

Fuel for Thought: Diesel vs. Gasoline in Motorhome

By Bryan Henke, manager, product marketing at Freightliner Custom Chassis Corporation



One of the first questions we at FCCC tend to hear from prospective RV owners is whether there are significant differences between diesel-powered chassis and those that run on gasoline.

It's a good question. Gas engines were the motorhome industry standard for decades, and it was only about five years ago, in 2007, that diesel RV chassis sales surpassed their gasoline counterparts. And while it's true that gasoline engines have seen some recent resurgence in the market, there are several reasons why diesel remains the better value and more oft-chosen option.

1. Power: The chemistry of diesel fuel itself provides one reason: It has a higher energy density than gasoline, meaning that a gallon of diesel can generate around 11 percent more energy than a gallon of gasoline.

2. Efficiency: Diesel fuel also has a higher expansion ratio and combusts at a higher temperature within an engine piston, giving you "literally" more bang for your buck. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, diesel engines are on average about 30 to 35 percent more fuel efficient than gasoline engines of similar size.

Even looking at the U.S. Energy Information Administration's recent data listing the average nationwide price of a gallon of diesel at \$3.78, compared with \$3.49 for a gallon of gasoline, the increased mileage afforded by diesel makes it the better value.

Diesel engines also offer greater torque ratings for the same horsepower as gasoline engines, meaning they'll get your RV to cruising speed and climb hills with less effort. And they provide this additional power at a lower RPM rate, leading to better fuel economy, a gas engine will rev much higher and work much harder on mountain roads.

3. Convenience: Maintenance intervals associated with diesel engine ownership are also much greater than those of gasoline engines. A diesel engine is typically scheduled for maintenance every 15,000 miles, compared with the 3,000-mile intervals of a gasoline engine. For owners, that's more time on the road, lower maintenance costs, and less time spent in service centers.

4. Long-term value: And because they have fewer moving parts, diesel engines are more durable, with a life expectancy nearly three times that of a gasoline engine.

All these advantages add up over the long term, and when the time comes to upgrade your motorhome, you'll find that diesel-powered RVs retain a higher resale value.

Power, efficiency, convenience and long-term value: Diesel edges gasoline on all four points and who doesn't want all that in an RV chassis?

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Bryan Henke has been with Freightliner Custom Chassis for 15 years. He held Technical Sales Manager Positions in our School Bus, Commercial Bus and RV product lines until accepting the position of Manager, Product Marketing. He holds a Bachelors degree in Mechanical Engineering and two vehicle patents.

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