

Fueling Up at Truck Pumps

If you drive one of those big diesel-pusher motorhomes, your fuel tank has a large capacity when compared with a normal vehicle. You can likely carry 100+ gallons of fuel—again, lots more than a normal vehicle. So, when you tie up the pump at a normal station for a long time while filling up, people may become agitated. It takes a while to pump a large quantity because those “car” pumps are slow when compared to the pumps at the truck fueling islands. Even the nozzle is smaller on the car pumps so the flow rate is less.

A big truck (a semi-tractor) may hold 300+ gallons of diesel fuel in what are called “saddle tanks” (150 gallons each, one on each side of the tractor). It would take them forever to fill at a normal fuel pump (for cars). The EPA limits typical gas stations to pumps with a flow rate of 10 gallons-per-minute maximum. You can do the math and understand that filling any big rig takes a lot of time. That’s why there are truck pumps.

The Truck Islands and Pumps

I always recommend that RVers with large diesel-pusher motorhomes use the truck islands found at the normal truck stops. If you are going to take on, say, 100 gallons of fuel, it will be a much more efficient use of your time at a truck pump. There are several reasons for doing this. Here are some of them plus some tips on how to do it the correct way. If you are new at this, the fueling process at the truck pumps is different. Here’s how...

- While your motorhome and tow car are typically not quite as long as a semi-tractor / trailer, it is still a large rig. There is much more maneuvering room when getting in and out of the truck pump.
- You may have to wait in line for a pump. It’s like going into the bank—pick a pump line, pull up, and wait—pull up close to the truck ahead of you. Once you pull into your line, do not try to cross over to another line.

If you do, you may end up blocking two lines. If there are lines, that indicates the truck stop is busy and there will be other trucks coming in.

- Once a driver pulls into the pump, they are going to be there about 10–15 minutes. They will fill the tanks, clean the windshield, may check the oil, and whatever minor checking is necessary.
- In line, it's okay to shut down your engine but stay inside the coach—be ready to start and drive into the pump.
- When you pull into the pump, note that at truck islands, you can fill from both sides. Many motorhomes have fill spouts on both sides. You **do not need to do this** unless you have the largest of motorhomes. If you have a 150-gallon tank (very common), just fill from one side.
- Only one side has the pump controls, card reader, etc., and this is almost always on the driver's side of the fueling bay. You have to set up this pump and get it going before you can activate the hose on the opposite side should you choose to use it.
- Someone should stay with the pump. It is fast and there is a lot of pressure. Most automatic shut-offs work but stay with the pump just in case. I generally start the pump, then my wife puts her hand on it while it is pumping. That frees me to clean the windshield.
- If you get a small diesel spill for any reason, use the phone at the pump to report it. They won't yell at you but will send someone out to handle it.
- A big advantage at nearly all the truck islands is a window cleaner/squeegee with a long handle—like a broom handle—long enough for your motorhome. Plus, they usually keep clean window-washing solution in the buckets since they know the truckers value this.
- Many truck islands will also have an air hose and water hose. Use what you need. Don't try to wash your motorhome there!

- Many truck islands have credit-card readers (where you can swipe your card at the pump). Follow the instructions. It will usually ask odd (to you) questions such as "truck number" or "unit number." Just push "Enter" to bypass this. Usually the card reader will work. If it does, you do not have to go inside and get the receipt.
- If you want a receipt, send the copilot inside to get it. Take a two-way radio so the person pumping can tell the person inside when they are finished and when to approach the counter to pay or ask for the receipt. Otherwise, the inside person has to go through the line to ask the clerk if the pump has shut off.

Cleanliness

You will need a pair of leather gloves to pump fuel at the truck pumps. The nozzles are usually dirty. Buy a few cheap pairs of gloves, use them until you start getting residual diesel odors on your hands (through the gloves), and toss them.

You may want to change into a pair of old shoes at the truck pumps, too. Those diesel islands get lots of spills throughout the daily use from lots of trucks. You don't want to track the residual diesel fuel onto your carpet.

Important Note: The FIRST thing you need to do after you finish pumping is to cap your tank, jump in, and move your rig forward—even before you pay. Do this first even if you have to go inside to pay.

Clear the pump area by at least one tow-car length. Often, there is a painted line to pull up to and ensure you clear the pump.



Another trick is to pull forward so that the nose of your motorhome is even with the nose of a semi tractor/trailer in the next lane. You are not quite as long as them and doing this will ensure you have cleared the pump area for the next truck behind you.



Doing this allows the truck behind you to pull in and start their pumping while you are finishing up (setting your trip odometer, fuel-metering system, paying inside, buying a donut, etc.). If needed, you can go inside to get your own receipt after you pull forward. Don't mess around here and you don't have time to go in and eat lunch. You need to pull out of here before that truck behind you is ready to pull forward—about 10 minutes.

An Efficient Stop

Using the pump at the truck island is efficient. A fully functional truck pump is rated at 60 gallons per minute. That is six times faster than those at the typical gas station.

I try to use Flying J truck stops as they have traditionally been friendly to RVers and seem to have the lowest prices most of the time. Other truck stops seem to just tolerate RVers. Always try to fill at a busy truck stop instead of a mom-and-pop stop somewhere out in the desert. You want to help ensure that wherever you stop, they go through lots of fuel. That way, the fuel is fresh and less likely to mess up your fuel filter.