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RV NEWS

A Match Made in Middlebury

Thor acquisition of Jayco: Two industry powerhouses create an ideal partnership



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Making Power Cool



Richard Gaudet, vice president of Xantrex, a Schneider Electric company



Mitul Chandrani, Xantrex senior marketing manager



Schneider Electric is Xantrex's parent company. Xantrex VP Richard Gaudet says having Schneider as a parent means Xantrex can leverage Schneider's buying power to drive down costs for RV OEMs.

With residential refrigerators continuing to make inroads as original equipment in new RV models, reliable power is becoming increasingly important for optimal use of these types of appliances. A reliable inverter system can help with optimally powering residential appliances.

By Julie Baxter

RV manufacturers are responding to the growing consumer demand for residential refrigerators. While these appliances offer certain benefits, they also present challenges when trying to sufficiently power them. If not configured correctly, RVs' power systems can shorten the life of the vehicle's batteries and its appliances.

An inverter removes limitations of a converter and provides the type of pure sine wave electricity residential appliances are designed to run on.

Power solutions are evolving to coincide with the technological conveniences of residential appliances. Xantrex recently released its new Freedom X inverter to help RV manufacturers with the AC versus DC issue.

"If you look back over the last 10 or 15 years, there has been a growing demand for additional AC-powered appliances and devices," says Richard Gaudet, vice president of Xantrex, a Schneider Electric company.

"The main driver triggering the development of the new Freedom X was Xantrex listening to its RV OEMs—namely their desire to install full-size



Xantrex VP Richard Gaudet says the Freedom X inverter's easily accessible quick-connect AC in and out terminals simplify installation of the inverter on the factory assembly line.

refrigerators," Gaudet says. "Original equipment manufacturers developed a strong interest in residential fridges powered by AC power . . . in not just Class A coaches, but vehicles of all sizes, including travel trailers and fifth wheels."

The Freedom X offers 1,200 watts of continuous sine wave power, which is clean power, like electricity from a local residential utility grid. Freedom X offers extended surge capability to kick start demanding compressor loads in residential refrigerators.

"In comparison testing, we found Freedom X is efficiently able to provide power for a longer run time," Gaudet says.

That longer run time matters, particularly when dry camping with no shore power source available. Gaudet says the Freedom X stands out not only because of the power it provides, but also because of the ease of installation and minimizing warranty events.

"There are a few key areas where we stand out from the competition. We made sure installation is extremely reliable and the quickest in the market;

you can install our inverter much quicker than our competitors'. And it's the first inverter in the market that you don't have to disconnect to do RV electrical testing. Further, with robust protection against reverse polarity, we have minimized one of the OEMs' largest warranty costs, another first for an inverter manufacturer. We took those types of things into consideration to ease the minds of OEMs."

OEMs took notice. Forest River, Highland Ridge, Jayco, Keystone and KZ-RV are already installing or committing to install Freedom X inverters after the product was introduced at the National RV Tradeshow in Louisville last year, says Mitul Chandrani, Xantrex senior marketing manager.

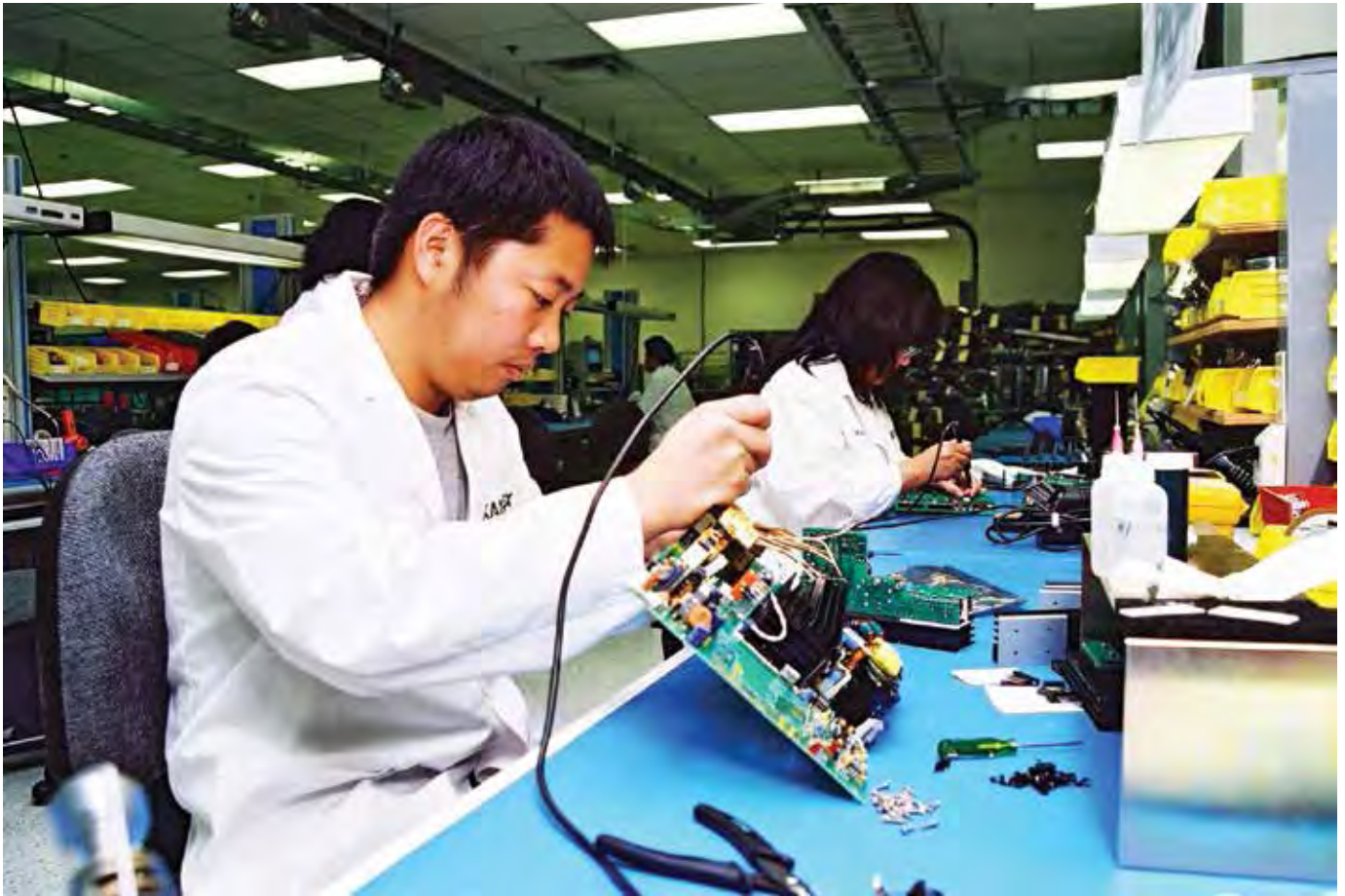
"We are so excited with the success of the Freedom X at the OEM level that we are preparing to launch four new aftermarket models later this year," Chandrani says. "These products will have more features in keeping with the demands from the RV aftermarket and offer a lot of flexibility in terms of AC power output and battery charging settings to suit a variety of applications."



Ben Johnson

Ben Johnson, national sales and product development manager at Highland Ridge, raves about the performance of the Freedom X.

"Highland Ridge is a unique company in the industry in that we scrutinize every part and process to look for innovative ways to improve the RV experience," Johnson says. "Based on customer feedback, we knew we had an opportunity to improve the performance of our inverter system, namely battery life, when running the very popular 110 (volt) residential refrigerators. Our results, plus independent testing, were eye opening. The choice became crystal clear. We chose the Freedom X inverter because it far outperformed other inverters in every way. In the end, we know the Xantrex



Xantrex's parent company, Schneider Electric, has 144,000 employees, with factories and operations in many countries.

Freedom X will provide a better experience for our customers.

"We want our customers to enjoy the RV experience. To us, that means campfires, grilling, movies on a rainy day, communing with friends and neighbors . . . not constantly worrying about things like battery life and whether the fridge is still running. The Xantrex Freedom X takes that worry out of our customers' minds and allows them to enjoy their RV for what it's intended for—owning the outdoors."

Leveraging the Parent Company Strength for Product Testing

Chandrani says the eye-opening testing didn't come by accident. Xantrex's lab in Vancouver, British Columbia, is the largest private inverter testing lab in North America.

He says the lab has 370,000 pounds of equipment and cables and a vast array of equipment to test Xantrex products under the harshest of conditions—from spraying inverters with salt water to

simulating extreme heat and cold temperatures in minutes.

"If you're out in Alaska, out in Arizona, the product has to work. Your battery must work. You have to be able to make coffee, make popcorn for the kids," Chandrani says. "Xantrex benefits greatly from having a parent like Schneider with its 144,000 employees and \$26.4 billion in annual sales."

Schneider Electric manufacturers all kinds of electronic products, from building automation systems to uninterrupted power supplies for countless industries worldwide.

"It's a very symbiotic relationship," Gaudet adds. "We're learning what elements of Schneider we can leverage to make us more robust, which is better for our customers, while maintaining the integral part of Xantrex, which is agility. It allows us to get the benefits of both worlds. We're able to leverage the buying power of Schneider and drive

down costs for RV OEMs to the lowest in the industry.

"We've been able to take the lessons from the product development process at Schneider Electric . . . robust, really strong products, and bring them to the RV market. We're long trusted as a brand with high quality and strong, disciplined, reliable testing processes. Our product is not going to break just beyond its warranty specs. It's going to continue to perform.

"In the RV market, we cover the spectrum (except for pop-up campers), from travel trailers to Class A coaches," Gaudet says. "All of Xantrex's RV products are Class B compliant, which means customers can count on them not creating electrical interference on the radio, stereo or TV."

Chandrani says the relationship also benefits dealerships when it comes to warranty service. If a warranty is in place and there is an issue with a product, with only a few exceptions, a dealer can replace it without consulting Xantrex.



The Freedom X offers extended surge capability to kick start demanding compressor loads in residential refrigerators and microwaves.

“Replacements are offered no questions asked. We’ve done that to make it easier for the dealer to take care of the customer,” he says.

Another way Xantrex works to help dealers take care of consumers is through a dealer-only hotline. Chandrani says dealers’ calls don’t wait in the queue when call volume is high. Instead, dealer calls get answered quickly so that dealers, in turn, can respond quickly to their customers.

Xantrex has more than 20 service centers in North America, which Chandrani says is just another step the company is taking to make sure customers are satisfied.

“We want to make sure products are investigated and inspected and repaired by qualified people.”

In addition, Xantrex has a sales, service and distribution facility in Elkhart, Indiana, where it can handle OEM

warranty claims and just-in-time requests from RV manufacturers. A team of sales application engineers is also based in Elkhart. Those engineers visit OEM manufacturing plants to provide diagnostic information and work to improve manufacturing yields.

The Aftermarket

Xantrex has been working to expand its footprint in the aftermarket, Chandrani says. Two years ago, the company launched a program to educate dealers about its inverter/chargers, asking dealers to offer consumers the choice of upgrading to an inverter/charger when an RV with a broken converter comes into the service department outside of the warranty period.

“Converters, long-standing standard equipment in smaller vehicles, can’t power an AC residential fridge, because a converter really is a basic charger, and even at their best,

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Xantrex Senior Marketing Manager Mitul Chandrani says the Xantrex test lab in Vancouver, British Columbia, is the largest private inverter test lab in North America. It has a vast array of equipment to test Xantrex products under the harshest of conditions, he says.

can't do so efficiently," Chandrani says. "A converter is not an AC power source and also is not an efficient battery charger."

Converters take incoming AC power and convert it to DC power while also charging the battery. Inverter/chargers reverse that, converting DC to AC, allowing for the operation of residential appliances while also charging the battery. Inverters also optimize battery life, Chandrani says. An inverter with a built-in transfer switch, such as the new Freedom X, utilizes the incoming shore power at campgrounds or wherever available to power downstream loads without depleting the battery.

"Research has found the majority of converters that come factory-installed would break just outside the warranty period," he says. "We wanted dealers to at least offer the choice of upgrading to an inverter/charger because of the many benefits they offer."

Chandrani says such an offer is a win for all involved. Inverter/chargers can boost parts department revenues, boost service department revenues and

boost customer satisfaction because dealers are "offering better products to the consumer."

"We are specifically promoting the compact, low-profile Freedom HF and HFS inverter/chargers for broken converter replacements. When we speak with dealers, they really appreciate the idea of offering a better overall system to their customers," Chandrani says. "If you think about it, when dealers replace a converter with a Freedom HF or HFS, they are offering a customer a converter plus inverter plus built-in transfer switch—a complete electrical system with better battery-charging capability."

The program has worked well, with aftermarket sales of the Freedom HF and HFS more than doubling in 2016, according to Chandrani.

Education and Incentives

Xantrex has a YouTube channel of educational and instructional videos, offers seminars at industry trade shows, and provides educational posters to merchandisers. More than 100 dealers attended its seminar at the

NTP-Stag show in Anaheim, California, in January.

Xantrex is encouraging dealers to swap out older make/model inverter/chargers installed in Type A motorhomes with the state-of-the-art Freedom SW inverter/chargers. It offers \$50 incentives to dealers that swap out earlier Xantrex model inverter/chargers, the Magnum ME or MS or Freedom 458 (installed from 1998 to 2004) for a newer model, such as the Freedom SW.

"The Freedom 458 is a great product, was far ahead of its time when launched 20 years ago. It's just not the latest and greatest," Chandrani says, adding that the goal of the \$50 incentive is to educate dealerships' service departments about the benefits of newer product. "We want to change the behavior, and it will take incentives, efforts and promotion to achieve our goals."

Xantrex has its sights set on a bigger footprint, too. This summer Xantrex will launch a full line of Freedom X inverter/chargers. Based on the early

responses from the OEMs installing the Freedom X, Gaudet anticipates he won't be the only one who is excited about the line.

"The initial feedback has been absolutely amazing," Gaudet says. "I've been with the company for 20 years, and it's probably right at the top (in terms of response). OEM customers are salivating. They're really pumped up and excited. This is the first time an inverter manufacturer has brought innovation that really matters to OEMs, that really makes a difference for the OEM.

"The Freedom X improves installation time, reduces manufacturing costs, lowers service costs. In the end, it's keeping customers happy. It's been really exciting. The only thing holding us back is just how busy the RV industry is today." RVN

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Xantrex is encouraging dealers to use the compact, low-profile Freedom HF and HFS inverter/chargers for broken converter replacements.

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