

Charles Watts' Positive Casita Thread (Dated 2001)

Note from Charles: *For years, I was a lurker on numerous RV sites, searching in vain for information about our beloved Casita, rarely posting a message. Finally, to help spur interest in a place for Casita owners to share tips, ideas and problems, I wrote the following "Positive Casita" thread on a website called "Happy Campers" several years ago. It wasn't long before Eric Mayer approached me with a plan to create www.CasitaClub.com. Thanks to all of you, CasitaClub has exceeded both his and my expectations. My wife, Pam, and I are on our third Casita now...and expect we'll own several more in the future. We hope you enjoy yours as much as we enjoy ours. And I hope you'll enjoy rereading the Positive Casita Thread.*

I'm starting a new thread of positive Casita tips, problems and solutions, and how to fix almost everything that might happen to a Casita. I'm on my second one. I'm six-foot-four feet tall, travel for months and thousands of miles each year with my wife and two dogs. We love the king-size bed and the dogs love the cubbyhole under it. I've learned a thing or two over the years, as I'm sure others have, and I'm welcoming their tips, tricks and fixes on this thread. If you're having a problem, post it in a positive vein, and hopefully I or others will be able to tell you how we handled it. None of this stuff is rocket science. Let's help each other.

Casita tip #1 -- If you aren't happy with the 13, 16 or 17 foot trailer's interior, it isn't ever going to get bigger. I've long suspected that the few (and I stress few) unhappy Casita owners I've encountered are really unhappy with the size of the trailer, and as a result, magnify every little problem into huge overblown doom and gloom utterances.

Casita tip #2 -- (Closely related to #1) If you do buy a Casita and find you can't live with it, put a "for sale" sign on it, park it near a busy intersection and set the asking price at what you paid for it. It will sell. Casita holds its value. Don't take my word for it, go to your local library, ask for the NADA RV book, and plot out the past ten years sale, retail and wholesale prices. It will still be worth 50% of what you paid for it in 10 years. If your library doesn't have the NADA RV book, have them do an inter-library search and loan, to assure yourself. If you want to have some fun, plot out a similar 10 year graph for a big Jayco or even a \$750,000 Prevost.

Casita tip #3 -- You bought a 100% fiberglass trailer. That's not a draw-back, but a big plus. Like Corvettes and boats, you'll be able to go faster and get places other RVers can't go. I love leaving them behind and spend hours looking through Trailer Life's annual campground guide, circling remote out of the way places that list an 18 foot length limit. I guarantee you'll leave the crowds behind if you want. Start thinking like you own a Corvette or a boat. (I don't think Casitas float so don't get too carried away). As such, you've just given yourself a huge leg up on other RVers. Even the worst possible boo-boo (I didn't see that tree, Honey) can be fixed in any body shop or boat repair place. I guarantee, you'll find several good "glass" men everywhere and anywhere you go. I've never needed any fiberglass repair, inside or out, on either of my Casitas, but I've stopped and talked about the possibility with my local auto repair shop. And their assurance that they could repair, fix, straighten (or curve) anything put any fear to rest.

Casita tip #4 -- Anything in this life is going to break, from the lead in my pencil, to my car, my concrete driveway and, yes, my Casita. Does my Casita break more than anything else in my life? No. Stuff happens. And it's not so much the fact that stuff happens, it's how you deal with it. You bought a Casita. I can guarantee you, beyond any shadow of doubt, you are now part of the family. If you hurt, they'll hurt. They will make it right and help you long after the warranty is expired. Don't worry about it. Casita has been in business for 15 years. The company has a remarkable number of "repeat" customers. They will truly go to the end of the earth for their customers.

Casita Tip #5 -- The Casita factory is in Rice, TX. You buy factory direct. That's not a drawback, that's a plus. Trailers are weird animals. Any brand. The appliances (range, water heater, furnace, fridge) are warranted by their respective makers. The trailer manufacturer warrants their installations, construction etc. Over the years, I've heard numerous horror stories about people getting caught with horrendous problems between the appliance manufacturer, the trailer manufacturer and the selling dealer, all claiming it's the other guys problem, leaving the poor owner in the lurch. Casita will never do this to you, even though technically a problem with your furnace is between you as the owner, and Suburban, the furnace manufacturer. But I've found Casita will help you. And you've eliminated a few middlemen by buying direct.

Casita Tip #6 -- You don't have to go back to the factory to get every problem fixed. Casita will stand behind you getting it fixed wherever you manage to pull it. I am such a devoted Casita fan, I have to admit, that I once contemplated driving 800 miles from Illinois to Rice, TX to have Casita change a burnt-out light bulb (I was looking for a chance to visit my friends at the factory!) but my wife talked me out of it. You can have any Camping World, any brand RV dealer, even "Bubba's RV Service" fix it. Odds are if your fridge goes out, there's a Dometic authorized repair center (if not several) nearby.

Casita Tip #7 -- Start cultivating your local RV repair connections before you have a problem. I live in Dunlap, Illinois. My nearest RV Sales/Repair place are jerks, plain and simple. They have big signs up that say "We only service what we sell." When I asked, they said they wouldn't service my Casita and that I should have bought one of their Diesel Pushers. Their policy also extends to people who purchase the same BRAND RV at other dealerships. I pity the poor guy passing through. But then I read my owner manual on the AXLE and was surprised to find an authorized repair shop in the next town. The same place is an authorized Dometic repair shop. I wasn't having a problem, but they were still glad to see me and assured me they would be able, with Casita's guidance, fix any problem with anything, short of burning it to the ground. Cultivate these friendships before you have a problem. I've never had a problem for them to fix, but I buy an occasional light bulb or toilet chemicals from them. And I know they'd welcome me with open arms if I ever had a problem. Same thing is true with the Camping World four hours away. You don't have to return to the factory to get stuff fixed...but I admit to constant yearnings to return to Rice, TX.

Casita Tip #8 -- Rivets on Airstreams, airplanes and Casitas occasionally pop. This is not a design flaw. They are engineered to work this way to prevent structural damage. Once...and only once...I had a rivet pop on my first Casita. It was after a day of travel on a washboard road way north of Jasper National Park in Canada. It was one of the four rivets holding the TV/microwave cabinet to the roof. I wasn't surprised that it failed because my wife and I thought we were going to lose fillings from our teeth from the way we, the car and the trailer bounced for hours and hours and hours. Unfortunately, back then, I wasn't prepared and didn't know a darn thing about pop-rivets. I stopped in the next town at a little hardware store, bought a couple of 1-inch screws, sized to fit in the existing pop-rivet hole. I also bought a tube of silicone caulk. I didn't have a ladder, so I backed the mini-van next to the trailer, crawled up on top, caulked the heck out of the hole, jammed in the screw with my wife's guidance, crawled down and put a newly purchased "acorn nut" on the screw and was back in business. It never leaked or broke again. The trick here is a to ALWAYS CAULK THE HOLE before you insert the screw! It won't leak!

Casita Tip #9 -- Yeah, but, 1-inch screws and acorn nuts aren't designed to fail like a pop-rivets, I learned later. And my steel screw/acorn nut was in fact transferring more stress than it should to the top of the cabinet. So I bought my first pop-rivet gun when I got home (a \$10 purchase anywhere). It came with an assortment of different-sized pop-rivets, which at the time, I didn't understand why. But I started practicing pop-riveting everything. Like I've said, this isn't rocket science and before long, I was pop-riveting dog tags to dog collars, my wife's recipes. Hey, practice makes perfect, so I could hardly wait till another rivet broke (which never happened again on my first trailer). When I purchased my 2000 Casita last fall, I "bought" a handful of official Casita pop-rivets, including the fancy "nuttied" versions. I'm ready and only hope my fillings are secure enough to withstanding my next adventure. Buy a pop-rivet gun and learn to use it. You'll find a 1,000 uses around the home, I guarantee it. And you'll be ready for a popped-rivet on your Casita. As I said, it happens on Airstreams and airplanes also. But if one pops, don't curse it; figure you bounced your Casita past the rivet's stress point so it failed before it caused fiberglass damage. Remember to caulk any hole, anywhere, BEFORE you insert the screw, pop-rivet or finger-in-dam and it won't leak.

Casita Tip #10 -- Remember, your Casita is more like a boat than a typical travel trailer. Shop for your supplies at a boat dealer. After all, what's good for a fiberglass boat is good for your fiberglass trailer.

Examples: Mequires makes a fiberglass boat wax marketed only through boat dealers. Great stuff. Lasts a long time on hulls in saltwater, even longer on your Casita. Boat dealers all sell various brands of "high flow" Marine grade caulking designed to seek out and seal even the smallest crack. If it keeps boats from sinking, it may seal up a leaking pop-rivet or window seal (although I've never had either leak, but I carry a tube of marine grade high flow caulk with me just in case!). Boat dealers also seek a variety of quick-sure-fixes for fiberglass repairs. Boaters are always running aground, into submerged trees, etc. These guys are virtual goldmines of information and fixes. Again, let me stress, I visit them to ask "what ifs," and not from "needing" repairs. But hey, again, if these places can keep boats afloat, they can surely help me with a fiberglass problem, if and when. I don't know why, but boat places as a rule are cheaper for various rv-type supplies than Camping World or Big League RV dealers. Boats have toilets, pumps, electrical switches and lots of other goodies that duplicate rv stuff. Check 'em out, and buy that boat wax!

Casita Tip #11 -- Rare things that I've heard go wrong and how I would go about fixing them. I almost hate to get into this, for fear someone will point to this and say, "Aha, I told you things go wrong with Casitas." I want to stress that NONE have happened to me. Instead, I've read on the internet about someone having these problems or maybe even run someone who's experienced them. As I have said before, short of burning to the ground, nothing is insurmountable if you think it through.

A. Awning leaks around the support brackets. Probably because someone failed to CAULK THE HOLE before inserting the screws to attach the brackets. Easiest, quickest fix would be to take the damn awning off and seal up the bracket screw holes with some sun-activated Bondo Fiberglass Patch, sold in any auto parts store. I carry a can, never used it, but have it just in case. Make sure you get SUN-ACTIVATED. You could also use the sun-activate Bondo and some fiberglass repair screen to "build up" a layer of fiberglass up, over, around and encapsulating the two awning supports. Or have a boat or body shop do it. It would be watertight, permanent and the awning supports would never come off the darn trailer! Now if that's too radical. Try some of that MARINE GRADE high-flow caulking you bought at the boat store. It might flow into the errant leak. If and when that fails, stop at ANY body shop or boat repair place. Have them remove the awning and brackets, seal the existing holes, move the brackets over two inches, reinstall the awning. Installing the awning is simple and explained in your awning owner's manual. You have read it, haven't you? I think I would opt for my first fix, remove the awning, seal the holes and get on with my life. My wife could hold an umbrella for shade anyway. (By the by, neither of my awnings in either have leak, so I have no first hand experience!)

B. "One of the pop-rivets leaks" I am so tired of hearing about how bad it is that Casita uses pop-rivets. Airplanes and Airstreams make extensive use of them, as does your car. But hey, let those complaining RV'ers whose rigs are glued, stapled, screwed or whatever eat cake. If one of your pop-rivets leaks, try some of that MARINE grade, high flow caulking. Pop off the little white cap with a pocket knife, apply a bead along the top and across the now exposed head). Again, I have no personal experience, but I also now carry a pop-rivet gun (you have been practicing, haven't you?), a portable power drill and corresponding bit. Step one would be to drill through the head of the leaking pop-rivet to release it. Pull out both the inside and outside part. CAULK THE HOLE BEFORE you insert the new pop rivet, and pop your way to a fix. None of this stuff is rocket science. Be prepared. Travel prepared. Practice your intended fixes, talk with boat and car repairmen and "Bubba's RV Repair Shop", pick their brains with what-if questions. You'll be surprised at how easy the answers are. By the by, boat and rv guys are most accessible during the fall and winter months. Don't expect to show up in mid-July and expect them to drop everything to talk with you. And even though I dearly love Casita whose job it is to build high-quality trailers that are highly fixable. I think I would go to guys who fix things for a living, rather than running back to Casita for all the answers.

More things I've heard and how I'd go about attempting to fix them.

C. "My door on the 16 foot trailer doesn't seal properly after a while." By design, the latching block wears down after a while. In some cases, if the trailer use is extensive or unusually rough, particularly on the older Casitas, you may have to have the latching block replaced. No big deal. Casita can send you one. I did it once on my first Casita. I also replace the door seal, but hey, I've also replaced the seals on my cars and front door to my house. You use it a bunch, it's going to wear out, replace it. I've read, but not experienced a problem with door hinges, which Casita has now upgraded and will supply new ones. If it still seems to be ill-fitting, I would probably go back to my boat or auto body guys or my stored can of sun-activated bondo fiberglass repair. I'd tell them

to peel back the carpeting on the door, build up the depth of the fiberglass on the door edges for a better fit, then reglue the carpet over the build up. It shouldn't be too expensive. Remember, these body shop guys have to "true" auto doors, day in, day out. They'd find working on a Casita a real treat!

D. Over the years, I've never experienced or heard about anybody getting a crack in their fiberglass shell ... with one exception. You've probably heard about him too, since he's so internetally (is that a word) vocal. I have heard of rare instances of "spider webbing" cracks (more a cosmetic problem than a potential leak) in the gel-coat and an occasional Casita hitting a tree or getting into a wreck. Boat shops sell a gel-coat repair kit to cover spider-webbing cracking, if and when it appears (I've never had it happen to either on of my Casitas, but I know what to do if it appears!) Severe accidents aside (which my trailer insurance covers), if my trailer did crack (which I've only heard of happening once and only once) and it was under warranty, I might be tempted to give Casita a shot at fixing it ... but I would probably call Casita and get authorization to have a boat or auto body shop fix it. I would also tell Casita that I'm going to make some "in-the-field" repairs first which will have to be undone later. I'd then whip out the sun-activated Bondo, and Bondo the tar out of the cracked area. If the crack happened to go under the frame of the trailer, I'd whip out the Marine Grade caulk, caulk along each side of the frame for a couple feet ... and then maybe put a layer of Bondo and fiberglass screen over the whole length of the crack and the frame. Total cost for supplies, under \$15. Then and only then, would I take it to a boat or auto body shop have talk about repairing it. Bondo is extremely easy to work with ... if you can spread frosting on a cake, you can work with the stuff. It's extremely forgiving and will always give you a waterproof bond. Again, I've never had to use it on my Casita ... but over the years, it's been a staple of the auto repair world. If it can repair a car, it can repair your Casita. Remember, none of this stuff is rocket science. Some folks around here are making it sound like Casita is the only manufacturer that ever has a problem. We all know that ain't the case.

Casita and condensation tip

The trick to preventing condensation was, is and always will be ventilation. Ventilation prevented condensation in my previous trailers ... and it's never been a problem in my two Casitas. Casita specific tips:

- 1.** At night, crack the bathroom window and crack the overhead vent. Do this rain, shine, snow, below freezing or not, and you'll rarely, if ever, have condensation inside the trailer.
- 2.** If, in rare cases, you wake up in the morning and find a little condensation on the windows, INCREASE YOUR ventilation for a while. Run your stove exhaust fan ... or better yet, your three-speed, reversing Fantastic Vent Fan. I'll post some winter camping tips on how and why we do this when dry camping at 10 degrees.
- 3.** We installed a Fantastic Fan in our old Casita. And we ordered another installed from the factory as Casita built our 2000 Casita. If you didn't have one installed, have Camping World, Bubba's RV installed one, or install it yourself. Do it not so much for condensation, but for general ventilation. It's great for moving air out, or pulling air in.
- 4.** You are always supposed to run your stove vent fan when you cook. We also run our Fantastic Vent (particularly when cooking noodles.) We run both after a shower.
- 5.** Now, I know, someone said the carpet holds moisture and loosens the glue. Experience tells me that's NOT TRUE! And if for some reason you wake up one morning with heavy condensation, a prudent RV owner would take steps to remove and prevent future condensation.
- 6.** The worst condensation we've experienced was not in our trailers, but my brand new mini-van. After a long day of trailoring, we pulled into a camp site after dark. I was so tired, I left not one, but two windows rolled down all the way ... and you guessed it, it rained like heck all night long. We found standing water inside and on the leather seats. I IMMEDIATELY went to a store and bought the biggest box fan I could find, and ran it for the next several days inside the van, drawing and drying out the dampness.

Leaks -- Eggs vs. other RVs

Every RV'er fears leaks. A hidden leak can kill most RVs long before folks wear them out. Well, when it comes to leaks, all Casita owners have to fear is fear itself. Here's a bet: Take a Casita and another traditional RV. Inside each, set up one of those "swish, swish, swish" rotating lawn sprinklers. Turn on the lawn sprinklers FULL BLAST and shut up the trailers for two weeks. Hard to imagine a worse leak than that. After two weeks, remove the sprinklers. Leave both RVs shut up for three months. That's right. Three months. After all this, the Casita will still be 100% structurally sound, because it's 100 percent fiberglass. The floor is fiberglass, the walls are fiberglass, the ceiling and roof are fiberglass, the cabinets are fiberglass, the benches and beds are fiberglass, the bathroom enclosure is fiberglass. Water will never destroy them! Sure, the carpeting might still be wet. The carpeting will probably have to be replaced. (with what, a quart of carpet glue and a few yards of carpeting.) And you'd have to replace the cabinet and bathroom doors. But your Casita will be 100 percent structurally sound and you'll be rolling down the road in no time. Would someone care to give a damage report on the other RV? Now, neither of my Casitas have leaked. But this is why I also have never feared a leak in either Casita either. All you have to fear is fear itself!

Casita Maintenance

Since it's everyone's goal to keep their Casita running, I thought I'd outline some basic maintenance tips.

- 1.** Rotate all three tires every 5000 miles. For me, this works out to about twice a year. If the mood strikes me, I'll also occasionally have the two-rotated-to-the-ground tires balanced. I bought a 2.5 ton floor jack (cheap at Sam's, Wal-Mart etc.) which lifts each side with a couple of pumps.
- 2.** Grease the wheel bearings once a year. It's easy on newer Casitas with built-in grease nipples. I bought a cheap grease gun (my first!) to use. Before that, I found it was easier to have my local Bubba's RV Service do it.
- 3.** If you do take it to Bubba's for a lube, have him check the brakes (although I've never had a problem with the brakes on either Casita).
- 4.** Wash the exterior BY HAND! Don't take it to a high pressure car wash and use a high pressure wand. This is good advice for ANY trailer owner, not just Casita. The high pressure wash can lift caulking strips and window/door gaskets on ANY trailer. But that's not the real reason not to use high-pressure wands to wash your trailer. The real reason is that it is too easy to "drive" moisture into the gas orifices of your refrigerator and water heater. These orifices are prone to rusting shut, and the rust will clog the gas flow eventually. (Go ask Bubba of your local Bubba's RV Service ... he'll tell you the same thing!) The orifices are far enough back to stay clear of rain and road spray, but the high pressure spray guns will drive it home every time.
- 5.** Wax your Casita at least once a year with that boat wax I told you about earlier. You did go buy it, didn't you?
- 6.** Wax the bottom of your Casita (because you can!) while you're at it. I use a mechanic's creeper to slide underneath it. No I'm not weird. I'm easily amazed that my Casita is a solid fiberglass egg. Sliding under it once a year also allows me to check stuff. I've never found a problem and don't know what stuff I'm checking for ... but hey, I'm looking once a year while I'm waxing! Don't those Prevost guys wax the bottoms of their rigs?

Yup, I'm a bottom waxer keeping the shiny side up.

Yup, I'm a bottom waxer (in case it rolls, it will be just as pretty upside down!)(*"Keep the shiny side up"* doesn't apply to me) Ha! I forgot to say I also wax the wheel wells. And I've threaten to start waxing the cabinets and bathroom enclosure but my wife has put her foot down. Hey, I said I amuse easily and I only do it once a year. Actually, while I'm bottom waxing my Casita, I also check the main electrical ground connection to the trailer frame for rust, fraying etc. A loose ground or short could ruin your day. I also check to see the hose clamps on the rubber shower drain J-trap are tight. On my first Casita, I once saw water running out from beneath the front end while my wife was showering. It was leaking from the shower drain hose clamp being loose around the rubber j-trap that hangs under the trailer. As many gravel roads as I run down going 80 mph, I also check for damage underneath the trailer from flying rocks. I've never found any trailer damage despite the fact I've broken countless car windshields and dinged my car's hood numerous times on our travels. And yes, I wax the bottom partially because most other RV'ers can't. Ha!

Casita Maintenance #2

Taking care of the inside of a Casita is easy ... if it isn't carpet, it's fiberglass.

- 1.** Vacuum the carpet regularly. We carry a vacuum with us at all times ... and yes, a couple times a year I vacuum the inside walls and ceiling (because I can and others can't!) No, not with big standup vacuum, but not a puny 12-volt or battery dust-buster either. A number of years ago, we found a hand-held electric Red Devil vacuum. It's powerful, has a beater-bar-roller, disposable bags and comes with a 20 foot electrical cord and a 3-foot sucker hose attachment. I imagine they still sell it at Wal-Mart, etc. It's compact so it stores easily under one of the benches.
- 2.** We use a carpet sample right inside the door, and an Oriental Rug runner (ain't we uptown!) down the isle of the Casita. They're easy to roll up and shake outside. And my wife can redecorate whenever the mood strikes her.
- 3.** Inside the bathroom, my wife keeps a non-skid piece of carpet down on the floor, except when we shower. Again, easy to roll up and shake outside.
- 4.** We carry a small cheap broom (\$2 at Dollar General). When dry camping, we remove the runners and sweep out the Casita occasionally (A two-minute job in the 16-foot Casita).
- 5.** We use any non-abrasive cleaner like Scrubbing Bubbles (my job and my personal favorite!) to clean the fiberglass bath enclosure or toilet. My wife uses Windex to wipe down the kitchen stove, cabinet and table tops.

Casita Maintenance #3

Nuts and Bolts and Screws, oh my Fact of live with an RV. Nuts, bolts and screws occasionally vibrate loose and can even break as you pound your rv down the road. Since traditional RVs use 100s of em, it's a constant battle keeping them tightened. Casita, however, uses mostly pop-rivets (see top of this message thread) and only uses a handful of nuts, bolts and screws. But it still pays to police them for tightness on a regular basis.

- 1.** Most important are the six nuts and bolts that secure your converter. Unlike many traditional RVs, you can easily access both the front and back to check them. But please be sure you disconnect from shoreline power before checking!!!! Casita uses locking washers to hold the nuts tight, but you still should check them.
- 2.** Also open the front converter cover and check the tightness of the six or so screws securing the various wires to their respective wiring terminals. This is extremely important to do on a regular basis in any RV! If one of these screws vibrates loose, all kinds of bad things can happen! This is true with any RV!
- 3.** On my first Casita, one of the screws securing the top back of one of the benches kept vibrating loose. I thought about replacing it with a pop-rivet (too permanent), or a nut/bolt/locking washer (too much trouble) but in the end, just reached under the bench and placed a piece of duct tape around the exposed bottom screw threads, which solve the problem by dampening the vibration. (My one and only duct tape fix!)
- 4.** After bouncing down some particularly nasty public-access, but privately owned logging roads in Northern Maine, I discovered that one of the screws securing the range/sink cabinet to the bathroom enclosure had broken. At first, I worried about how I was going to get the broken part of the screw out of the cabinet wall so I could insert a new screw through the bathroom fiberglass. But then I decided to use the broken screw threads as sort of a "molly and slightly angled the new screw so the threads would grab along the old broken screw inside the wall. It worked like a charm. Since the screw head was exposed inside the bathroom, I caulked the screw hold BEFORE inserting the new screw. It never leaked!