

Better RV Bedding

By K. Schipper

Suppliers are developing new bedding options to give RVers a more comfortable night's sleep – and creating a new profit center for retailers in the process.

The whole idea of buying an RV – whether it's a modest pop-up or something (much) more elaborate – is to take at least some of the comforts of home along for the ride. However, for too long, many RV owners have noticed their night's sleep often resembles a night of sleeping on the hard ground.

Fortunately, as sleepers everywhere have responded to the latest in mattress technology (think memory foam), some mattress manufacturers are realizing that RV owners would like to improve their on-the-road sleeping experience with a product similar to what they're leaving at home.

The end result is a potential new profit center for dealers that's enjoying great demand, and is surprisingly easy to order and ship.

The Suffering Masses

Just as RV owners are going more in the direction of taking their home comforts with them – be it a residential-style refrigerator or entertainment center – more are being hit with the realization that it's time for a better sleeping experience as well.

And, the people who are willing to lend a hand in that direction are those who already know the mattress business from selling to the residential market.

Matt Burgess, senior vice president with the Johnson City, Tenn.-based BedInABox.com, says when his company began considering adding RV mattresses to its product line, company reps did some research down at the local RV dealership.

Lippert makes and sells several different lines of mattresses to OEMs. The supplier also sells mattress pads and three different series of sheets – good, better and best – along with pillows.

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“We went in and I could literally pick up the mattress with two fingers, it was so light,” he says. “It was like an air-filled mattress with springs under it. We were just really surprised. Here people are out trying to relax and rejuvenate, but if they get poor sleep, it doesn’t help the experience.”

Jonathan Prichard, CEO of Mobile Sleep Components in Littleton, Colo., says many of the RV mattresses he’s seen are worse than what’s in the in-laws’ guest room.

“People spend a fortune on a new or used RV – and then they get a really bad mattress,” says Prichard. “I think a lot of the OEM mattresses are just low-quality, fiber-filled products that are there because the manufacturers are trying to hit a certain price point. However, the customer ends up suffering.”

While BedInABox.com is aiming its products specifically through the RV dealers, Lippert Components Inc. (LCI) and Mobile Sleep Components make and sell products to OEMs as well.

Elkhart, Ind.-based LCI also has recently entered into an agreement with the highly respected and well-recognized Denver-based Denver Mattress, and LCI officials say they intend to serve both the OEM and dealer markets.

“Both markets are very strong for us,” says Steve Paul, LCI director of aftermarket sales. “We have such a large presence on the OEM side that we think this has instant appeal on that side of the market. On the aftermarket side, we’re a bit distinctive because we’re bringing an overall bedding



Steve Paul, Lippert director of aftermarket sales, is pictured with Denver Mattress RV Collection point-of-purchase materials his company makes available to RV dealers. LCI entered into an exclusive relationship with Denver Mattress to distribute the company’s mattresses to the RV market.



Jonathan Prichard, CEO of Mobile Sleep Components, is pictured next to some RV mattress P.O.P. materials.

solution to the marketplace, and that's different than what anyone else has done in the past."

Paul explains that for LCI, the mattress is only the first step in the process. Along with the Denver Mattress products, the company also is offering mattress pads, which add to the overall sleeping experience in all RV sizes.

"In addition to that, we offer three different series of sheets – good, better and best – along with pillows," he adds. "We'd like to think that a customer for an RV can really take care of all their bedding needs through the Denver Mattress program offered by Lippert."

Prichard notes that Mobile Sleep Components will soon be adding a line of U.S.-made mattress protectors and sheets, which can be sewn in any size or shape.

Important Numbers

In the battle of numbers, mattresses are definitely a product that has appeal to RV buyers. Paul says LCI doesn't have firm numbers, but its research has given it a good idea on demand.

"We do know that more than half of the people who buy a new RV are replacing their mattresses within the first year," he says. "We



Mobile Sleep Components has found that RVers appreciate the company's memory foam mattresses, which provide a more comfortable night's sleep.



Mobile Sleep Components takes pride in making its mattresses in the U.S. The company plans to add a line of mattress protectors and sheets sometime in the second quarter of 2015.

also know that everybody who buys a used RV should replace the mattress when they buy.”

However, there are also other important numbers in the sale of RV mattresses. One very critical one has to do with size.

Mobile Sleep’s Prichard says people shopping for a new mattress – regardless of where it will be used – want comfort, support and durability. However, for the RV market, the biggest challenge is often finding the right size.

“There are a lot of unique sizes in the RV industry – literally thousands of different sizes,” he says. “That includes everything from the ‘queen short,’ which is the most popular, to some really special sizes. For instance, we supply aftermarket mattresses for Airstream, and they have very odd shapes and curves.”

BedInABox.com’s Burgess agrees, and says his company’s ability to make custom sizes and shapes of mattresses is one of its advantages.

“It’s not just different dimensions in terms of rectangular shapes,” he says. “We can bevel, we can curve; we can do a lot of different things. We’ve made round mattresses before, but when it gets complicated, we ask for a life-sized template from the customer.”

Of course, a custom size is going to require more time in the shop to complete, representatives for all these companies note. For the person needing a common RV size – queen short, queen regular, king narrow or king regular – however, shipping can be as quick as one or two days.

A couple other numbers to keep in mind when buying – or selling – mattresses are CFR 1633 and MVSS 302. Both are



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BedInABox.com's showroom in Johnson City, Tenn., stocks a variety of mattresses. The supplier expanded into the RV market after determining there was a need for a more residential-type product. Sales to the RV aftermarket now account for about 10 percent of the company's business.



BedInABox.com founders Mr. and Mrs. Bill Bradley stand next to one of their mattresses, which is packed and ready to be shipped. Because of their foam construction, mattresses can be compressed, rolled and shipped to just about any location.

flammability standards and they cover different areas, according to Prichard.

"While 1633 is required of anyone providing a mattress for use not only in a house, but also in a towable, pop-up or fifth wheel, 302 covers anything motorized, be it a motorhome, a bus or a truck," he says. "Many of our competitors meet one standard or the other, but we pass both so we don't have any liability issues."

Easy Does It

Still, any dealer who's thinking about mattresses in terms of what goes on the average at-home bed, or envisioning storerooms full of large, bulky rectangles difficult to wrestle into the door of the average RV — let alone around tight corners to the bedroom — needs to think again.

A look at TV commercials for mattresses for home use is putting a heavy emphasis on memory foam products these days, and RV sleepers are benefitting.

While these manufacturers are quick to point out they're not offering quite the same foam product available through the local mattress store, they're very similar, and many offer multiple layers of sleeping comfort.

BedInABox.com's Burgess says one problem that many foam mattresses suffer from is that "they sleep too warm."

"We've done a couple things to cool ours off," he says. "One is using gel in our foam. We also use a very breathable

foam and even our most basic models have breathable knit covers on them. The latest mattress we introduced uses a phase-change material developed as a liner for space suits by NASA (National Aeronautics and Space Administration) to help regulate body temperature."

Mobile Sleep's Prichard notes that RV owners typically want something light not only to not add weight to the unit, but also to make under-bed storage easy to reach. Still, his company offers several different quality levels for its RV customers.

"We have everything from a one-layer foam mattress – which is more economical – all the way up to a 10-inch luxury mattress with 4 inches of open-cell memory foam, an airflow layer, and a luxury quilt," he says. "And, it's a high-density foam."

The quality of the foam used in these products is also important to the manufacturers and there's a lot of emphasis on being a "green" product. For instance, Burgess notes his company's foam is made in the United States.

"We also use what we call 'responsible designs,'" he says. "We use the most renewable resources possible in our foam to offset the petroleum use. We use soy-based content and castor oil to replace some of the non-renewable resources we have to use."

Prichard notes that Mobile Sleep Components only uses Certipur-us-certified soy based foams in its products, which are low-VOC and contain no heavy metals or ozone depleters.

LCI's Paul stresses that Denver Mattress is proud of the low amount of waste its manufacturing process generates. It's also removed boric acid from use as a fire barrier and has gone to plant-based foams.

"You have to remember that when you buy a residential mattress at a store, it pretty much stays in a climate-controlled place its entire life," he says. "When you put a mattress in an RV, it might be sitting out in 100-degree heat for three months. You don't know what kind of chemicals might be released. That's the story behind these eco-friendly mattresses."

Prichard, from Mobile Sleep Components, agrees, saying, "We use a natural rayon fire barrier and also an eco-friendly water-based glue to laminate our foam layers."

"Eco-friendly" also could be used to describe how mattresses from the three suppliers are packaged and shipped. Because of their foam construction, mattresses can be compressed, rolled and shipped just about anywhere, including directly to the RV owner.

"When it gets to a customer, because it's rolled and compressed, it's easy to get into a unit," says LCI's Paul. "Once it's in there, they just cut the wrapping. The mattress completely decompresses and opens up and is ready to be slept on. That's huge, both from a transportation standpoint, but also getting it in and out of the unit is much easier that way."

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The Winning Path

With those advantages, it might seem that these mattress products would be an easy sell. However, just to make sure that's indeed the case, the manufacturers offer plenty of sales materials for dealers to get their message across.

"We've put together an incredible point-of-purchase display that fits right on a dealership's showroom floor and encompasses the entire program," says Paul. "We also have a plan-o-gram display that a dealer can use to display all the products – not just the mattress, but the mattress pad, the sheets and the pillows — all in one single display."

Point-of-purchase displays are probably the best way these companies have of reaching RV owners, especially since BedInABox.com's Burgess acknowledges that many would-be buyers would prefer the ability to lie on the mattress before buying.

"We can work up custom solutions," Burgess says. "It really depends on what the dealer and the shop need. Some people say a rack would do with some mattress core samples so people can see what's on the inside, and we do that."

Mobile Sleep's Prichard agrees. His company also offers optional P.O.P. displays a dealer can put in the parts department or the showroom service center. He notes one goal is to take up little

room. For that reason, the company also offers counter displays, although he says 99 percent of the dealers ask for floor displays.

"We also have brochures and door hangers," he says. "The door hangers are very popular, and work well when they're put in the bedroom on a cabinet pull. We also offer customized templates for direct mail pieces, and we have a loop DVD that can play on a TV in the parts department."

Not surprisingly, all three men are confident the RV mattress aftermarket is a moneymaker. For instance, Burgess says RV mattresses have grown to be 10 percent of BedInABox.com's business, "and it's growing very quickly now."

Part of the reason for that is that RV owners don't necessarily understand they can't just go to the local mattress store and buy an RV mattress, says Paul.

"That offers a fabulous opportunity where we can help our distributors and dealers take care of their customers' needs at their stores, rather than going somewhere else outside the dealership," he says.

"There's a lot of opportunity for money to be made if you're a dealer," agrees Prichard. "If they look at the margins they can make, it's a no-brainer. They're selling a good mattress for less than what the customer would pay in a store and making a good amount of profit. Everybody wins."

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