

Paint Protection

Aids Customer Satisfaction, Improves RV Service Profits



Scotchgard™ Paint Protection Film from 3M is applied to the vulnerable panel below this RV entrance.

Demand for paint protection is growing as RV customers seek to preserve the look and value of their motorhomes.

The ability to protect paint on the vulnerable leading edges of RVs presents a potential profit opportunity of \$300 to \$600 or more per unit for RV service operators.

The film is also a proven tool for promoting customer satisfaction. Thin, clear paint protection film greatly reduces damage caused by dust, sand, rock chips and insects, and represents a good investment for owners.

"Today, most RV travelers are familiar with this product and its usefulness due to word-of-mouth testimony from satisfied users," says Jim Sweet, the owner of Coach Guard Inc. of Elkhart, Ind. He reports that market awareness has grown substantially in the seven years since his firm began offering paint protection film services for RVs.

As dealers and shops are well aware, today's RVs are sophisticated and expensive, and buyers are concerned with preserving appearance as well as resale value. As a result, they're willing to spend money for effective products. Sweet estimates that up to half of new RV buyers opt to have film applied at the time of purchase, and many used vehicle owners now also purchase paint protection – either to protect a used vehicle that remains in good condition – or after a repaint job.

"The cost of paint protection is modest compared to the value of an RV, and pays for itself in a short time," Sweet says.

Susan Cox and Mike Vosdoganes operate Empire Clear Shield Inc., in Mesa, Ariz., a paint protection film service organization specializing in RV work. They have also installed film on motorhomes for more than seven years, and design and produce pre-cut film kits for sale to motorhome manufacturers and other independent installers across the country.

"Considering that it can cost from \$4,000 to \$6,000 to repaint the front of a multi-color RV with full body paint, our customers consider the film to be a bargain," says Cox. She estimates that in her firm's market area nearly 50 percent of diesel RV owners have paint protection film installed on their vehicles.

Increasingly, the film is installed by the manufacturer before a vehicle leaves the factory, either as a product feature or purchase option. Empire Clear Shield also sees growing interest in having paint protection film applied to towed vehicles, which face a constant stream of road grit from the towing RV.

The Product

Paint protection films are generally made from a tough, thermoplastic urethane film with long-term durability and good weather resistance. Even though this material may be nearly 20 times as thick as the underlying paint, it can be difficult to spot even at arm's length. The best films have a clear coat to match the paint's gloss, and a pressure-sensitive adhesive that bonds well to painted surfaces, right up to the film's edge.

Manufacturer 3M developed its paint protection film technology during the Vietnam War to protect the leading edge of military helicopter blades from flying debris. Today, an automotive manufacturer-approved version of the film is used in both factory and aftermarket applications around the world, including new cars, classic cars and street rods, race cars, commercial trucks, motorcycles, snowmobiles, boats and boat trailers.

RV service operators find that getting started with paint protection film requires very little investment. The required tools consist of plastic squeegees and a few spray bottles. However, Sweet stresses that film attachment is not a do-it-yourself project. Although the film is applied using hand tools, it requires supervised training, physical dexterity and considerable experience for successful results.

Applicators require a period of supervised training to develop the necessary skills and techniques, and such training is commonly available from the film manufacturer or authorized converters/distributors. "Once a person develops good skills and efficient practices, it is possible to complete two or even three film installs in a day's time," says Cox.

The Process

Paint protection film installation begins with careful cleaning and removal of dust, wax and oil residues from the RV surface, which is then wetted with a solution so that the film can be put in place and adjusted before it adheres. The liquid solution is then removed by squeegee to remove air bubbles and creases while bonding the film securely to the painted surface.

Once the film has been applied and allowed to cure for 24 hours, no further maintenance is required; and the vehicle body can be washed in normal fashion. If necessary, paint protection film can be removed later without damaging fully-cured OEM paint.

"Once it is in place, paint protection film is nearly invisible," Sweet says. "Our customers appreciate the fact that the film does not change the appearance of their new vehicles, yet it is very effective in reducing road damage. When the job is done properly, the film will conform to the shape of bumpers and other vehicle features, be nearly invisible, have no trapped bubbles or debris, a mirror-like finish, and no loose or lifting edges.

Film converters such as Coach Guard and Empire Clear Shield have developed pre-cut film kits that are customized to fit individual RV models for efficient installation. The film is also available from the manufacturer in roll form, and can be cut to fit the shape of the RV nose, bumper, window pillars, wheel well areas and other vulnerable painted surfaces.

Operators such as Coach Guard typically provide paint protection film customers with a five-year warranty against cracking, yellowing, blistering or loss of adhesion under normal exposure conditions.

Coach Guard, Empire Clear Shield, and other industry participants report that word of the benefits of paint protection has spread quickly in the close-knit and expanding RV community. RV owners appreciate that an initial investment in quality paint protection film and qualified installation will pay real dividends in preserving the appearance and value of their expensive units.

PRO



Film is smoothed and trapped air and water bubbles are removed from beneath the material using a flexible squeegee. With proper handling, the film conforms and adheres well, even on complex body shapes.



Very wide front panels on this RV are covered seamlessly with 40-inch-wide Scotchgard™ Paint Protection Film segments.



Empire Clear Shield, Inc., Mesa, Arizona

"Specializing in 3M Paint Protection Film for Motorhomes, Cars, & Trucks"

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