entry to these kinds of events *are* likely to be potential purchasers in one way or another.

Perhaps there are fewer products here which have a place in motorcaravan conversion work and the issue of weight was discussed earlier. On the other hand, many of the sealants, adhesives and mastics made by



The door catch with its stainless-steel paddle-flap was purchased from Europa, a kit car component supplier.



manufacturers such as Hodgsons and Sika are used in both the construction of buildings as well as the production of caravans and motorhomes.

Security fittings are worth noting, too, and domestic window bolts can be used to secure doors or external locker lids on motorcaravans.

Owners' cars gain free entry at most kit car shows; look out for Starcraft and Rancher motorhomes and have a chat with the owners.

Using a domestic security bolt



To supplement the locking latch on this entrance door, two domestic security bolts were fitted as well.



Before insulating and lining the door, a hardwood block was bonded to receive the bolt using UPol B glass-reinforced polyester paste.