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CEILING RENEWAL

by Ivan Henderson

“What can I do to repair the sagging vinyl on my headliner?” This is the most commonly asked GMC Motorhome cosmetic question. Even though the headliner is only part of the motorhome ceiling, the white, perforated-vinyl headliners in 1975 through 1978 GMC-interior GMC Motorhomes have deteriorated with age and moisture intrusion. The same is true with the glued vinyls and other headliner materials in GMC Motorhomes that have other interiors.

Curiously, few GMC Motorhome owners notice the yellowing, cracking, and general deterioration of other ceiling components until the headliner is renewed. Then, it is often too late and much more expensive to go back and renew these items. That’s why we renew the entire ceiling in GMC interiors with vinyl headliners for \$1,500. Leather headliners and other more exotic materials are more expensive.

For those who want to try and make their perforated-vinyl headliner last a little longer, I cannot offer much encouragement. We have experimented with many different types and brands of adhesive, but have yet to find one that will secure the vinyl to the cardboard panel without distorting or wrinkling the vinyl material. Many GMC Motorhome owners have also tried various means of repair without much success. The only product that seems to do an acceptable job of repairing small areas is wallpaper paste.

There are several reasons the original vinyl material comes loose from the cardboard panel. The main reason is deterioration of the foam between the vinyl and the panel. Age, heat buildup, and other conditions inside the motorhome cause the foam to literally crumble and disappear. This causes the vinyl material to sag and, in some extreme cases, completely fall off the ceiling. In many cases the vinyl will begin to wrinkle or pucker where overhead cabinets or trim pieces contact the headliner. This is caused by the movement of the cabinet or trim against the vinyl over time. It actually stretches the material making it virtually impossible to secure

it back into its original position.

The only good answer to the GMC Motorhome headliner problem is to replace it with any of the many vinyls, fabrics, and other materials that are available. Complete ceiling renewal is not difficult, but it is very labor intensive when it is done properly.

The first step in motorhomes with GMC interiors is to remove the overhead cabinets and any other items that restrict removal of the original ceiling panels. These include but are not limited to the roof air-conditioner air-box assembly and mounting plate, roof-vent trim and handles, 12-volt DC ceiling lights, 120-volt AC hall outlet, headliner moldings and retainers, ceiling-to-wall plastic trim, and TV antenna crank and trim.

Next, remove the headliner panels, the plastic front panel with dome lights and speaker panels, and the plastic rear panel with the rear corners and speaker panels. Try to keep the headliner panels intact so they can be used as templates for the new panels. Sometimes it is difficult to remove the panels in the hall because the roof and cabinets are holding them in place. Use a hydraulic jack and a 2x4 cut to a length that will allow it to be positioned between the jack and a roof rafter closest to the problem area. Gradually jack and use just enough force to remove the panel.

Plan ahead. Once all of the ceiling panels have been removed, install wiring for additional 120-volt AC and 12-volt DC outlets, a new AM/FM radio antenna, a CB radio antenna, a TV antenna, a cellular telephone antenna, a satellite dish, and stereo speakers. You will never again have such easy access from the front to the rear of the motorhome.

Fabricate new headliner panels using a wood product thin enough to bend around the radius between the ceiling and the wall. Paneling 1/8-inch thick works well. It is often called lauan in the RV industry. If the paneling is finished, apply the ceiling material to the unfinished side. Mark and cut the new panels using the original panels as templates.

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