

Do you need an RV?

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Thanks to Richard Wagar for providing this article. Richard has crewed 8 RAAMs and driven the RV each time. He's back again in 2008 for another go!

The following are some tips, hints and experiences that I have gathered in my 8 years of driving an RV for RAAM.

First of all, do you really need an RV? An RV is like a mother ship where you can go to rest and sleep during the off shift, where you can eat and relax "off line". If you are in solo RAAM, an RV is very helpful and gives you some flexibility in resting rider and crew if no motels are available in the area where you need to go "down". If you are in team RAAM an RV, in my opinion, is a must. It gives the riders and crew that are off duty a place to eat and sleep as you are going down the road. I have also used the RV to do the shopping and laundry as we go, for solo RAAM.

Where do you get an RV? The least expensive way is to borrow one from a friend or relative. As with any RV, check it out before you commit because some RV layouts do not lend themselves to the RAAM adventure. You need one that is large enough to handle all the crew and rider/riders and all of their gear. I tend to favor the Class C type of RV, that's the one with a bed over the cab. In this layout you have that bed, a bed in the back, the couch and table that also makes a bed. I don't like to use the table for a bed unless it's needed. Keep it as a place for folks to eat and do paper work, etc.

If you can't borrow one the next thing is to rent one. This can be expensive but is cheaper than buying one. There are many places to rent and many prices. I tend to favor a national rental company, such as Cruise America, that has nationwide support in case of trouble. I had a Cruise America motor home break down in Kansas one year, on a Friday night, and in less than 24 hours they had a replacement to me and we were on the road again. (The rider and vans had kept going.) These may be a little more costly but knowing that support is behind me is well worth it. When you pick up the RV the rental company will have an orientation to show you how to operate everything. It's best to have 2 or 3 people go through this as each one will remember different things. Hint: be sure that there is a fresh water hose and sewer discharge hose supplied with the unit.

Do you have drivers that are experienced in RVs? If so, great! If not, don't panic. They drive much like a car – only taller, wider, longer and braking distances are longer – so drive defensively. Always remember your size, watch for overhanging awnings, branches etc., watch the rear end as you maneuver around, and remember the outside mirrors are wider than the RV and can be whacked on roadside signs, bridges and the like.

Some things that the person in charge of the RV needs to keep in mind: The following systems – gasoline, propane, fresh water, gray/black water and battery systems. First, gasoline makes the whole system work. It not only fuels the engine to propel the RV, it also fuels the generator which in turn powers the air conditioner and microwave. Keep in

mind when the fuel level drops down to about $\frac{1}{4}$ of a tank the *generator will not run!* This is a safety feature so you do not run out of fuel while just running the generator. The propane fuels the refrigerator, hot water heater, stove and the furnace. You also need battery power to ignite the propane in these fixtures. The water system consists of three main parts – fresh, gray and black water holding tanks. The fresh water feeds the shower, toilet, hot water tank and both sinks. The water pump has to be turned on before the fresh water system will work. Conserve the fresh water as it will flow down the drain into and fill up the gray or black water tanks. The gray water tank contains the water from the shower and sinks. The black water tank holds the water from the toilet. Be very conservative in the use of these systems, as the gray and black water tanks have to be dumped and the fresh water refilled, probably at least once a day. In the West it is not too hard to find an RV dump site but that gets harder the further East you go. When I am driving for a RAAM team, I limit the use of the shower and toilet to just the riders. The crew can use a nearby tree or most time-stations have a restroom nearby. The RV does not have the capacity for all the crew to use the facilities. Most units have a monitor panel to show the levels in the tanks; use them as a guide, but don't believe them. Haven't seen one yet that is accurate. You just have to keep in mind how much water you have used and how it was used. The RV rental place will explain how to use these systems. Pay attention as how to light the systems that use propane, for example, and how to hook up the hoses, etc.

On the solo RAAMs I have worked with, the rider has the priority of the back bedroom and the restroom, On team RAAMs the riders have exclusive use of the back bedroom and restroom. Hint: when you are driving and someone is sleeping in the back bed, remember to drive smoothly, i.e: watch speed around corners and bumps, as the long overhang at the rear of some RVs will accentuate the bounce and cause some sleepers to become airborne!

When stocking the RV prior to the start of RAAM, label each cupboard with the contents so others can find what they need when in a hurry. It's not too hard to keep the RV clean and tidy if everyone pitches in and helps. It's a good idea to have a small broom or a whisk broom to sweep out the place. I have, and have seen others, get down on their hands and knees with a damp paper towel to mop the floor when it gets bad. Only takes a couple of minutes, and does wonders to clean up the rig. Another hint: a towel folded up and placed on the bottom step of the RV will help catch some stuff, and whenever laundry is done, just throw it in.

I think the most important thing to remember when using an RV is this. *Be constantly aware of how big you are and how much space you are taking up on this earth.*