

Winterizing the Truma-Equipped Winnebago Travato

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Introduction

When we bought our 2016 Travato 59G, the manual's instructions for winterizing seemed to not quite result in the water systems being properly drained. I looked at how the plumbing around the Truma was laid out, and realized there were spots that would never be properly drained using gravity, and those areas wouldn't be getting antifreeze pumped into them.

After some discussion with Winnebago, the manual for the Travato was updated to recommend the use of compressed air first, then antifreeze, rather than one or the other. Let's dive in and see why this makes sense, and how to do it right.

Considerations

The fresh water system consists of both cold and hot water. When you use RV antifreeze, you do so with the Truma bypassed, meaning you do **not** pump it into the Truma. This is part of why the compressed air makes so much sense. You want to be sure all the pipes are free of water and there are some that just might not get fully emptied otherwise.

Tools and Materials

Compressor and related

You'll need a good air compressor on which you can adjust the output pressure. I use a compressor intended for air tools. We use it to add air to the tires of our cars and Travato, for various other tools and such, and for blowing water out of hoses and lines. It's important that you set the pressure of the air you pump into your Travato low enough to not do damage. 25 or 30PSI should be just fine. The water pressure regulator you use (you do use one, right?) will limit to 40-50PSI, so 30PSI of air should be quite safe.

It's worth having a decent compressor for many tasks around the house, and it'll be useful for your Travato needs.

I use a pancake compressor. I think we got ours along with some air-powered nail guns, but you can get one alone. Here's a picture of this type of compressor.

This kind of compressor had a tank that gets pumped up to a fairly high pressure, and a regulator that allows you to set the pressure to be delivered via air hose. I use this compressor with a tire inflation fitting when I'm checking pressure on the tires of our Travato or cars.

I connect a hose to the compressor and at the other end connect to a fitting that adapts to a garden hose thread. Camco makes a good one.

If the air hose you buy to go between the two doesn't have those quick-attach fittings, you'll need to add those on. You can get a decent compressor at Sears, Home Depot, Lowe's and other such places.

Antifreeze

You'll also need pink antifreeze. The amount you need depends on the model. For the G, you may need up to 4 gallons. For the K, you can probably do it with 2. Buy extra. Better to have it, especially if you take a trip to Florida, de-winterize on the way down, and have to winterize on the way back.

Fresh Water System

First thing we're going to do is use gravity. Let's drain out everything. Your Travato manual will give the locations of the various drains.

- Valves on the driver's side, down under the side of the van
 - these three valves are instead located under the stove/sink area, and are accessed by removing the bottom drawer on 2017.5 and later G models.
 - as of this writing, the K models and earlier G models have the valves under the driver's side.
- Cold water tank drain under the bench seat at the dinette (G model). It's a silver handle along the very front of the bench. There will be a label, but it seems to always be in the wrong place.
 - One of the three valves under the driver's side (or under the kitchen cabinet) also drain the water tank fill lines.
- On the K model, one of the three valves on the driver's side drains the tank.
- Truma drain valve (blue with yellow handle) and pressure relief valve (metal with tag)
- Open the faucets inside, and get your sprayer connected.

Open all of these valves and let the water drain fully. Do NOT change the position of the water heater winterization valve yet! Once there is no more water draining out anywhere under your Travato, you can proceed to the next step.

Open the City Fill and Tank Fill inlets. Remove the filter-washers. Press the button inside one, then the other, until water stops flowing. Now replace the filter washers.

Water Filter - Older Style

Let's not make a total mess by filling the water filter cartridge with pink antifreeze. Trust me, I've done it. Now that you've opened the drains, you will want to remove the water filter and replace it with the bypass plug. You kept the bypass plug, right? It came with your Travato. Oh, so you removed the filter without putting a container or something underneath? Time to clean up that puddle you left (it's worse in a G, as you wind up having to remove the floor of the cabinet in order to dry things up).

Your water filter system may have a bypass plug.

Water Filter - Newer Style

Newer Travatos have a filter contained in a housing. It seems 3M decided to stop making the filter system Winnebago had been using. So for the new one, drain the lines, then remove the housing (have towels below and take the housing off slowly. It'll likely be full of water. Take out the cartridge and put the housing back on. Given the amount of water that you'll have to deal with, one option is to blow out the lines before you remove the filter, as that might allow you to get most of the water out of the housing.

Pressure!

OK, now you're ready to start blowing out the lines.

And that means, it's time to use compressed air. Let's go after each of the systems.

Fresh Water Tank Fill

Screw the blow-out plug into the fresh water tank fill. Make sure your compressor's regulated output is set to zero. Connect a hose from the compressor to the blow-out plug. Slowly raise the pressure to maybe 20 PSI at most. You still have the valves open from before, right? Good. There should be some hissing and pissing as remaining water comes out. Let this run for a few minutes, then dial the compressor outlet pressure back to zero and disconnect the hose.

You might want to turn on the water pump for a few seconds at this point. The pump is self-priming and will suck any water that might still be in the line from the water tank to the water pump. Don't run it for long, though.

City Fill

This is the one where you need to do a bunch of things. We'll start with the valves all open. Insert the blow-out plug into the city fill. Turn the air on to 20 or 30 PSI. Air and water should be coming out of a number of places, much of it your low-point drains.

Let's start closing some valves. Your Truma valves are open (drain and pressure relief) and you'll want to leave them open. Close the low-point drains under the side of your Travato. More air and water should now be coming from the inside faucets. Close those. Now any trapped water in the Truma lines should be flowing out. Let this run for a few minutes, as it will dry out the lines sufficiently.

Dial your compressor back to zero PSI for a moment.

Now switch the water heater bypass valve the other way. Since Winnebago invariably gets the stickers in the wrong orientation, take a sharpie and put "N" on the direction the valve has been pointing, for "Normal" and a "W" for "Winter" on the pipe where the valve points when you change it. Now put it to the winter position.

Why all this compressed air talk? Well, the Truma gets bypassed, and does NOT get filled with antifreeze, so you really, really, really want to make sure the lines have been drained. Yours might drain just fine. The pipes around our Truma don't drain properly because there are some up-hill segments. The compressed air ensures water isn't trapped where it'd freeze and break things.

Now that the Truma is bypassed and your drain valves are closed, turn the compressor back up to 30PSI. With everything closed up, you should not hear air flow. Open a faucet, and air should come out. Do this one by one and you'll dry out the lines pretty well. Don't forget your shower! And don't forget your toilet, including the hand sprayer. You really don't want to have either of those items damaged.

If you decide you're not going to use antifreeze and you have the newer filter system, it's time to remove that filter housing once again and dump out any residual water.

Time for Antifreeze

OK, you did a good job blowing out all the lines. So you should be done, right? Not quite. The screen filter between the water tank and the water pump is still full. Yes, you could drain it, but it's a real pain. And you still don't know if the water pump itself is completely drained. Let's be safe, and use antifreeze.

There's a panel in your Travato that comes off, revealing a siphon tube and a valve much like the one used to bypass the water heater. Switch the valve in there, and stick the tube into a gallon bottle of the pink RV antifreeze. Yes, you could also put the antifreeze into a bucket and that might work better, but the bottle approach does work.

On the G model, the panel is right by the sliding door. Easy to get to, as is the valve. You K owners, sorry, it's a pain to get at the siphon tube and associated valve, which are in the access panel on the side of the driver's side bed.

You noticed there's a cap on the end of the siphon tube, right? No? Oops. Well, it unscrews and the siphon tube will work whole lot better if you take the cap off.

Turn on the water pump. It'll run a bit and suck in the pink stuff. If all the valves are closed, it should stop running. If it starts sucking air (used up most of a bottle) then turn off the pump and put the siphon in another bottle. Pump is now on, and stopped running? Good.

Open each sink valve and let it run until pink stuff comes out of the faucet. Do both cold and hot side. You did bypass your Truma, didn't you? I sure hope so, because it'd take a lot of pink antifreeze to fill the Truma and you really didn't want to do that!

Don't forget the shower, the toilet and its hand sprayer, and the outdoor sprayer out back. You want to run enough antifreeze through each of these that the pink stuff looks full-strength, not diluted by residual water.

You could at this point open the drain valves momentarily to get some pink stuff flowing out them too. Can't hurt to protect those lines and valves. Just don't leave any of them open long or you'll go through a lot of pink stuff.

At this point you shut off the water pump, switch the valve by the siphon tube back to normal and your fresh water lines are fully winterized. Should you worry about the pink stuff getting slushy or solid, I've read that this will happen, but that the pink stuff doesn't expand so there'll be no harm.

Don't forget to put the cap back on the end of the siphon tube. You know, that one you forgot to remove the first time, and couldn't figure out why the pump didn't siphon antifreeze.

For those with the newer filter system (housing with filter inside) it's time for one more step. Remove the housing again (you'd removed the filter cartridge earlier, right?) and dump out the antifreeze into the kitchen sink. That antifreeze will help winterizing the grey tank lines, and the housing won't be full of an antifreeze/water mix. There is a risk of the mixed content freezing (yes, even the pink stuff can freeze) and expand and damage the housing.

Congratulations, but you're not done yet. You still need to address the drainage lines.

Drainage System

The sinks in the Travato from 2016 onward use waterless traps. These are a membrane system that allows water to drain, but does not permit anything, especially fumes from the tank, back up into the living space.

Black Tank Flush

This one is easy. Similar to the tank fill, it's a good idea to flow a bit of air into the black flush. It won't take more than a few seconds as these lines don't really hold any pressure. But it'll ensure the pipes, vacuum breaker and sprayers are all dried out. There's not much chance of water trapped anyway, but it really does not hurt to push a bit of air in and be sure.

G Model

The 59G has some unique aspects to the drainage system that are really important to understand. Failure to properly winterize these drainage components will result in expensive repairs.

Drainage system components include:

- Sink drains
- Black tank
- Shower drain
- Grey tank
- Macerator pump

Once you've winterized the water supply lines and pump, you need to winterize the drainage system. There are two pumps used on the drain side of the G model: the shower drain and the macerator.

Dump Your Tanks!

You went and dumped your tanks already, right? No? Go do that. You want as much water (and other stuff) out of the tanks as possible.

OK, you're back.

Open up the shower drain. You'll find a strainer that unscrews, revealing a pipe going down. You need funnel that'll fit in that hole. Really, get a funnel. No, you do NOT want to do it without a funnel. Trust me on this. Unless you like things to be pink and sticky. I did warn you!

Good. You've got a funnel in place. Turn on the shower drain pump and slowly pour two gallons of antifreeze down through that funnel. Yes, two gallons. Of course the first few ounces will have protected the shower drain pump. That's not why we're using two gallons.

Turn off the shower drain pump. It's well protected at this point.

Sinks

Pour some antifreeze down each sink. A cup or two will be plenty. The waterless traps probably don't need as much protection as the old residential-style water traps, but since you can't see the waste plumbing and don't know if there are any spots that'll hold water, let's be sure and put a bit down the drains.

Macerator Pump

Now the reason for those two gallons down the drain: the macerator pump. The G model uses a macerator to pump waste water from the grey tank up over the axle to the drain fitting. That pump would be a real pain to replace. Your goal here is to get it nicely filled with pink stuff. So with those gallons of antifreeze in the grey tank, it's time to run the macerator pump. But wait! You need to know when to stop.

Put a bucket under the waste outlet of your Travato and remove the cap. Open the Grey Tank valve. Now operate the grey tank drain pump until you see pink antifreeze come out. Let it run a bit longer, so you see antifreeze that's not been diluted by residual water in the pump. Good. You're now protected there. Close the grey tank valve.

Black Tank

The black tank is drained by gravity, but it'd be nice to protect the tank valve and plumbing. So pour some antifreeze down the toilet. It won't hurt if you put a bunch down.

OK. Now open the black tank valve and let some pink stuff flow into your bucket. I sure hope you did dump your tanks, or your bucket will be very full of poo, and you will need to use more antifreeze once the tank is really empty.

Now make sure both the black and grey tank valves are closed, and put the cap back on the drain tube.

Done

Congratulations. Your drainage system is winterized.

K Model

The 59K model has a simpler drainage system setup than the 59G. The kitchen sink and the shower drain into the grey tank. The bathroom sink and the toilet drain into the black tank.

Sinks

The kitchen sink has a waterless trap. Put a cup of antifreeze down the kitchen sink. The bathroom sink uses a P-trap. That type of trap relies on liquid (water) to make a seal and keep fumes from coming back up the drain line. You will need to add enough pink antifreeze down the sink drain to ensure the trap is protected. A few cups of the pink stuff should do it.

Shower Drain

The shower drain should get enough antifreeze added to ensure the piping and trap are well protected. Add some extra, as you'll want to be able to use that to check that you've protected the grey tank.

Grey Tank

Remove the waste outlet cap. Put a bucket under the outflow pipe. Open the grey tank valve and let it flow until pink stuff is coming out. Close the valve.

Black Tank

Dump some pink stuff down the toilet. Then go outside and open the black drain. You did dump the tanks first, didn't you? Your bucket runneth over with poo? Oops. Bad move. OK, you didn't screw that up. Let a bit of pink stuff flow out and close the valve. Replace the cap.

FAQ

Q: Now that I've drained and winterized, can I still use the Truma for heat?

A: Yes. Make sure you turn on only the heat part of the Truma, not the hot water part. If you make a mistake it won't hurt anything. The Truma will notice the lack of water and will shut down with an error message. You can use electric, gas or mix to heat the Travato safely with no water in the Truma.