

How to Buy Step 4: What to Buy

New Or Used?

Based on my experience with over 200 used RVs traded each year, it is my opinion that the only valid reason to buy a used RV is your budget. If you can, buy new. Only focus on a used RV if that is the sole way an RV fits your budget, and you are unwilling or unable to adjust your budget to make a new RV viable. Used RVs tend to be more expensive in the long run, especially if your goal is to purchase a new one in the next year or two. If your budget says used, be sure you buy it from a reputable dealer—or know exactly what you are getting or giving up. Most used RVs are in need of some repairs. It is the rare used RV that is in excellent condition and requires no work to put it into safe and proper working order. We spend thousands of dollars on repairs to put the typical used RV into safe, useable condition.

Identify A Quality Manufacturer

Over 300 RV brands listed in the NADA RV Appraisal Guide are no longer producing RVs. While some of the manufacturers are still in business, the majority have ceased to exist. This has a dramatic effect on resale values, parts availability and support. There are also new companies trying to gain a toehold in the industry, some with old names. Some make it, and some end up on the defunct list. The manufacturer of the product you choose is another factor to consider in choosing your RV. Use our RV Manufacturer Questionnaire to help you find a quality manufacturer for your RV.

RVIA Membership

Most people do not realize there are very few laws governing the standards for RV construction and operation. Most safety and construction standards are voluntary and are set by the industry itself through the Recreational Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA). Manufacturer membership is voluntary, therefore adherence to all the standards is voluntary. To help insure your RV meets minimum safety and construction standards, be sure the manufacturer is a member in good standing with the RVIA.

History & Reputation

How long has the manufacturer been in business under the same ownership? Do they still build the same products? Are they known as a quality manufacturer? What is their best-known product and what makes it popular? How do the owners of their products feel about them?

Facilities

Are they nationally distributed? How many plants serve their market? How consistent is the output from plant to plant? Are there regional Service Centers?

Stability & Financial Strength

How strong is the company? Do they have the strength to weather an economic downturn or a costly product recall? You don't want to be the proud owner of an RV with a serious defect, and find out the manufacturer went into bankruptcy rather than fix it. You can compare the annual reports of publicly held companies. Unfortunately, many RV makers are smaller, privately held firms. Gauging their strength is a very difficult task.

Customer Care

How well do they take care of their RV owners outside normal warranty coverage? Every warranty has gray areas that are subject to interpretation. What is the manufacturer's philosophy on these situations? The exceptional companies take the RV owner's point of view and try very hard to solve their problems. Others avoid and ignore. You don't want to have to resort to legal remedies to get results. Dealing with a manufacturer and dealer who have good working relationships (based on a goal of customer satisfaction) is always your best bet.

Philosophy On Glitz vs. Guts

There are basically two camps of RV manufacturers: producers of glitz and producers of guts.

Glitz manufacturers are interested in providing dealers with the lowest possible cost and the appearance of the highest possible price. They cut wherever they can (that isn't likely to be noticed), and funnel as much as they can into what you do see. Shortcuts are taken where you won't notice, and the goal is for the unit to last one day beyond the warranty period.

Guts manufacturers are interested in building an RV for the long haul; an RV that will outlast the financing terms and still have value. These manufacturers spend more money on things you don't easily notice such as designs, engineering, testing, and warranty.