Caring for your AC Generator System(s)

Enjoy your hookup-free power – but avoid maintenance missteps that can become expensive mistakes.

Your onboard AC generator (genset) will supply portable 120-volt AC power allowing your vehicle to operate without having to plug into shoreline power. Many owners are not well-versed in the maintenance of these vital and expensive units which may lead to unnecessary problems that can be costly to fix.

Maintenance

Check the oil *every time* before starting. Checking the oil level frequently will help you catch any leaks and other problems early. Do not rely on your gensets automatic shutdown when it senses low oil pressure. When the oil is changed or added be sure the proper viscosity and American Petroleum Institute (API) grade of oil is used.

Your generator will have an hour meter that indicates the amount of time the unit has run. Your generator should be serviced every 100 hours or once a year whichever comes first. The fuel and air filters should also be replaced depending on usage. Gasoline/LP-gas models should also have their spark plugs changed at this time. Some models may require valve adjustment, point replacement and other servicing. Refer to your owner's manual for your generators specific recommendations and schedules. Any adjustments to the governor and choke should be done by a qualified technician.

Inspect the genset and compartment frequently for accumulation of leaves, paper, and sometimes even rodent nests. The coolant level on liquid cooled models should be checked regularly and the antifreeze protection should be tested before the threat of freezing weather. Flush your coolant and replace it every two years. The belt tension and condition should be checked regularly and replaced every two years.

Fuel and Storage

Generators are usually powered by the same fuel as the coach's engine.

Gasoline

Gasoline has a fairly short storage life and may become stale in the generator's carburetor resulting in failure to start and may gum up the jets and other small passages if used infrequently, requiring disassembly. Stale fuel can be avoided in the carburetor by running the generator for at least 30 minutes once a month. This will allow the generator to fully warm up and consume the fuel in the line, float bowl and filter. Your generator warranty may require a once a month usage to maintain coverage.

Reducing stale fuel problems can not be avoided by using higher octane fuel. Deterioration of fuel varies with weather temperatures, time and evaporative properties of the fuel.

Before storing your vehicle for lengths of time of several months or longer, a fuel additive like Sta-Bil should be added to the tank and mixed by driving. Following driving, the vehicle and generator should run with a load applied to it at a minimum of 50 percent of the generator's rated capacity until the fuel stabilizer gets into the carburetor and/or fuel injection.

Avoid filling your gasoline tank for storage late in the fall or in the winter. Gasoline purchased during this time of year will have additives that make it vaporize easier. Following evaporation, the fuel will leave behind a varnish like deposit in the generator's carburetor. Running on fuel using stabilizers and draining fuel from the carburetor before storing your vehicle for long terms are the most effective ways to reduce stale fuel problems.

If a fuel drain is present in your genset's carburetor float bowl, the fuel can be drained and added to the vehicle's fuel tank. This should only be done outdoors without vehicle engine running. If the generator has a fuel line shutoff, use it and run the generator until the carburetor is out of fuel. Remember to leave yourself a note on the starter switch that this has been done.

Diesel Fuel

Diesel fuel also may become storage over time. Microbes that live off of the moisture in the bottom of the tank can clog filters and injectors. To avoid this, diesel fuel storage additives should be added to the main fuel tank and circulated as described in the gasoline section above.

LP

Gensets running on LP usually have a longer service life than a similar generator that runs on gasoline. LP is the cleanest-burning fuel of the three fuel types. LP doe not go stale like gasoline during storage requiring no additive. LP does not contain as much energy as gasoline so LP gensets are down rated compared to gas powered units. These units can also exhaust your supply of propane if they are not monitored carefully.

Fuel tank level

Most genset's fuel pick up is installed so that it stops delivering fuel when the coach's fuel tank gets down to about ¼ of a tank. This prevents the genset from draining all of the vehicle's fuel. It also results in a lot of gensets that inexplicably quit or won't start. Be sure to check your fuel tank level anytime your genset stalls or won't start.

General Information

The exhaust system on your generator should be inspected before starting it. Never run a generator with a leaking or damaged exhaust. Test your carbon-monoxide detector before starting the genset. Generator engines produce carbon monoxide which is an odorless, but toxic gas.