

CB RADIO

On a Caravan or Rally, communications among the participants and with the leader is extremely important. You can learn where the best price is for gas or diesel, the location of a good eatery or some great attraction. More important are changes in routing or time of arrival, traffic problems and communicating your needs to the leader. You should be traveling and coordinating in small groups of two, three or four between stops. Once you arrive at a destination, there will always be new information to be disseminated. The principle method of communications will usually be the CB. Yes! This means you should have a radio in both the tow vehicle and your trailer. A hand held for the trailer will also be useful when you are on a Caravan and have Parker Duty. Learn how to properly use the CB and test it before you start on the Caravan.

You do not need a fancy radio with 6 or 7 knobs and switches for good communications. Actually, the most important part of the radio is the antenna. Usually the largest antenna provides the best performance. Half of your antenna is provided by the vehicle (the ground-plane) it is attached too. The larger the ground-plane the better your radio will perform. Usually the best spot for a magnetic mount is the center of your automobile roof. After installing the antenna, it should be trimmed in size for minimum VSWR at channel 16. Campers use channel 14 for communications and truckers use 19 so this will optimize the system for your use. Tuning the antenna is done by changing its physical length. There is usually a setscrew that locks the small wip in place to do the tuning. Find a Ham Radio or CB Operator (lots of them in WBCCI) and they can help you with a VSWR meter and the expertise you will need. Better still, have your local Unit do a tune-up exercise at a rally. For the fiberglass, Motor Home a ground-plane antenna will not work since you do not have a nice aluminum skin. You will need a non-ground- plane antenna. Some of the early Motor Homes had the wrong type of antenna and never where able to get satisfactory CB communications. Again, if you are not sure find a Ham and he can check your antenna.

To set up your radio put your RF gain control to maximum, turn off your noise blanker and make sure you are in CB mode (not weather or amplifier). Set the Radio to channel 14, turn up your volume and adjust your squelch so that you hear a constant noise level. The squelch adjusts your sensitivity and thus ability to hear everyone in range. This is the only adjustment that you cannot just set and forget. Since the background noise changes constantly, you should be checking this setting every 15 or 20 minutes. Just lower the squelch until you hear the noise level and then raise it slowly until the radio gets quiet. This will give you the maximum sensitivity.

If your vehicle or local conditions are causing a high constant noise level, then switch on the noise blanker. Be sure and turn it off when it is not needed or doing any good since it reduces sensitivity. Now you should be able to hear everyone within the range of your Radio. However, can they hear and understand you? When you speak, key the Microphone and hold it about two inches from your mouth. You need to hold it this close to get good modulation and have others understand what you are saying. If your radio has a microphone gain control, you

can adjust this so you can get farther away. I do not recommend this because you should get into the habit of keeping a constant distance from the mike regardless of the radio you are using. If you get closer or have the gain control too high, you can overdrive the radio and distort your signal. The best way to check this is to work with another rig and check out your signals and settings before you start a trip. Once everything is working right, all you have to do is adjust the volume and the squelch.

Get into the habit of saying 'over' when you are done speaking and be sure and listen first before you start talking. Talk to you down the road.