

# BODY Work

## Basic Care

**R**outine cleaning is identical for both painted and gel-coat-fiberglass surfaces. Proper care begins with periodic washing (always in the cool of the day or in the shade) with automotive washing products.

(Note: household detergents can leave an undesirable residue, so it is always preferable to use a product



**The most routine maintenance that is required for the fiberglass exterior of an RV is simply keeping it clean.**

designed for automotive use.) Rinse thoroughly, then dry with a chamois or soft clean towels to prevent water spots. Apply a coat of good automotive wax or an appropriate protectant every three to six months, or more often if necessary, to protect the surface.

Over time, the painted or gel-coat surface will be affected by the elements. Harsh sunshine (UV radiation) will fade and oxidize the surface. Tree sap, bugs, road tar, dirt and grime will do their ill deeds against a once-glossy exterior. There are products designed to minimize the damage and prolong the shine, but nothing except keeping the RV parked inside a shelter or protected by a special cover will halt the gradual surface degradation.

A wax or protectant layer provides

a physical barrier against the effects of the environment, with the intent that these products will take the brunt of the abuse, protecting the paint or gel coat. Polishes and their close kindred are used to remove the oxidized paint and gel coat, which for awhile renews the original shine. Of course, the renewing process removes a thin layer of paint or gel coat and eventually those coatings will become so thin that the only remedy is to repaint. Although gel coat can be reapplied to small areas, it is impractical to reapply gel coat to the entire surface of an RV.

## Damage Control

**P**ainted or gel-coat fiberglass is no more or less vulnerable to the negative influences of the environment than, say, an RV with a painted aluminum exterior. However, one of the benefits of owning an RV with a fiberglass exterior is that if small areas are damaged, repair is fairly easy. Although an emergency repair may not look pretty, at least it can be performed by an owner who just wants to restore the exterior's integrity until a more professional repair



**An inexpensive and compact fiberglass repair kit is a handy item when emergencies arise. Easy to use, the kit can be employed to quickly close a hole in the RV skin until a more professional repair can be made.**

job can be done. Fiberglass repair kits that include everything necessary for an expedient mend are fairly inexpensive and can be purchased at RV or marine-supply outlets.

## Repairing Severely Damaged Fiberglass

**S**erious damage, such as perforated, cracked or broken fiberglass may look ugly and hopeless, but it is not difficult to repair. The first step is to trim away excess broken pieces and restore the remaining fiberglass to its original shape as much as possible. Once the damaged material has been cut away, the contours of the good material will be evident, so you can follow them as you rebuild the broken area.

Don't worry about being dainty during this phase because you'll be using a grinder and/or sander to clean the surface to remove road grime, oil and dirt. Make sure all the damaged fiberglass is gone and the surface of the remaining fiberglass is clean. If it isn't clean, the new material will not adhere when it's applied.

Now it's time to mix the fiberglass resin according to instructions on the product container. If the temperature is warm, the resin will "kick" more quickly than if the ambient temperature is cool, so you will have to work faster. Product instructions may include directions about modifying the mixture to compensate for temperature variations. Mix only enough resin to handle the work you are doing at the moment so you don't end up with a lot of wasted material that has kicked before you can use it.

Cut the fiberglass cloth large enough to cover the area to be repaired with a few inches overlapping surrounding solid fiberglass. Wet the fiberglass cloth with the resin and apply the cloth over the surface of the area to be repaired. Be aware that most conventional resins are not intended to provide the strength of the fiberglass, but only to hold layers of cloth together and provide rigidity. It is the cloth that provides the true strength, so don't oversoak the cloth with resin — only wet it through.

After placing the cloth in position, smooth the wetted cloth with a roller