

## PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

# Driving with the Blue Ox TruCenter

by Byron Songer

My wife and I own a 2002 Newmar Dutch Star built on a Freightliner XC chassis (I-beam front suspension) pushed by a Caterpillar 3126e engine tuned at 330 HP. April of this year marked the starting our third year of ownership. As Newmar owners, we've heard those with newer Newmar coaches talk favorably about ComfortDrive with a small bit of jealousy. Of course, for us, an independent front suspension is also something to covet. When we noticed the advertising for Blue Ox's TruCenter steering stabilizer, we decided it was time to look into the product more seriously.

According to the promotional materials, the TruCenter offers the following benefits.

- Reduces driver fatigue.
- Keeps the coach within its lane.
- Maintain control during a blowout.
- Touch button adjustable.
- Tire and chassis life extended.
- 1-year warranty.

While we've had no complaints about handling but the safety aspect of the system intrigued Martha a great deal because we both had noticed several motorhome owners not handling blowouts well. Since my prior life involved sales I was skeptical that some of the benefits were based on "marketing speak" (aka stretching the truth). For instance, would the addition of something to enhance steering control really help extend tire and chassis life? My response to that question is: "Your experience may be different." After all, tire and chassis life covers a multitude of variables.

We "bit the bullet" and purchased the system, with installation, at the Tampa SuperShow. The purchase was made through a reputable dealer/installer in Central Florida. One motivation for making the purchase was based on the fact that we'd be traveling from Kissimmee through Louisville to Jackson, Wyoming where we would work through the summer season at Snake River Park KOA. We figured that we may encounter some high crosswinds along the way so having the TruCenter in place could be advantageous. The only decision that remained, after the purchase, was where to have the button installed on the dash of the motorhome. The installer mentioned the possible locations so the decision was made to place it to the upper left of the steering wheel in a blank space that was easily accessible for the wiring.

After the installation was completed and the coach test driven by the mechanic, we took off on our trip northward. Since the system is to help correct the experience of constantly pulling in one direction to correct for any crown in the road, I pushed the button while traveling up US-27. Honestly, I noticed no difference. At least, not as I anticipated. After our one-night layover in Lake City, I tried correcting to overcome a strong wind from the west while driving on I-65. Still no positive change. The third day out we headed toward Knoxville for the coach's annual maintenance appointment. Since there was no strong wind or crown in the road to overcome, no adjustment was made.

It was while the coach was being serviced that the technician noticed a wire hanging loose under the front end. It was the wire that runs from the control box on the Tru-



*The Blue Ox TruCenter steering stabilizer consists of an electronic module that controls the behavior of a spring. The passive system helps in providing directional control.*

Center Steering Control to the button on the dash. It had not been wrapped securely. No wonder that the adjustments didn't work! After additional time in the shop, the correction was made.

The next opportunity to make an adjustment was done on US-231 while driving north of Lebanon, Tennessee. It worked, I could tell a difference. Driver fatigue reduced? Maybe. Who can tell after driving several hours from Knoxville to Bowling Green, Kentucky?

After a three-week layover in Louisville, our home area, we took off for the Jackson Hole/Grand Tetons area. The opportunity to test the system further certainly presented itself. One day we had a strong crosswind from the south. The next day was a strong crosswind from the north. It worked both times. On a third day, we had strong headwinds. Does this steering thing also help with enhancing fuel mileage? Definitely not. Bummer!

At the beginning of this article, the six benefits of the system were mentioned. Let's take a look at them in reviewing.

Reduces driver fatigue. This statement is one of those that had an "it depends" attached to it. Getting tired from driving depends on several things and among them is rest along the journey. However, it does work in reducing the constant feeling of always pulling down on one side of the steering wheel to combat a crosswind or the crown in the road. Martha and I would say it reduces the fatigue of

that constant pull. However, one is still left with the job of steering the coach and accounting for some drift from left to right.

Keeps the coach within its lane. To this remark, we would answer by saying "how do you mean that?" Since the coach drifts less from a crosswind, yes. When encountering a blowout? We don't know. But, since the system can react more quickly and properly, it should. Neither of us, by the way, want to test that ability.

Maintain control during a blowout. See the above. According to some videos on YouTube, it does. However, one must still know how to handle a blowout, especially on a front (steering) tire.

Touch button adjustable. Yes. There is nothing else to do if correctly installed, other than pulling the steering wheel in the direction that is to be overcome and push the button. The right amount of pressure is applied due to the design of the system; a strong spring clamped at an appropriate position.

Tire and chassis life extended. OK, Blue Ox, explain the theory of this statement. Tire pressure, balance, road conditions, and driving style are just a few of the variables that determine all tire life not to mention chassis wear.

1-year warranty. We'll take them at their word.