

# BODY Work



**Use a quality automotive wax on the fiberglass skin to help buffer the surface from direct impact of the sun's radiation. The theory is to let the wax take the beating, rather than the fiberglass.**

boating-supply stores. It's tough as iron, yet easy to work with as putty. This two-part epoxy product is mixed, then applied with a putty knife and allowed to cure. After curing, it can be sanded, drilled, sawed, filed (or whatever else you might want to do to it) and then painted.

If the damaged surface was originally painted, a coat of touch-up paint will be necessary to make the repair unnoticeable. You should be able to purchase a small container of touch-up paint to match your RV from your dealer. Or, you may have to visit an automotive body and paint shop to have a bit of paint blended to match. Before trying to match the original paint color, use a light rubbing compound on the area to be repaired. This will remove oxidation and allow you to see the true color.

If the original surface was gel coat, the fairly thick color layer may not have been entirely breached. In that case, the clear resin used for the repair may permit the original color to show through without too much of a blemish showing, so no further touch-up is necessary. However, if the gel-coat layer is damaged all the way through to the raw fiberglass beneath, it may be repaired with a gel-coat repair kit that is available at most RV or

marine-supply outlets. Gel-coat tints can be mixed and blended until they match the original color. If the surface is dirty and oxidized, thoroughly wash it and then restore the original color by using a light rubbing compound before trying to match gel-coat color.

## Touching Up Gel Coat

**T**o perform touch-up work on gel coat, begin by cleaning the surface surrounding the area needing repair. Then, using masking tape, mark off the area you'll be working on. Small cracks, chips and deep scratches should be gouged out until they are wide enough to be filled with gel-coat paste. You may use a rotary tool (like a Dremel) to quickly open up these damaged spots. Then lightly sand the area with 220-grit sandpaper to remove any small chips or other clutter from the gouges.

Final preparation of the surface is done by washing the area with acetone to remove any sanding residue, wax or other contaminants that could interfere with the application of fresh gel coat. When working with acetone, be careful to provide plenty of ventilation and protection for your skin and eyes.

The next step is to prepare the proper color for your gel coat. Begin with a neutral or white gel-coat paste and gradually add coloring agent until the color is right. Because the color may change slightly as the gel coat cures, it is best to prepare several test batches, each with a slightly different formula of coloring agent, and allow each to cure. Then compare each test batch with the original color to see which comes closest (an exact match is nearly impossible to achieve). Keep notes for each test batch so you can duplicate the results later.

Now for the actual repair. Prepare a batch of properly colored gel-coat paste. Using a putty knife or other suitable tool, spread the paste into the gouges or across the area being repaired. Be sure to force out any

air that may be trapped beneath the paste. Overfill the repair area slightly because gel coat will shrink a little during the curing process.

Following the direction on the container, catalyze the repair area with MEK (methyl ethyl ketone) peroxide. Then cover the repair area with a sheet of plastic food wrap to seal off oxygen penetration. This is necessary because gel coat will not cure in the presence of oxygen. Leave the plastic wrap in place for six to eight hours (or overnight if desired) at a temperature of about 70 F.

When the curing process has been completed, remove the plastic wrap and wet-sand the area with 320- or 400-grit sandpaper. Follow this by buffing, polishing and applying paste wax, as necessary.

There are times when it may be preferable to simply paint over a repaired gel-coat surface rather than trying to match the original color by blending coloring agents. This is no problem. Begin by removing any



**To avoid streaking that results from soapy residue, use a "car wash" product rather than a household detergent to wash the RV.**

wax residue, sand the surface lightly and apply a coat of primer surfacer. Sand the surface, according to product instructions.

Finish by applying paint in a color to match the rest of the coach. ♦