

Vehicle & Caravan Issues



We experienced a total of 6 vehicle and caravan issues during our 7.5 week shakedown trip as follows:

1. Day 1 - Land Rover

On arrival to France (not even 350 miles into our journey) and travelling on good, easy, flat, sealed motorway (we had not even made 1st campsite location), the timing belt snapped (we had just had it changed via Foley's before leaving the UK). We didn't know what the issue was at the time only that we had lost power very suddenly and couldn't get ourselves off the motorway (we could see a service stop area but just couldn't reach it in time).

One flat bed lorry later, plus two taxis to take caravan, equipment, bikes and us onto campsite at midnight - the Land Rover was taken the following day onto Jeanne Le Fevre, a Land Rover specialist vehicle centre based in Amiens.

It was 15 days before we saw our vehicle again. During this time, we placed caravan in storage for a short time, hired a van and travelled down to the Loire and back again with two po-up tents and bikes in tow.

Cost for repairs: £900

Where: Garage James Lefebvre, 656 rue d'Amiens, Amiens

Verdict on Mechanic: Very slow in both diagnosis and then the repair itself. Promised date came and went - as a result our vehicle insurance co. had to put us up in a hotel for weekend in Dieppe while we waited - hard life! . Foley's had to keep intervening on our behalf (and in French!). Suggested we repatriate at outset though in retrospect this was understandable due to the issue experienced. See also issue no. 6 which further makes us wonder.

2. Day 8 - Hire vehicle

On gaining the understanding that we weren't going to see our Land Rover any day soon, we hired a Renault Traffic (9-seater van) courtesy of insurance company. Only 10 minutes into having, Anne smashed up along the side as well as another stationary vehicle parked innocently on a narrow high street in the Champagne region. Totally self-inflicted and luckily vehicle (and Anne!) still fit to drive complete with dents, marks and minus driver wing mirror which Andrew duly stuck back on with duck tape before driving off again.

Cost for repairs: £900 (paid by credit card on return of vehicle)

3. Day 15 - Caravan

Before leaving the UK, we decided to have the hitch on the caravan changed via Foley's from an old heavy, rigid one to a more up-to-date version but the jockey wheel broke (lost it's pinch and broke into two parts) before it hit the ground on winding down to pitch ground on campsite - we had not even unhooked following collection from storage in the Compiègne. The jockey wheel was the only source we had for holding the caravan up when detached from Land Rover. In the jockey wheel's absence - Andrew became resident pitch master by winching caravan off

Land Rover using 2-T trolley jack, 2 x caravan A-Frames and several blocks of wood to support it - a worrying time! In the end we decided safer NOT to unhitch from Land Rover after a fashion.

Cost: N/A

Duration: remainder of trip

4. Day 23 - Caravan

En route from Dordogne to Millau, we got a flat tyre on caravan (luckily, just as we were pulling off motorway into service station). A nice Portugese lorry driver came to our rescue with a more capable bottlejack than our 2-ton trolley jack. We were then tasked with sourcing a new spare before moving on - took a little while as apparently the tyres (15" Firestone Steelbelt Tubeless Radial ATX 245/75R15C107S15) not standard or generally available in Europe. A phone call to Foley's helped us locate alternative slightly more heavy duty equivalent - BFG 255/70R15 - so we bought two for the road

Cost: £242 for 2 new tyres

Where: Euromaster, Clermont Ferrand

Duration wait for Tyres: 2-3 days

5. Day 30 - Fuel pump failure on Land Rover

En-route from Clermont Ferrand to Millau. We tried a couple of garages ourselves directly but no joy. Result of fuel pump failure meant that speed was a serious issue and combined with weight strain of caravan, ever growing leak under vehicle and smoke from the exhaust - we decided again to put caravan in storage. Conscious of our timetable, we then hobbled on using cable ties and duck tape to Valencia in Spain before getting fixed.

Cost: £327

Duration of fix: Same Day

Where: British Car S.L., Doctor Marco Merenciano, 41 - Valencia

Verdict on Mechanic: Excellent - could see we wanted to get back on the road quickly and pulled out all the stops to help make it happen same day - highly recommended.

6. Day 41 - Suspected engine gasket failure Land Rover

Occurred on en-route to Malaga. We exited at Castell de Ferro for an unplanned welcome break along Sierra Nevada coastline for weekend to organise mechanic. Anne had been complaining she could hear a continuous tick, tick, ticking noise since day 15 on picking up the car in Amiens -kept saying still not right but thought maybe over-acting.

Used local garage in Castell itself. Mechanic advised the issue - though not gasket afterall, was related to the first issue and replaced two rods plus balancers? (difficulty translating) x 2 and cups? x 8. He showed us the broken part but we didn't think at the time to take it or a photo or something so we could be able to determine problem better once back home. Mechanic said something about balancing/tuning incorrect following cambelt repair. Anne's ticking noise disappeared finally.

Cost £246

Where: Emilio Sanchez Barranco, 18740 Castell de Ferro, Granada

Duration: 5 days

Verdict on Mechanic: Small family business. Excellent - deals with 4x4s all day long. Highly recommended.

Total 'on the road' repairs: £1,714.

Other Minor Issues

Vehicle

- A. Fuel leak - we think due to new tank connection to existing.
- B. Fuse on reverse/brake lights kept blowing on last knockings of our journey home into UK.
- C. 13amp plug socket not easy to put any plugs into due to awkward positioning.

Caravan

- A. Leaky roof - due to age, canvas roof surround was in a bad way (ripped, stained etc.) before leaving due to not being able to address in time before trip - buckets, cloths, gaffer tape always on hand.

B. Water retention on roof - gathers and doesn't go away - keeping an eye on and tipping the roof every so often became a regular housekeeping task.

C. Electrics - some work performed by Foley's to enable hook up to Land Rover but lights failed to work inside caravan after a fashion - we think due to water leaks - may have blown something. We did still have power capability (plug sockets) just no lights.

D. Gas - boiler on board and may have worked but due to not being sure about when last serviced and we didn't get a chance to do before shakedown, we were a bit nervous that maybe the caravan might blow up if unsafe so left this untouched.

Other Observations

Land Rover

None to report.

Caravan

A. Towing - biggest issue we faced was towing on hills and we came across many. It became a mission and a challenge to put our foot down to pick up speed on the downhill stretches in order to get the best run up to the next approaching hill possible. If we wanted to get off the beaten track or traverse a more interesting but complex route containing a 2-vehicle train, we had to really think hard about it and often avoid. We must have delayed half the motoring population of each country we were in when driving on a single carriageway especially when no overtaking was allowed or possible.

B. Weight strain - on the lead vehicle (Land Rover) - especially uphill - a major consideration as all weight is currently front loaded in the nose of the caravan.

C. Parking - even if we could find a space in some of the smaller villages/towns etc. suitable for 2-vehicle set-up - a run-up was needed in order to be able to straighten both vehicles into position - not often possible so often finding need to move on.

D. Speed - much, much slower pace when driving with a caravan.

E. Limited freedom and versatility - unable to chuck Land Rover about due to having heavy load attached. Plus ability to get into awkward places (mountain tracks and again parking up quickly) if we wanted to.

F. Expense - ferries, campsites, weight, fuel - much more expensive consideration due to towing weight and because essentially bringing two vehicles.

G. Stress - by this we mean - when Land Rover issues kicked in - it would have an impact depending on where we were on the road - more difficult rescue plan consideration along with children to think about.

H. When lead vehicle-less - where to keep / store / pitch caravan safely while waiting Land Rover return.

I. Manoeuvrability - didn't really cause us any serious issues and didn't bother us but when pitching on campsites, caravan so heavy it's difficult to turn even when using Land Rover. When unhitched, too heavy to lift/turn etc. so often had to leave pitched with nose out facing front rather than sideways like most traditional caravans tend to be parked.