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INSIDE:

MAINTENANCE SCHEDULE

COACH TALK

- SWITCHERS
- SPEAKER WIRING
- HOLDING TANK
- GMC MODELS
- HOUSE BATTERIES
- 4D
- GOLF CART
- FURNACE
- TEMPERATURE
- STEERING
- BOX LEAK
- GARAGE DOOR
- WATER HEATERS
- ELECTRIC
- LP-GAS
- DEAD BATTERIES

GMC MOTORHOME SERVICE FACILITIES

WHAT'S NEW

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS

INTERNET ACCESS

DON'T HIT IT WITH A HAMMER

by Walt Sener

The contoured GMC Motorhome screen door was the brainchild of one Alex Birch. He was an invaluable member of the engineering team responsible for the design and production of the inimitable GMC Motorhome. As an aside, Alex will admit only that the Birchaven is purported to bear his name. But first it is necessary to discuss a rather basic hand tool — the familiar hammer.

An aeronautical apprentice spends many hours acquiring knowledge relative to the proper use of hand tools, theory of flight, airfoils, engines and related integrated aircraft systems. The engine, for example, must be unquestionably reliable in every respect. If it fails, the pilot simply cannot enjoy the luxury of parking alongside some convenient highway until assistance arrives.

Everything possible is accomplished to preclude internal engine failure. Students are taught the acceptable method of applying safety wire to internal engine retaining bolts, screws and castelated nuts. If the wire isn't twisted tight enough to "twang," it is rejected by a very sharp pair of diagonal wire cutters. After several days of painstakingly twisting one steel strand around the other, a relative degree of proficiency is attained. The dreaded "dikes" however, are always present until a "twang" will actually resonate at the approximate frequency of a G-string... on a guitar.

During subsequent engine assembly, it is necessary to precisely align the power-section casing to a machined matching surface. On occasion, a gentle tap with a rawhide mallet is in order to assist in proper alignment of the housing. Sometimes more aggressive mallet persuasion is dictated. As I recall during this critical phase, a shop superintendent wandered by one day and bellowed for all the world to hear, "Don't hit it with a hammer, you'll foul it up for fair!" From that moment I never, aggressively, hit anything with a hammer. Well, almost never...

It has often been said that necessity is the mother of invention. Long ago, at a GMC Motorhome

gathering in the deep south, the Birch family copilot expressed dissatisfaction with the presence of foreign flying critters inside "her" motorhome. Confronted with a bugs-or-me ultimatum, Alex returned to the drawing board. The resulting product was an instant success. Further, it has been purported to be the unofficial reason for restoration of innumerable bug-free relationships within the fleet.

Installation of the new screen door during GMC Motorhome assembly was not considered feasible due to unwarranted production line delays. Accordingly, the need to resolve the demand for a bug-free environment prompted Alex to initiate direct shipment to interested owners. Customer do-it-yourself installation was quite another adventure!

My screen door arrived without a scratch. It was well blocked and shored, and it was shipped in the most durable, and expensive, heavy-duty cardboard box I have ever seen. I still use that coveted box as a creeper under my motorhome. It works great! The screen door? Well, after memorizing the installation instructions, the screen door easily fit into the door frame. Unfortunately, the entrance door would not close or latch. So, back to the instructions. After several extensive adjustments and copious mumbled phrases, the door still wouldn't close!

Frustrated, I telephoned Mister Birch and asked to be given appropriate technical advisory assistance. (That's Department of Defense Governmentese for HELP!) Alex patiently informed me that the most essential step, Number One (1), had been inadvertently overlooked. First, he admonished, fit the entrance door to the motorhome, since each assembly has a different contour. If necessary, use wood blocks to "spring" the entrance door to fit the door frame. (It was during this vital phase that my neighbor elected to desert, just as the wood blocks shattered.) Also, Alex continued,

Continued on Page 12