

Marathon Tech Support: Behind the Scenes

“We do whatever it takes to get Marathon customers back on the road.”



by Sharleen Nelson

He will locate an RV parts shop for you, or get help if you have a flat tire. He'll get your lights turned back on, and help you find your keys. He's on a first-name basis with most Marathon customers. Leon Snider is much more than a technical support technician—for scores of Marathon Coach customers, he's an indispensable resource.

An electrician by trade, Leon has more than 30 years of experience in the RV industry. He started his education early, working on the electrical parts of cars in his dad's gas station when he was 12 years old. After being employed at other RV companies for several years, Leon was hired by Marathon in 1988 as a production electrician, was soon promoted to assistant manager of the electrical department, and in 1992, joined Marathon's service department.

Before 1997, there was no dedicated technical support department. If a customer called Marathon with a problem, it was handed over to whatever technician was available. Recognizing the need for an established support division, Marathon sent Leon and another employee to Prevost Car's headquarters in Canada for training. "We attended 'Prevost school,'" Leon said. "When we came back, we got tech support up and running, and it's been going full swing ever

since." Marathon provides 24/7 technical support service for its customers every single day, including holidays.

As the primary daytime tech support person, Leon has turned multitasking into an art form. It's not unusual to see him walking the hallways of Marathon's Oregon headquarters talking into a headset that is affixed to his ear at all times. He's always connected and ready to deal with any customer emergency, big or small. "Some days I receive as many as 60 phone calls," he said. That's not surprising when you consider that nearly all of Marathon's more than 1,100 coaches are still on the road. "I recently received a call from the owner of the 13th coach that Marathon built," said Leon. "Now *that* was an interesting conversation."

According to Leon, the majority of tech support calls have to do with anything in the coach that is electrical—the generator, air compressor, satellite system, appliances, components, lights—and electrical troubleshooting is his specialty. Most are easy fixes that Leon can walk the customer through over the phone. For instance, if a light isn't working, Leon can tell them where to find the breakers. He can troubleshoot issues from appliances such as the microwave or refrigerator, to heating and plumbing. "Someone will call and tell me their toilet doesn't work: They push the toilet handle down and nothing happens," said Leon. "It could

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be something as simple as the toilet needs to be plunged because their kids put something down it that shouldn't be there. Those things happen."

Leon can also evaluate coach problems using Marathon's proprietary TechLink intelligent electrical system, which can diagnose problems remotely. "I can talk to a customer from here via my computer, find out what's wrong, and then make changes remotely," he said. Although Leon can access most of the coach information from the computer network, pre-TechLink coaches, #0468 and earlier, are not on the system. This isn't a problem, though, because Leon keeps a library of engineering drawings and books in his office for every Marathon coach.

When he's not troubleshooting problems, Leon takes the time to keep abreast of new and evolving technologies to better assist customers. "I do everything I can," he said. "The engineers are always making changes, so when I'm not taking a call, I often look at the blueprints for the newer coaches." Also, every three or four months Leon receives an updated Prevost owner's manual to read through. "It's an opportunity to see the recent changes Prevost has made and learn how things operate."

Troubleshooting coach problems is, of course, his job, but Leon takes customer service to an advanced level, going out of his way to help customers any way he can. Leon receives many

calls that aren't electrical related—problems with the Prevost chassis or customers who are stranded on the side of the road with a flat tire. If it's a chassis problem, Leon will refer them to Prevost, which has representatives throughout the United States. But oftentimes, Leon calls Prevost for them. "When I get calls from customers who have broken down or have a flat tire, I do everything in my power to help them." Over the years, Leon has amassed a huge database of contacts in different cities he can call to help customers who are traveling. And if he doesn't have a contact, Leon will call the Chamber of Commerce in the nearest city and inquire about reputable repair shops in the area. "My caller may not be someplace where they have cell phone service, so I will try to find a tow service or a tire company that will travel to where they are and help them," said Leon. "We do whatever it takes to get Marathon customers back on the road."

Still, as much as Leon enjoys his job interacting with and helping people, he has noticed that customers enjoy dealing with him and other Marathon employees. He attributes this to the way Marathon treats its people, which results in satisfied employees who stay in their jobs for a long time. "Customers notice this and like coming in because the same people take care of them each time," said Leon. And if there's ever a problem on the road, Leon will be there to help. •

FREQUENTLY ASKED TECH SUPPORT QUESTIONS

Q: I have a picture on my television, but no sound.

A: Check the radio at the dash, in the bedroom, and in the underbelly. If the radio is on in the area you are having this problem, you will not have sound from the television. Because the radio sound overrides the television, make sure the radio is off in the location of concern.

Q: How can I change the inverter from 50 amperes to 30 or 15 amps?

A: With the inverter screen showing on the unit itself, set the inverter with the options, "OFF SRCH ON EQ." Find the "Menu Items" button and press down once. This opens a screen that says, "Set Shore Cord Size Amps AC 50."

Use the "Set Point" key and drop both inverters to 14 each for 30-amp service, and down to 7 each for 15-amp service. If you run the generator in this mode, the generator has a separate input on the inverter and will run at a full 50 amperes. Once you

are finished with shore power at lower amperage, you can perform the same procedure and run it back up to 50 on each unit.

Q: I just picked my coach up from a Marathon Coach service center and I have no shore power operation.

A: Check your breaker in the underbelly. Marathon service technicians are instructed to turn off the "Shore Main Disconnect" prior to unplugging and plugging in a coach, so that should be the first place you check prior to calling technical support.

Q: How do I connect to the TechLink system?

A: It's phone jack to land line. Plug your phone line into the phone jack in the bay that is a designated direct line to the TechLink system. Connect the other end of the phone line to a regular land line phone. A switch located in the rear closet activates the system.