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# MOTORHOME

MARCH 2013



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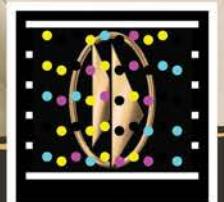
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**South Dakota:**  
A Land Before Time



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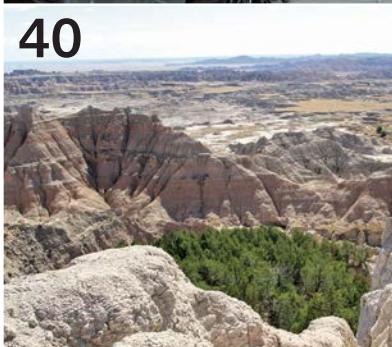
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**On The Cover:** Winnebago's value-packed Vista 26HE boasts all the necessities, making camping near Santa Ynez, Calif., an enjoyable experience. See the test on page 48. **Photo by Chuck Campbell.**

# CONFUSED CALENDAR

**W**hen you're in the magazine publishing business, your calendar is confusing. For example, as this issue was assembled, we were putting final touches on the end-of-year holidays and packing a test coach for a trip to the California desert for some R&R and social time with a few other motorhome enthusiasts. I know it was December, but we were thinking March.

Granted, the calendar showed Christmas and New Year's just ahead, but for magazine people, December was last August. I think you get the picture.

Over the years, onlookers questioned our sanity — and we unintentionally fooled a number of kids — during photo shoots. A couple of stories come to mind. During one photo shoot we parked a Class A in a gorgeous campground in Yosemite National Park. Out came the ladder and a string of lights. Our models donned heavy coats and proceeded to hang the lights on the coach. It was quite a spectacle as we created Christmas in August.

But nothing beats the time we photographed Santa rolling down the ramp of a Class C toy hauler on a motorcycle with a bag full of toys. The youngsters in the campground ran to their moms in sheer delight only to be disappointed to learn that Christmas was still months away.

Of course, my wife, Lynne, and I follow a normal calendar, but in December our minds are locked into spring, busy making travel plans for summer. After a while, calendar confusion becomes a way of life.

During our December holiday break we perused the new Good Sam RV Travel Guide & Campground Directory and our maps (yes, we still like to look at paper maps) and planned our summer adventures. We had plenty of time to do so basking in the Palm Springs sun while parked at Emerald Desert RV Resort in Southern California.

While we spend most of our time



in full-service campgrounds, we also like to plan a few trips to places that are more primitive. Coincidentally, in this month's issue we're featuring Joshua Tree National Park, which is not far from our destination in Palm Springs. This is a beautiful park with miles of hiking and exploring in a setting that's wonderfully natural. We've already made plans with friends to gather in this park in late spring — according to the real calendar.

Joshua Tree, like many national parks and other public destinations, does not offer the benefits of hookups, so we have to rely on self-containment to support our daily living requirements. A key appliance is the AC generator. For most travelers who utilize hookups, the generator sees very few hours of service. But this is one machine that really needs attention, even if it's rarely used. The article on generator maintenance on page 54 provides the proper procedures for making sure the generator stays in tiptop shape and is ready to go when the start button is pushed.

Generator exercise is very important, as is the need to keep our bodies in motion. As you read how to keep yourself fit in a coach (page 28), remember to run the generator under load every month.

We plan on hanging around the West this summer, except for a trip to Syracuse, N.Y., to attend the Good Sam/Camping World Rally June 13-16. This event is sure to be a crowd pleaser. It's near many spectacular travel destinations (think Niagara Falls) and will be chock-full of events, entertainment, motorhomes and accessories. Never been to The Rally? Check out the experiences of author Christine Goodier and her husband, Bob, on page 34. It was their first time and they're hooked.

Now, what month is this? ♦

# MOTORHOME

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## WHERE WOULD YOU LIKE TO SEE MORE WINDOWS IN YOUR MOTORHOME AND ARE YOU HAPPY WITH THE DINETTE DESIGN? IF NOT, WHAT WOULD YOU CHANGE?

That's the question we asked in the December 2012 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

### YES TO CURBSIDE WINDOWS

I couldn't agree more with Jon and Robin Grunzweig regarding their desire to have the dinette on the curbside. My first motorhome (a 2000 Class C Sunseeker) had this feature, allowing us to open the large window and enjoy conversation with those outside, or even to just watch the campfire. My current Class A has the dinette on the "wrong" side and we now stare at our neighbors.

I also like having the sofa and the dinette opposite each other, so it is easier to engage in conversation. With the dinette and couch on the same side of the coach, it feels like there are two separate groups, and some people have their backs to others.

The first thing I do when I receive a new copy of *MotorHome* is look at the floorplan of the model highlighted on the cover to see if it has the dinette on the curbside. If memory serves, fewer than five featured coaches had this layout.

I'd love to hear the manufacturers' logic for not putting the dinette curbside. But more importantly, I'd love for them to "open up" the curbside for a better campsite experience.

**MIKE STRAUB | OMAHA, NEB.**

### WANT TO SEE OUR SITE

I'm in complete agreement with the Grunzweigs on the poor placement of dinettes and windows in most of today's coaches. In fact, I wrote a letter on this very subject a couple of years ago. Like sheep, the designers all do the same thing and I can't think of a single reason for it except to show progressiveness through change, no matter how useless the change is. If I want to even speak to my wife while I'm grilling I have to go in, where previously we could talk through the open window.

It's interesting to note that the featured coach in the same issue, the Thor Windsport 33G, has the dinette and window on the curbside. Maybe in a year or two the sheep will all return to the common sense floorplan. I want to see my own campsite when I'm at the dinette.

**ERIC WELLS | HAYESVILLE, N.C.**

### FLOORPLAN WISH LIST

To have dinettes and more windows on the curbside of motorhomes has been my wish ever since we traded in our 1997 model, which had that feature, for the coach we now have, which doesn't. Campgrounds have their activity areas on the curbside of each site, and looking out the other side where both our dinette and couch are, we sometimes feel we are intruding on our neighbor's privacy. Plus, there is rarely a nice view of nature on that side.

There are other problems that have kept us from moving up to a newer motorhome. Does anyone else wonder why most of the new models have exterior heights above 12 feet? I'm sure the higher inside ceilings are nice to have, but in almost 40 years of RVing I have yet to sit around a campfire and hear anyone say they want more headroom. I have, however, heard fellow campers say their garage storage areas are now not adequate to accommodate the new heights.

Many larger units we see are owned by couples who are retired or getting ready to retire. I think the perfect unit would have an in-dash workstation, a powered co-pilot seat, a standard three-step entry, a king-size bed, the dinette would be on the curbside, there would be more than one 4- or 5-foot-wide wardrobe, and the recliner would be plush and comfy.

I wrote to two major motorhome manufacturers, and I received nice letters back, but I haven't seen much evidence that they are listening. It might be advantageous for manufacturers to publish a questionnaire in *MotorHome* that campers could respond to with their thoughts and suggestions.

**BARBARA BEHLING | ROCKFORD, ILL.**

### RECONSIDER DINETTE DESIGN

We have owned three Class C motorhomes with different floorplans and all had dinettes. If we buy another, I would replace the dinette with a table and chairs. A dinette only comfortably seats two adults, and sliding in and out is never easy and wears the fabric. We never use our dinette for sleeping. U-shaped dinettes look nice, but take up considerable space and aren't easy to get in or out of.

We used to promise each other  
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As for windows, our first coach had a large window at the dinette and another over the two chairs across from the dinette. Everyone had a great view. Our present setup is only good for those in the cab or at the dinette. More windows curbside is ideal.  
**JORENE DORIA | VIA EMAIL**

### **WINDOWS = SCENERY**

The Grunzweigs are right-on regarding large and plentiful windows curbside. In fact, I'm so adamant about it that I only bought my last two motorhomes after the factory assured me it could replace one of the existing windows with a large picture window. The extra cost was considerable, \$2,000 and \$3,000, but worth every penny because of the beautiful scenery

that became visible from within the RV.  
**JEAN WILLIAMS | VIA EMAIL**

### **WHERE WOULD THE WINDOWS GO?**

My floorplan works well for us and we don't feel the need for more windows. Most floorplans have the galley on the curbside. This seems like a logical approach due in part to the utilities being on the opposite side. If the coachbuilder put more windows on the galley side, where would they go? There are already appliances, sinks and overhead cabinets there. Our floorplan has three windows on the galley side, and although they're not big, they suffice.

**DREW MUELLER | MARTINEZ, CALIF.**

### **PRICE CORRECTION**

In the December 2012 article "10 Top Tailgaters," there is a typo on page 41 with reference to the MSRP of the Fleetwood Providence 42P. I have one of these and the price is much higher than the quoted \$229,600. Probably should be \$329,600.  
**ROBERT ANGUS | CLARKSVILLE, TENN.**

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *You're right, Robert, thank you for calling this to our attention. The correct base MSRP of the Fleetwood Providence 42P is \$328,328.*

### **THANK YOU, KIEVAS**

The December 2012 issue of *MotorHome* announced the Kievas are going to "hang up their keyboards." As an RV owner, I have enjoyed their column for many years, and have made great use of their suggestions.

My wife and I started with a tent trailer and traveled with our daughter and two sons. After 20 years in the tent trailer, we purchased a small fifth-wheel, and then later traded up to a larger fifth-wheel, which we used as a full-time residence when we retired. We now own a Class C motorhome and travel with a Yorkshire dog.

Over the years, the Kievas' articles helped us with tips on purchasing travel items, RV care and maintenance, and packing food, clothing and equipment. We learned about campsite etiquette, highway requirements for various states and how to enjoy traveling with a group of RVs.

Thanks for the help over the years, and we trust you will stay healthy and happy for many years to come.

**PAUL AND JOAN ROBERTS  
FRUITA, COLO.**



### **WHAT YOU ARE SAYING ON OUR FACEBOOK PAGE:**

We asked readers to share where in their motorhome they'd like to see more windows. Here's how some of our Facebook fans responded:

**Tommy Moore Sr.:** *I wish my MH had windows on the side of the bed slideout instead of above my head. Because of the valance and window hardware, it's very uncomfortable and almost impossible to sit up in bed and watch TV or read.*

**Diana Talley Smith:** *Bedroom. There is one small window on the curbside now and two tiny windows on both sides of the bed that open maybe 3 inches. And there's the emergency window in the back. Enough light, no air!*

**Tonja L. Bliss:** *I want a full cover sunroof over my living room area, kitchen, bedroom and over the main driving area.*

**Kim Knapp Blackburn:** *Believe it or not, the bathroom. Would like some rectangular windows at the very top of the wall against the ceiling.*



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**PROBLEM-SOLVERS**

I purchased a new Tiffin last January, and shortly after I noted the two front HWH stabilizer jack cylinders were rusting. I cleaned and oiled them but the problem persisted. I contacted HWH by email and got an instant response saying the issue would be handled under warranty. Mesa RV had just opened a new facility in town, so I visited it, as it is a dealer of Tiffin and HWH products. I contacted Joe Portelli at HWH and was told he would send the leveling jacks to Mesa RV and all I had to do was make an appointment. I made the appointment and the job was completed. Mesa RV was very accommodating and I would like to thank HWH and Portelli for resolving the problem and for great customer service.

**MIKE MOYA | WEST PALM BEACH, FLA.**

**TAKE IT WITH YOU**

Reading Jim Krauciunas' letter to Hot Line in the October 2012 issue about his Goodyear tire failure brought back memories from our experience and I'm sure most RVers have had similar occurrences. The handling of a blowout is important and taught us a lesson to remember.

When our Goodyear tire had a blowout, it damaged our RV. We were towed to a tire dealer and had our spare installed. I took the destroyed tire with me. The tire was three years old and had 32,000 miles. I figured I was stuck with the cost of the RV repairs and tire replacement. I contacted Goodyear and it picked up the tire to examine the cause and its condition. Goodyear determined it was a manufacturer defect, and as such replaced the tire, balanced and mounted the tire, and paid 100 percent of the damage to our RV, \$918.36. There was zero cost to me.

The lesson here is to always save or take the damaged tire with you. Do not discard, even if you have to strap it to the passenger seat.

**RON OWNBY | GYPSUM, COLO.**

**QUESTION:**

**What tips do you have for other RVers when dealing with repairs on the road?** Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 3300 Fernbrook Lane N #200, Minneapolis, MN 55447; or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com). ♦



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by LAURA MICHAELS

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS

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OF WICHITA  
MOUNTAINS  
WILDLIFE REFUGE

In southwestern Oklahoma, bison roam and deer dance across the prairie while Texas longhorn cattle forage among the blackjack oak woodlands. Their home is Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, a 59,000-acre mixed grass expanse that was originally established as a forest reserve in 1901 and is now the oldest managed refuge in the United States. Elk, red-tailed hawks, prairie dogs and collard lizards are among the more than 400 animal species found in the refuge, and they're joined by 806 plant species.

Hikers and bikers can make their way around Quanah Parker and Lost lakes, through a rocky canyon or up Elk Mountain on one of eight trails. Take in views of the surrounding terrain from the top of Little Baldy Mountain, and then settle in at Doris Campground, which offers 23 RV sites with 30-amp electric service.

For more information, call 580-429-3222 or visit [www.fws.gov/refuge/Wichita\\_Mountains](http://www.fws.gov/refuge/Wichita_Mountains).





## A Taste of Wenatchee Valley, Wash.

**Wenatchee Valley, on the east side** of Washington's Cascade Mountains, is a high-desert agricultural oasis well known for growing some of the finest wine grapes, apples and pears in the Northwest. Its golden, rolling hills also make it a terrific destination for an RV trip — and a great place for road foodies to get a taste of artisan food and drink.

We started our discoveries in Cashmere, a quaint town with a historic and walkable downtown famous as the home of Aplets and Cotlets. Since 1920, Liberty Orchards has been making these devilishly good confections of gelled fruit and walnuts dredged in powdered sugar. It offers free tours and samplings at its gift shop and factory on Mission Avenue.

A few doors down is Snapdragon Coffee Café, the place to go for terrific gelato and creative juice and coffee drinks. Snapdragon's creamy gelato comes in flavors such as chocolate cabernet and sorbets include local flavors such as raspberry cider, blackberry cider and Old World spiced cider and Cotlets. Snapdragon also makes interesting non-alcoholic juice drinks like basil lemonade.

Across the hall is It's Five O'Clock Somewhere Distillery, where staffers distill and hand bottle artisan gin, whiskies, and fruit brandies (eau-de-vies). They'll let you sample any or all of it in their tasting room.

Not far from downtown is Cashmere Cider Mill, a cidery making non-alcoholic artisan ciders in flavors like red cherry, blackberry and, my favorite, lavender. Large fruit presses grind apples, seeds, stems, flesh and skins to make juice or cider, then concentrate it and add water. Marcia and Kyle Green use the old-fashioned press method with cloth filters that put only juice and a bit of apple pulp into the bottle. Their apple cider, which is bottled in glass wine bottles, goes through flash pasteurization that kills bacteria and retains the flavor. After opening, the cider keeps in the refrigerator for four to six weeks.

Just 20 minutes down the road in East Wenatchee, they make hard cider at Snowdrift Cider Company. In 2008, apple



**It's Five O'Clock Somewhere Distillery bottles an array of spirits including whiskey.**

PHOTOS: ANNE WEAVER



**The Wenatchee pizza at Saddle Rock Pub combines local apples and smoky bacon atop house-made dough.**



**Liberty Orchard's Aplets and Cotlets are a popular treat of gelled fruit and walnuts topped in powdered sugar.**

grower Peter Ringsrud and his son and son-in-law made hard cider from "cider apples," fruit that contains tannins like wine grapes and produces bittersweet and bittersharp flavors.

"When you mention cider, people think about sweet products like Martini-lli's. But hard cider actually has little apple flavor with the tannins coming through,"

explains Paul Ringsrud.

They grind cider apples like Kingston Black, Michelin and Foxwell, seeds and stems and all, and press them. They blend different apples to achieve varying characteristics and their products contain an average of 7 to 8 percent alcohol.

Snowdrift produces 35 varieties of cider such as English Style, a combination of a base aromatic cider blend and a bittersweet blend that produces a mild, delicate and complex flavor, and Orchard Select, light and refreshing cider with citrus notes and a peach finish. The hard ciders range in price from \$14 to \$20 and you can taste and buy them at their small tasting room by calling ahead.

Wenatchee doesn't have a beer brewery, but there are plenty of Northwest artisan brews at the Saddle Rock Pub on North Wenatchee Avenue in Wenatchee. You can even get a "ski" half flight (six tastes) or a full flight (12 tastes) on clever flight boards made from real skis.

For foodies, Saddle Rock's thin-crust pizzas with house-made, tossed dough and flavorful from-scratch pizza sauces are must-haves. They offer interesting pizzas like the Wenatchee with local apples and smoky bacon.

Another local product is Little River Candy Company's toffee popcorn, perfectly round kernels of fat popcorn lightly coated with liquid toffee — a great road snack. They use special popcorn called Magic Mushroom that pops up fat and round. While Little River doesn't have a retail location, you can buy its toffee popcorn at several Northwest stores, including Haggen stores, Red Apple and Albertson's.

If you travel to this area in the spring, summer or fall, make sure to stop at the many fruit stands and indulge in the valley's natural bounty — fresh cherries, peaches, pears, apples, apricots, pluots, nectarines, corn and more. You won't find produce any better or fresher.

Have your own artisan/agricultural valley to recommend? Send an email with "Road Foodie" in the subject line to [hasselbring@bctonline.com](mailto:hasselbring@bctonline.com).

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## A PAIR OF SUPER C'S

The Four Winds and Chateau brands in Elkhart, Ind., have some company as Thor Motor Coach introduced its 33SW F-550 "Super C" motorhomes for both product lines. The new coach is powered by a PowerStroke 6.7-L diesel engine on a Ford F-550 chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 19,500 pounds. The company said this combination, along with the Ford six-speed transmission, allows the 33SW to maximize its 10,000-pound hitch receiver. The coach also comes with an electronic brake controller integrated in the dash.

Along with its HD-Max full-color exterior, the 33SW is equipped with a 5.5 kW Onan generator, dual 13,500 Btu roof air conditioners, slam latch baggage doors and one-touch Big-foot leveling jacks. Inside buyers will find a king bed, residential refrigerator, 30-inch over-the-range microwave, solid surface countertops, solar and privacy window roller shades, and a 1,800-watt power inverter. Base MSRP is \$137,000.

**Thor Motor Coach, 800-860-5658, [www.thormotorcoach.com](http://www.thormotorcoach.com)**

## TIRE MONITORING MEETS BRAKING

A new braking system from Danko Manufacturing features optional tire pressure monitoring capability. The RVbrake2 Auxiliary Braking System for towed vehicles is the first portable braking system to integrate tire pressure monitoring. RVbrake Tire Pressure Sensors simply thread on the valve stems in the dinghy vehicle wheels and are activated when the RVbrake2 Wireless Monitor is enabled.

RVbrake2 includes the Wireless Monitor and Breakaway but the RVbrake Tire Pressure Sensors are sold separately. The MSRP for RVbrake2 is \$1,350; Tire Pressure Sensors are \$325. Visit the company's website to find a dealer.

**RVbrake, 800-815-2159, [www.rvbrake.com](http://www.rvbrake.com)**



## STEERING WHEEL REMINDERS

Motorhome owners have plenty to think about when preparing to leave the campground: Did I put the TV antenna down? Are the slideouts locked? What about the dinghy vehicle? That's where RVminders come in. These slap-on reminders wrap around the coach steering wheel and call attention to tasks that must be completed before safely traveling down the road. Each RVminders set includes 10 reminders; two of them are blank so RVers can customize them to their needs. The other eight remind RVers about the TV/satellite antenna, dinghy, slide locks, hookups, steps/ladder, doors/vents/windows and compartment locks.

One set of RVminders is \$18, or two sets for \$30. RVminders are available at Camping World and at [www.rvminders.com](http://www.rvminders.com). **RVminders, [www.rvminders.com](http://www.rvminders.com)**



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## GET COOKIN' IN YOUR RV

The Auto Channel and "RV Cooking Show" have teamed up to air a full season of "RV Cooking Show" episodes on TACH-TV, The Auto Channel's over-the-air and cable broadcast TV network. The network is available in the South Florida market with plans to expand to California, Pennsylvania, Arizona and Massachusetts in the near future.

Viewers are invited to join "RV Cooking Show" host Evanne Schmardeer on her

adventures to RV destinations and re-create local, destination-related dishes in her galley. The show can be seen on TACH-TV stations and online at [www.TheAutoChannel.com](http://www.TheAutoChannel.com) and the channel's RV sister site, [www.RVMotoring.com](http://www.RVMotoring.com).

## RV SHOWS

### MARCH 1-3

#### 22nd Annual New Orleans Spring RV & Camping Show

Kenner, La.  
337-436-4355

### MARCH 1-3

#### Northern Kentucky Camper Show

Covington, Ky.  
941-780-0538

### MARCH 1-3

#### Fredericksburg RV & Travel Adventure Show

Fredericksburg, Va.  
610-336-9100

### MARCH 1-3

#### 2013 Ottawa Spring RV Show

Ottawa, Ontario  
877-817-9500

### MARCH 7-10

#### Montreal RV Show

Montreal, Quebec  
514-338-1471

### MARCH 7-10

#### Red River Valley Sportsmen's Boat, Camping & Vacation Show

Fargo, N.D.  
763-755-8111

### MARCH 8-10

#### Progressive Insurance 9th Annual Virginia RV Show

Hampton, Va.  
800-441-0013

### MARCH 8-10

#### York Campers World RV Show

York, Pa.  
610-767-5026

### MARCH 8-10

#### Columbus RV Super Show

Columbus, Ohio  
941-780-0538

### MARCH 8-10

#### 41st Annual New Hampshire Camping & RV Show

Milford, N.H.  
603-736-5540

### MARCH 15-17

#### 26th Annual Acadiana RV & Camping Show

Lafayette, La.  
337-436-4355

### MARCH 21-24

#### Progressive Insurance Northwest Sportshow

Minneapolis, Minn.  
312-946-6285

### MARCH 21-24

#### Quebec City RV Show

Quebec, Quebec  
514-338-1471

### MARCH 22-24

#### 42nd Annual RV, Camping and Travel Show

Rockford, Ill.  
815-997-1744

## News Briefs

The RV market expanded with the launch of manufacturing company **Talvor USA** by industry veteran Pablo Carmona, previously COO and president of manufacturing for former **MVP RV Inc.** of Riverside, Calif. Talvor USA is an extension of manufacturing company **Talvor Australia** and brings together industry experts from the United States and Australia. The new company will manufacture Class B motorhomes at its Perris, Calif., facility. These vehicles will primarily be sold in the U.S. The 4.9-acre facility began operating in December 2012.

**Spartan Chassis**, a subsidiary of Spartan Motors Inc., has announced a new Class A front engine gasoline concept chassis to capitalize on the growth of smaller Class A motorhomes. Named the Extol, this chassis was presented at the National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Ky. Powered by an 8.8-L engine that offers 430 HP and 512 LB-FT of torque, Spartan said the engine provides a sizable performance improvement over current market offerings.

**Winnebago Industries** in Forest City, Iowa, was honored recently with the presentation of the Blue Star Banner flag by the American Legion in recognition of the company's support of its employees serving in the military.

Accepting the award on behalf of Winnebago were members of the RV manufacturer's management, as well as several former military and current National



Guard and Reserve members. Winnebago Industries wishes to thank all its employees serving in the military and those retired military veterans.



# TOUCHDOWN!



Drive for the win with the luxurious new Winnebago Tour<sup>®</sup> and Itasca Ellipse<sup>®</sup> 42GD! This unique, beautiful and supremely livable floorplan will delight you at every turn.

Entertaining the team? Up front, the galley – with double sink, residential-style refrigerator and pull-out island – transitions gracefully into the dining area. From there, you enter the attractive lounge, which features our exclusive Rest Easy<sup>®</sup> Extendable Sectional Sofa as well as a huge 55-inch TV that puts you right in the middle of the action.

Just beyond the huge walkthrough bath you'll find the master bedroom with powered king bed, matching nightstands, deluxe wardrobe and chest of drawers. And since the 42GD is built on our tag-axle Maxum<sup>®</sup> chassis, storage abounds, while the ride and handling are as plush as its interior.

It's game time and the ball is in your hands: See the 42GD at your nearest dealer, call 800-643-4892, or see it online at [WinnebagoInd.com](http://WinnebagoInd.com).



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Winnebago, Circle 101 on Reader Service Card

# LOOKING FOR AN RV?

See all the latest RVs on the market at [RVBG.com](http://RVBG.com)!

The screenshot shows the RVBG.com website interface. At the top, there are banners for 'RV BUYERS GUIDE' and 'Enter to Win a Keystone RV'. Below that, there are sections for 'FLEETWOOD RV', 'Roadtrek', and 'Superchips'. A 'SEARCH RVs' section is visible with filters for 'RV Type', 'Make', 'Price', and 'Length'. There are also sections for 'RV ROLLOUT', 'RV SPOTLIGHT', 'RV RESOURCES', 'RV SHOWS', and 'POLL QUESTIONS'. A red box highlights the 'SEARCH RVs' section, which includes dropdown menus for 'Any RV Type', 'Any Make', 'From Any Year', 'To Any Year', 'Any Price', and 'Any Length', along with a 'SEARCH' button.

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## escapes | CROSSROADS

### JUST BEYOND THE RAINBOW

Step into one of the most famous fairy tales of all time at Dorothy's House and the Land of Oz in Liberal, Kan. A bronzed Dorothy greets visitors as they enter the 1907 house that was refinished and restored to be similar to the 1939 farmhouse in which Dorothy Gale from "The Wizard of Oz" lived. Spanning 5,000 square feet, the Land of Oz includes animated entertainment and famous characters such as the Munchkins, talking trees, flying monkeys, the Wicked Witch of the West, Glinda, Dorothy and Toto, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man and the Cowardly Lion. Those who fell in love with the 1939 movie will especially appreciate the original model of Dorothy's house from the tornado scene that is displayed at the Land of Oz.

Visitors can stroll across the 1,700-count yellow brick road leading to Dorothy's House and the Land of Oz. Those wanting to leave a permanent mark on the grounds can personalize a yellow brick for \$65. Guides dressed as Dorothy give tours throughout the year. **For more information**, call 620-624-7624 or visit [www.dorothyshouse.com](http://www.dorothyshouse.com).

— Amanda Lepinski



### GO CAR CRAZY

Automotive aficionados, especially those of the classic car persuasion, can flock to Blackhawk Museum in Danville, Calif., for a real treat. Blackhawk has two auto galleries displaying more than 90 historically significant automobiles in a building that competes with its contents. The 70,000-square-foot structure has a 69-foot-tall atrium lobby that incorporates black, ruby and pink polished Italian granite, copper-hued German skylights and glass. Top that off with 40-foot-tall columns of brushed stainless steel and you have one stunning entrance. The elegance of the building serves to heighten the artistic presentation of the classic cars contained within its walls.

The museum's cars, or "rolling sculptures" as Blackhawk calls them, are displayed like works of art. The walls are black, the gallery floors are highly polished black granite and stage lighting dramatizes each car. It is an impressive display guaranteed to delight visitors of all ages.

Classic cars in the collection include a 1933 Pierce-Arrow Silver Arrow shown at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair and the only 1938 Bugatti Type 57SC Vanden Plas Tourer ever built. And don't miss the 1926 Daimler with boa constrictor-shaped horns where the snake's tongue projects when the horn blows. It was owned by the Gulah Singh Maharajah of Rewa of India and built for hunting.

The museum is open Wednesday through Sunday and admission is \$10. **For more information**, call 925-736-2280 or visit [www.blackhawkmuseum.org](http://www.blackhawkmuseum.org).

— Kathy Thompson ♦



INSET: SEAN O'FLAHERTY



PHOTO: BILL ABBOTT

# ENDLESS EXPLORATIONS IN JOSHUA TREE NATIONAL PARK



DISCOVER A DESERT WONDERLAND IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA



Its nickname might be teddy bear cholla, but don't get too close to this spiny cactus.

**M**y mom used to despise the desert.

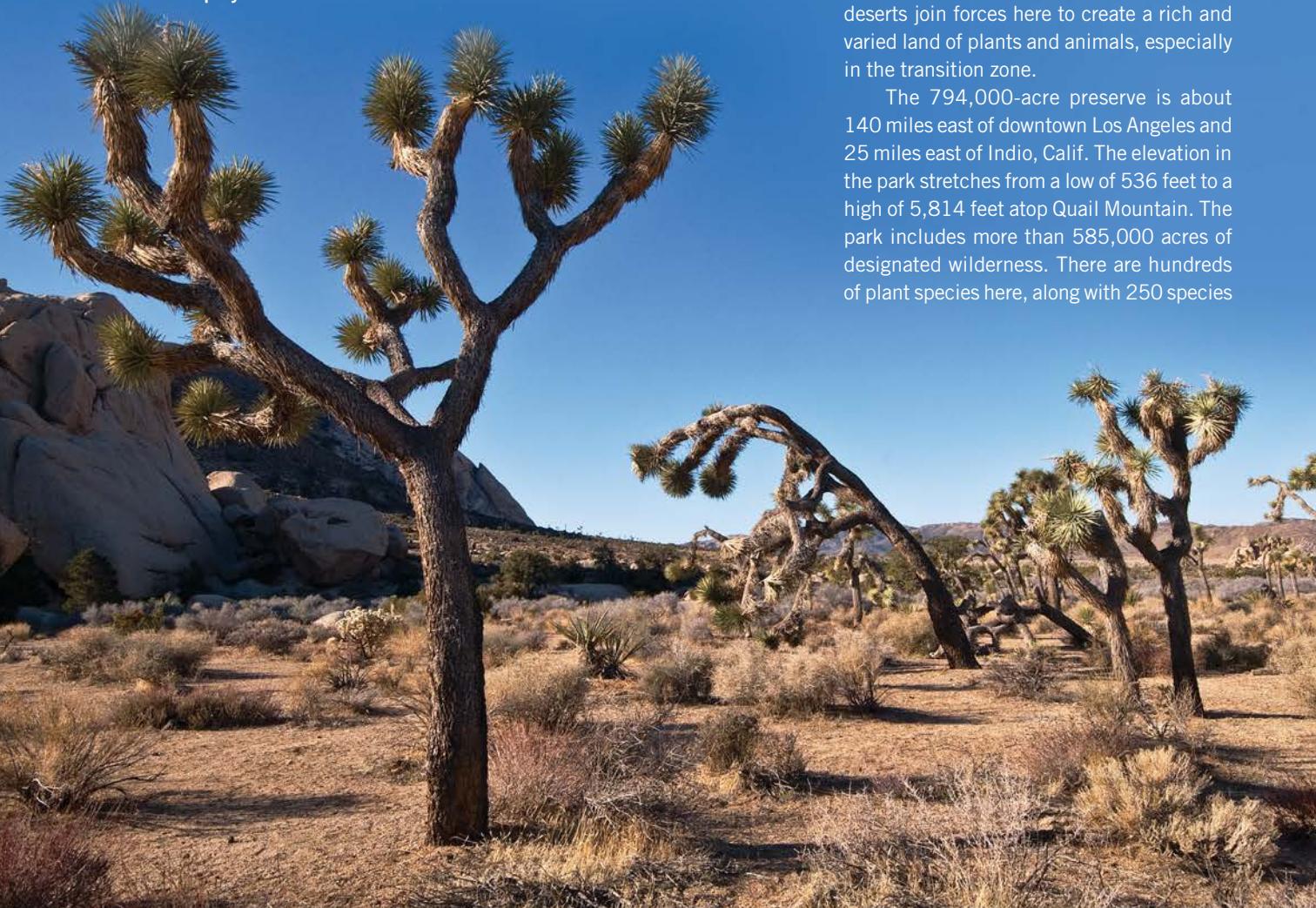
She loves all shades of green haunts, and dreary, rainy skies. So it was a surprise when she agreed to take a drive with me through Southern California's Joshua Tree National Park.

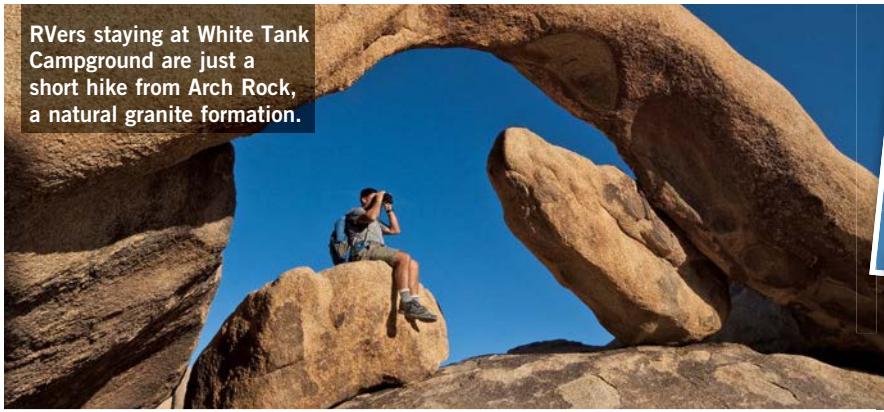
I had been boasting to her about Joshua Tree and all its beauty. I promised her the desert could be beautiful and I guaranteed she would think so, too.

Upon entering the park I started the tour right away. I told her Joshua Tree is a great place for visitors who want to get away from it all. "It's also a terrific place for RVers like me," I said with a smile, "and an awesome place for rock climbers and mountain bikers."

Two deserts converge at Joshua Tree National Park. The Mojave and Colorado deserts join forces here to create a rich and varied land of plants and animals, especially in the transition zone.

The 794,000-acre preserve is about 140 miles east of downtown Los Angeles and 25 miles east of Indio, Calif. The elevation in the park stretches from a low of 536 feet to a high of 5,814 feet atop Quail Mountain. The park includes more than 585,000 acres of designated wilderness. There are hundreds of plant species here, along with 250 species





RVer's staying at White Tank Campground are just a short hike from Arch Rock, a natural granite formation.



Top: The bushy cactus wren is a common sight. Above: A desert side-blotched lizard suns itself.

of birds, 40 species of reptiles and 52 mammal species. One reptile, the desert tortoise, is threatened, while the purple-hued Coachella Valley milk-vetch, a plant, is endangered.

Joshua Tree first became a national monument in 1936 with a proclamation from President Franklin D. Roosevelt. In 1994, as part of the California Desert Protection Act, Congress designated the area a national park.

Although there are several entrances to the park, I always enter via the south entrance, located off Interstate 10. The more popular entrance stations to the northwest, at the towns of Twentynine Palms and Joshua Tree, are reached via I-10 and Highway 62 (Twentynine Palms Highway).

The south entrance offers access to the plants and animals of the Colorado Desert. The eastern half of the park is drier and at a lower elevation than its counterpart, the Mojave Desert, which occupies the western half and contains ample stands of the park's namesake, the dagger-leaved Joshua tree.

The Colorado Desert is below 3,000 feet in elevation and offers a bevy of local plant life including creosote bushes, ocotillo, palo verde and jumping cholla. Though it's often called teddy bear cholla, don't even think of giving it a hug or you'll be poked with countless barbed spines. In the spring, look for red-orange blossoms of the chuparosa and the hummingbirds



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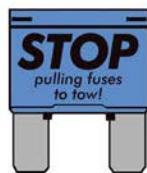
U.S. Patent # 6,168,182

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## ENTRANCE FEES

A seven-day permit costs \$15, and an annual pass costs \$30. The Interagency Annual Pass is \$80 per year and allows entry into all federal areas, including national parks and national wildlife refuges. Adults 62 and older may obtain an Interagency Senior Pass for \$10, which allows lifetime free access to all national parks and monuments and a 50 percent reduction in campground fees at some locations. Individuals with disabilities receive the same benefits with an Interagency Access Pass, which is free of charge.



Rock climbers scale the face of a monstrous boulder near Hidden Valley Trail.

who feed from them, as well as kangaroo rats, kit foxes, zebra-tailed lizards, Le Conte's thrashers and Western diamond-back rattlesnakes.

The Mojave Desert, meanwhile, stands higher than 3,000 feet in elevation. Boulders grace much of the landscape with pinyon pines, Mojave yuccas, Mojave prickly pear cacti, scrub oaks and so much more. And of course, there are loads of Joshua trees, which aren't actu-

ally trees but a species of yucca that can grow more than 40 feet tall.

Pollinated by the yucca moth, which in turn relies on the Joshua tree for food, full-grown Joshua trees provide nesting places for a number of birds such as the American kestrel, western scrub jay and ladder-backed woodpecker. Others, like the loggerhead shrike, impale its prey on the tree's pointy leaves. On the ground, mammals such as the black-tailed jack-



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A moonrise at sunrise over Jumbo Rocks Campground.

rabbit and antelope ground squirrel scamper about, while reptiles include the Yucca night lizard.

As you travel north through the park, you'll come to the Cottonwood Visitor Center and campground. The campground is open year-round and sites are available on a first come, first served basis. The facility has no hookups, but it does have water and a dump station.

Beyond the campground is Cottonwood Spring, a birdwatcher's paradise. Although the spring is natural, its surroundings were introduced when miners and homesteaders planted palms and cottonwoods in the early 1900s.

There are 191 miles of trails near the campground and throughout the park. If you want an impressive view, hike up Mastodon Peak. From the summit you'll gaze down upon the Salton Sea and in the

distance you'll see the jagged peaks of the San Jacinto Mountains.

From Mastodon Peak, you can descend to the Lost Palms Oasis Trail, a path that leads past giant rock monoliths to a stand of native fan palms. Five native California fan palm oases dot the park, providing shelter, food and water for the local wildlife. In days of old, the oases were essential to travelers. Miners and cattlemen inhabited the area years ago, and pictographs prove earlier inhabitation by Native Americans. Evidence suggests the Pinto culture existed here sometime between 4,000 and 8,000 years ago.

As you proceed northwest, don't miss the dense stretch of teddy bear cholla about 20 miles north of the Cottonwood area. Part of the Cholla Cactus Garden trail, this quarter-mile loop boasts many other types of cholla and plants that make it a self-guided treat.

At the White Tank Campground, about eight miles northwest of the cholla gardens, you'll pass the transition zone between the Mojave and Colorado deserts. Now you'll get your first glimpse of the unusual boulders of the region, and the Joshua tree.

According to legend, the Joshua tree received its name from Mormon pioneers. With branches stretching heavenward, the trees prompted the pioneers to liken them to the arms of Joshua pointing the way to the Promised Land. Look for their clusters of cream-colored flowers when they bloom from February through April.

Spend time at White Tanks and you're bound to see rock climbers scaling the various upward routes. Countless boulders, arches, rock piles and a jumble of pink rock sculptures line the land. More than 80 million years ago,



**CAMPGROUNDS**

Campsites with hookups are not available in the park, but water and dump stations are available at Black Rock and Cottonwood campgrounds. (Water is also available at the Indian Cove Ranger Station and West Entrance.) Some of the park's nine campgrounds have 25-foot vehicle length limits. Private campgrounds with hookups and hot showers, restaurants, gasoline and other provisions are available in the towns of Yucca Valley, Twentynine Palms, Joshua Tree and Indio.

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*Stephanie Mulac with husband Greg and daughters Marina and Morgan.*



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Hiking the Ryan Mountain Trail.

these rock piles lay hidden underground. Molten liquid oozed upward from the inner earth and cooled before reaching the surface, forming an igneous rock called quartz monzonite. A much wetter climate existed then, and groundwater penetrated the joints, with hard mineral grains eventually dividing the granite-like rock into blocks. Time passed and the soil around the rock washed away and violent flash floods exposed the spherical boulders seen today.

From White Tank Campground, travel northwest four miles to a junction where you'll then head west for another 17 miles to the 5,195-foot viewpoint at Keys View. Although you can exit the park at this junction by turning right, that's the last thing you'd want to do, for plenty remains to see and do. From this point, near the summit of the Little San Bernardino Mountains, you can gaze out across the vast Coachella Valley to the nearly 11,000-foot-high San Jacinto Range. To the south, the shimmering waters of the Salton Sea, 241 feet below sea level, are visible. And to the northwest, the San Jacinto Mountains touch the San Bernardino Mountains at San Geronio Pass.

For an even better view of Joshua Tree, hike up Ryan Mountain Trail, a wonderful path leading to the 5,461-foot summit. Stand on top of the peak and you'll be in awe of your surroundings.

If you're up for another hike, head to Lost Horse Mine Trail. It's four miles round-trip or you can hike a 6.2-mile loop. At the mine, I found a friendly loggerhead

shrike, as well as a nosy white-tailed antelope squirrel.

Barker Dam is another popular hike. You can reach the dam, constructed by early day cattlemen, by hiking a 1.2-mile round-trip trail that provides entry into a world of petroglyphs, junipers, pinyons and turbinella oaks. The place is also considered an excellent bird-watching spot. From here, exit the park by driving 11 miles northwest of the west entrance at the town of Joshua Tree.

Joshua Tree National Park has provided endless enjoyment to me during visits for hiking, camping and climbing, and other visitors will no doubt find their own reasons to love this park. ♦



Donna Ikenberry is a freelance writer and photographer. She lives in South Fork, Colo., with her husband, Mike Vining. They travel half of the year in their RV.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

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# ACTIVE RVing

## 15 EXERCISES TO KEEP YOU FIT DURING YOUR MOTORHOME TRAVELS

by MARY ZALMANEK

### I love everything about traveling in a motorhome

except for the long hours sitting while we drive from point A to point B. Even when I am passing the time looking at enchanting scenery and listening to engrossing audiobooks, it is still too much sitting for me.

An article in *Men's Health* called sitting "the most dangerous thing you'll do all day." Researchers found that people who sit more than 23 hours a week are 54 percent more likely to die of a heart attack. They are also more likely to suffer lower back pain.

#### SITTING

**"THE MOST DANGEROUS THING YOU'LL DO ALL DAY."**

That may explain why my lower back hurts like the dickens when we travel. Well, maybe the four 2-inch screws and two rods that connected my L3 to L4 during a spinal fusion 18 months ago have something to do with it, too. Usually, I am active enough to keep discomfort at bay.

When the motorhome is stationary, I am seldom sedentary.

To compound the problem, the foods we eat while driving aren't as healthy as what we normally eat. Before we bought our first motorhome in 2002, I'd never eaten a lunch consisting solely of puffed corn snacks and diet cola. I'm embarrassed to admit that combo is now our semi-standard fare of "traveling food."

This all boils down to a predictable weight gain of several pounds when we travel. Enough already!

I'm not the only one who has had this problem. Jodie Ginter logged more than 250,000 miles during the six years she explored North America as a full-time RVer. Along the way she gained 20 pounds. An interest in fitness led her to become a certified personal trainer. To help other people stay fit while on the road, she created a DVD titled "Jodie Ginter's RV Fitness," a 20-minute total body workout.

I met Ginter during a recent visit to Tucson, Ariz. She showed my husband, Jim, and me a workout that requires no special equipment and very little space. The exercises can be done in a chair, standing or on the floor. Many of the chair exercises can be done while riding in the passenger's seat. Start with two sets of 10 to 12 repetitions and work up to three sets of 15 reps.

If you haven't exercised for some time and you have health concerns, you'll want to talk to your doctor before beginning a new exercise routine.

### CHAIR EXERCISES



PHOTOS: MARY ZALMANEK

#### KNEE EXTENSIONS

Sit up straight on the edge of a chair with knees at a 90-degree angle. Keep abs tight to maintain good posture. Straighten your right leg, keeping your toes pointed upward. Bend knee and touch your foot to the floor. Repeat for 10 to 15 reps, then switch sides. This exercise works the quadriceps.

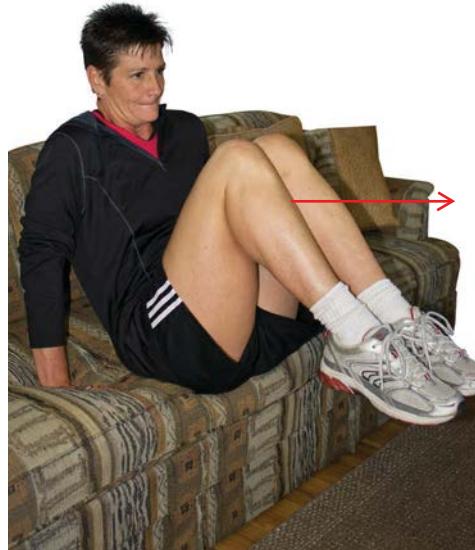


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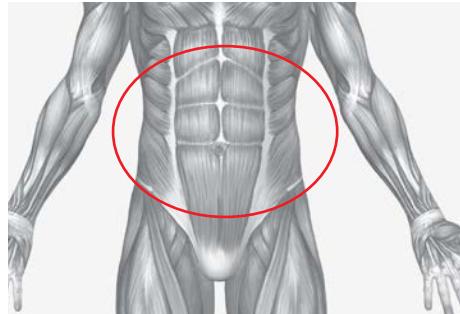
## CHAIR EXERCISES

**KNEE UPS**

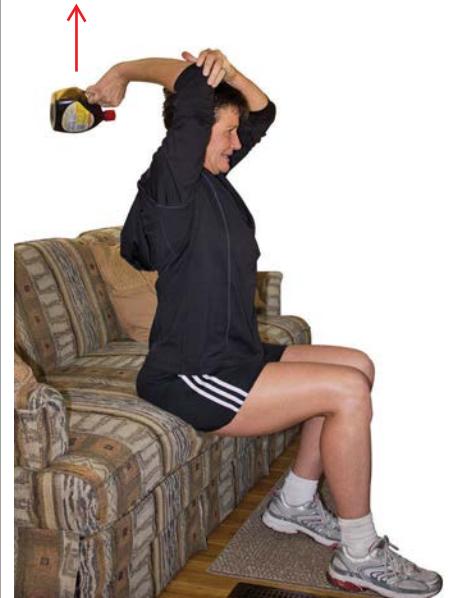
Sit upright at the edge of a chair with your knees at a 90-degree angle. Lift your bent knee straight up and down. Maintain a straight, strong posture and flex your foot. Repeat for 10 to 15 reps, and then switch sides. This exercise works the quadriceps.

**REVERSE CHAIR CRUNCHES**

Sit tall in a chair with your arms down at the side for support. Keep your abs tight. Bring your knees up toward your chest, then push them out without touching the floor. This exercise works the abdominal muscles.



“IF YOU HAVEN’T EXERCISED FOR SOME TIME AND YOU HAVE HEALTH CONCERNS ... TALK TO YOUR DOCTOR BEFORE BEGINNING A NEW EXERCISE ROUTINE.”

**TRICEPS CURLS**

Hold small weights in one or both hands. Improvise with whatever you have available. Put a soup can in each hand or a bottle of syrup in one, supporting your elbow with the other. Raise arms overhead, keeping elbows close to ears. Slowly lower the weights behind you, then raise them to the starting position.

**CHEST FLIES**

Put your arms out in front of you at shoulder height, as if you are hugging a tree. Keep your elbows up. If you want to use some light weights, hold 15-ounce cans. Bring arms out and back, then bring them together with palms facing each other. This exercise works pectoral muscles.



**CHAIR EXERCISES**



**SEATED KNEE-TO-CHEST STRETCH**

With a hand behind your knee, pull knee into chest. Hold for 30 seconds. Repeat on the other leg. This exercise stretches the lower back.



**BACK STRETCH**

From a seated position, drop your head to your knees and let your hands fall to your feet or the floor. This position stretches the lower back.

**STANDING EXERCISES**



**WALL PUSH-UPS**

Stand a few feet back from a wall or flat surface like a refrigerator. With arms at shoulder height, place your hands on the wall. Lean forward with your whole body, coming up on the balls of your feet and keeping your abs tight. The farther your feet are from the wall, the better workout you'll get. This exercise works the chest, triceps and upper back.



**CALF RAISES**

Do this exercise while standing at a sink or using a chair back for balance. With your feet slightly apart, rise up on the balls of your feet. Squeeze your abs, glutes and calves. Raise and lower 12 to 15 times. On the last rise, hold for 10 seconds or so. When you finish, stretch your calves by putting one foot forward, flex foot with toes up and hold for 30 seconds. Repeat the stretch on the other calf.



**HIP EXTENSIONS**

Stand with feet slightly apart, using a counter or chair for support. Keep abs tight. Raise one leg behind you, until your foot is 3 to 4 inches off the floor. Don't arch your back. Repeat for the other leg. You should feel this in your glutes.



**STANDING EXERCISES**



**KNEE EXTENSIONS**

Stand with your abs tight. Raise your knee so that your thigh is at a 90-degree angle to your body, and your thigh is at a 90-degree angle to your calf. Next, extend your leg with your toes pointed. This exercise works your quads. Repeat 10 to 15 times before lowering the leg. Repeat with other leg.



**QUAD STRETCH**

With one hand on a table or chair back for support, lift one foot behind you. Grasp your ankle and gently pull your heel up. You will feel a stretch in your quads. Tighten your abs and keep your knees close together. Hold for 30 seconds. Switch legs and repeat.

**FLOOR EXERCISES**



**SIDE-LYING HIP ABDUCTION**

Lying on your side with your legs straight, stack your feet on top of each other. Your hips and shoulders should be aligned vertically to the floor. Lift the top leg up and slightly back. Slowly return leg to starting position. Do this 10 to 15 times with each leg. A second set could be done with the upper foot in a pigeon-toed position.



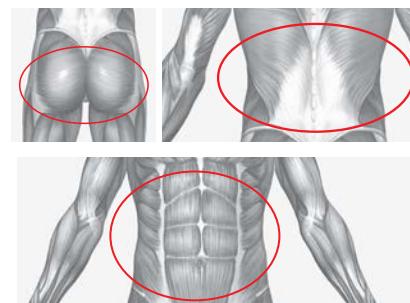
**PLANKS**

Lie on your stomach with arms bent and elbows close to your sides, palms down and fingers facing forward. Lift your torso and thighs off the floor, keeping your body in a straight line as long as possible. You can leave your knees on the floor for a half plank. This exercise strengthens your core.



**BRIDGES**

Lie on your back. Bend your knees at a 90-degree angle with your feet flat on the floor. Lift your hips off the floor, keeping stomach tight. Hold for a count of five. Repeat for 10 to 15 times. This exercise strengthens your glutes, back and abs.



**“BE SURE TO STRETCH MUSCLES AFTER YOU’VE WORKED THEM.”**

**EATING SMART**

Ginter also had some advice for eating sensibly while on the road. It’s important to plan ahead. If you don’t have a plan, you’ll probably end up eating junk food. I can attest to that. Prepare your lunches and snacks in the morning. Pay attention to serving sizes for snacks. A single 160-calorie serving of Cheetos is 21 pieces. Count them before you start eating.

## EASY, HEALTHY TRAVELING FOOD

- Lettuce wraps with turkey and hummus
- Sweet baby bell peppers
- Sugar snap peas
- Peeled baby carrots
- Edamame
- Tangerines
- Frozen grapes
- Single serving microwave popcorn
- Raisins
- String cheese
- Graham crackers



- One handful whole almonds
- Crystallized ginger
- Chewing gum
- Water

### TEST DRIVE

Not long after our session with Ginter, we had three days to drive 1,000 miles in the motorhome. I challenged myself to ex-

**“ON THIS TRIP MY BACK DIDN’T HURT NEARLY AS MUCH.”**

ercise and eat right during the road trip. Every hour or so, I did some of the chair exercises. The stretches were especially helpful. When we stopped, I did standing or floor exercises or took a quick walk around outside.

I also planned for healthier eating on the road. I stocked the refrigerator with bite-size raw vegetables and fruit. Before we set out each morning, I prepared an easy-to-eat lunch, such as lettuce wraps with hummus and turkey. To my delight, I found that a single piece of crystallized

ginger would satisfy my sweet tooth, whereas a dozen dark chocolate almonds would just whet my appetite. I drank water instead of soft drinks.

I’m happy to report that on this trip my back didn’t hurt nearly as much as it did the last time we traveled for three days, and my weight didn’t go up either. Ginter’s advice helped make those long travel days much more pleasurable. Now I’m enjoying the journey and the destination, and loving all parts of the motorhome lifestyle. ♦



Mary and Jim Zalmanek enjoy traveling in their 2003 Safari Trek when they are not at home in Monument, Colo. Mary is the author of *The Art of the Spark* ([www.artofthespark.com](http://www.artofthespark.com)).

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

To order “Jodie Ginter’s RV Fitness” DVD, go to [www.rvadventurevideos.com](http://www.rvadventurevideos.com). For more information, contact Jodie Ginter at 419-305-1482 or [jginter80@gmail.com](mailto:jginter80@gmail.com).

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by CHRISTINE GOODIER

# FAST AND FUN TIMES WITH GOOD SAM

## FIRST-TIMERS EXPERIENCE THE RALLY AT DAYTONA INTERNATIONAL SPEEDWAY

**“T**his place is enormous! Look over there! Even more RVs are parked over that way!” I swiveled and pointed as my husband, Bob, nodded in agreement behind the steering wheel. We had just entered the hallowed turf of racing giants like Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt: Florida’s Daytona International Speedway, now morphed into a campground for 3,500 RVs.

It was day one of our very first Good Sam Rally, held Nov. 2-4, 2012, and we weren’t sure what to expect. A troop of seasoned volunteers waved us along a labyrinth of roads to the right camping location, determined by our windshield pass color. In mere minutes, our 22-foot Leisure Travel Van Sprinter was settled into a dry camping site on a speedway parking lot.

As we hopped out of the van, Patricia Babcoke from Odgen Dunes, Ind.,

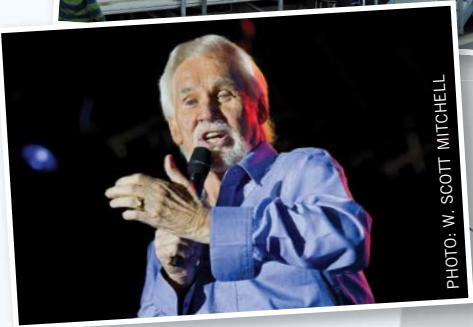


PHOTO: W. SCOTT MITCHELL

Top: An enthusiastic crowd packs into the grandstands for the Rally Opening Ceremonies. Above: Legendary singer Kenny Rogers entertained Rally attendees with hits such as “Ruby, Don’t Take Your Love to Town” and “Lady.”

greeted us with a location card and color code to identify trams that would serve our area. After two days on her feet, she was still smiling. “We came in on Monday and started parking on Wednesday,” Patricia said. “We’ll be parking more than 500 RVs in this lot.”



PHOTOS: ROBERT GOODIER



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Jessie (left) and Lonnie Rix of Orange City, Fla., with their 35-year-old motorhome at the Rally's Vintage RV display.

A tram whisked us through a tunnel and up into the speedway infield to check out the Rally village, already buzzing with action. The registration team noted our site location in case someone needed to find us and handed over our tote containing ID badges and a fat schedule booklet. We were ready to roll.

As a faithful fan of NASCAR races, Bob was looking forward to seeing a world-class racing venue up close for the first time. I was hoping to enjoy some camaraderie with other RV folks, and we both wanted to check out new RVs and products on the market. Where to begin? We gazed around, staring hard at a map like a pair of tourists in Tiananmen Square.

"The size of this Rally is overwhelming," said Mike Boyle, another first-timer. Mike and his wife, Bonnie, left their Maryland home as Hurricane Sandy pounded the East Coast and arrived in their 2010 Jayco Melbourne 26A. They planned to take a look at larger coaches on display.

While chatting, we discovered the Boyles' reasons for owning an RV matched ours. "We camp to travel and go places," Mike said. "Not so much to sit in the campground and socialize." Last year, the couple spent more than a month touring Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons, destinations we hope to visit soon.

After strolling through a nifty collection of vintage RVs together, Bob watched people test-drive new motorhomes on the speedway's track (at modest speeds) while I marked our schedule with don't-miss activities. Speedway garages that normally housed multimillion-dollar race cars had been transformed into classrooms for seminars.

As Rally registrants, we could choose from a bevy of seminar topics starting with the basics in "RVing 101" outlined by Bob Livingston, publisher of *MotorHome* and *Trailer Life* magazines. Other seminars composed a collage of RV knowledge about tire pressure, satellite TV, towed vehicle braking systems and much more. An outdoor day stage near the speedway pit road held entertainment and additional events, like an opportunity to meet



This young RVer's dog won "Silliest Pet Trick" by playing dead at the popular Rally Dog Show.

Marcus Lemonis, CEO and chairman of Good Sam Enterprises and Camping World.

We dropped by "Coffee with Good Sam Club State Directors," hoping to meet someone from our regional club. Although no North Carolinians were on hand, Florida Assistant State Directors Joe and Debbie Weston beamed a sunny welcome in our direction. Their host state had rolled out sparkling sunshine, azure skies and ideal temperatures for the weekend.

At a presentation right up my alley, Food Network chef Bob Blumer, host of "Surreal Gourmet" and "Glutton for Punishment," and an RV owner himself, demonstrated campground cuisine at the "Good Sam Culinary Experience." His event and many others were repeated several times, giving us second chances to catch those we had missed the day before.

My favorite entertainment event was Saturday's hilarious Rally Dog Show, where pooches and their owners competed in categories like Silliest Pet Trick and Dog/Owner Look-alikes, as Good Sam representatives walked through the crowd handing out free yellow doggie bandanas.

While watching, I met another pair of Rally first-timers, John Campbell and Martha Johnson from Cape Canaveral, Fla., who attended the Rally in a Winnebago Adventurer. Their golden retriever, Bailey, sporting a miniature jockey strapped on his back, took second place in the Racing Dog Costume category.

"We're very impressed with the orga-

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**NOTE:** The January issue of *MotorHome* listed dates for a Rally in Albuquerque, N.M. That event has been cancelled.

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PHOTO: W. SCOTT MITCHELL

Country superstar Reba McEntire wowed the crowd during her performance at The Rally.

nization of the Rally,” John said. His plan in the future will be to register earlier for the best choice of campsite categories. We agreed, since some grassy areas had electric hookups while many sites on asphalt parking lots did not. But dry camping proved to be no hardship. Our refrigerator operates on LP-gas and during generator hours, from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m., we were able to make coffee and charge our electronics.

My concern that we were parked far way from the activities evaporated the first day after utilizing the trams that shuttled the 7,290 Rally attendees to event venues.

Like John, I was impressed by the smooth operation of such a large, complex event.

Throughout the weekend we were drawn back to the goodies on display in the big, white Supplier Tent. Bob seized the opportunity to ask product representatives about LED lights and roof caulking while I chatted with Robin Dickson, who served as master of ceremonies at the Rally Dog Show. Robin is president of Dogs for the Deaf, an organization that rescues shelter dogs and trains them to help people with disabilities. She explained to me that Good Sam Club

chapters all over the United States provide funding to support the placement of these capable canines free of charge.

Blockbuster evening entertainment at no extra charge by Kenny Rogers on Friday and Reba McEntire on Saturday was simply the icing on this gigantic Rally cake. Big crowds of people with surprising amounts of energy after two busy days turned out and were rewarded with surprises like Camping World T-shirts, fireworks and parachutists floating down from the sky, displaying a huge American flag.

Before leaving Sunday, we stopped to



First-timers Mike and Bonnie Boyle left Hurricane Sandy’s rain and winds in Maryland to attend the Daytona Rally.



Musically inclined attendees join MotorHome publisher Bob Livingston for a spontaneous jam session.

## TIPS FOR FIRST-TIMERS

- Consider booking an early bird arrival to familiarize yourself with the venue before the action starts.
- Print and study the schedule before you leave home (online at [www.therally.com](http://www.therally.com)) and mark the events you don't want to miss.
- Read your mailed information packet and follow arrival instructions (directions may vary from your GPS routing).
- Arrive with water and LP-gas tanks full and your waste tanks empty.
- Pace yourself and don't try to cram everything into the first day.
- Wear a hat, comfortable shoes and sunscreen, and carry bottled water.
- Bring your dog.



Rally-goers had the chance to meet Camping World CEO and Chairman Marcus Lemonis.

say goodbye to the Boyles and get their take on the weekend. One seminar that we had missed, "100 Years of RVing," turned out to be Mike's favorite. He had also liked the "Geeks on Tour" computer event. Mike told us the various experts on hand had met his expectations overall: "People were very open and positive; they were out to make good will. I've learned a tremendous amount." Mike had tarried at the tent, just as

we had. "The vendor area was bigger than I expected," he said. "We spent a good bit of money and bought items I had been thinking I needed — or wanted."

And what about that bigger RV? "I didn't expect them to have the volume of RVs they had on display," Mike said, comparing the Rally favorably to America's Largest RV Show, an annual Pennsylvania show he attended. The Boyles' visits to the new RV displays proved fruitful as they said they found their next coach and planned to buy "sooner or later."

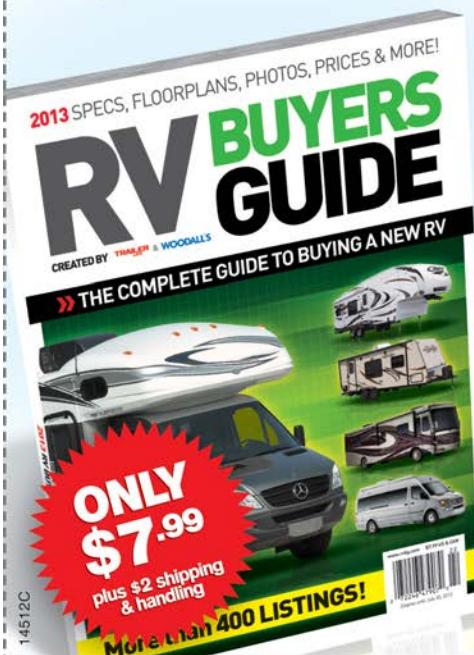
Since returning home, I've been thinking about how rallies make it easy to strike up fun conversations with like-minded people. Armed with some new product knowledge, Bob has begun making a few tweaks to our RV. I'm glad we went, and we'll definitely attend more rallies in the future. As for the Boyles? A few days ago we received an email: They ordered a new motorhome exactly like the one they saw at The Rally. ♦



Christine Goodier is a freelance writer who lives on the North Carolina coast and travels with her husband, photographer Bob Goodier, in a Class B Sprinter motorhome.

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by BOBBIE HASSELBRING

# WESTERN SOUTH DAKOTA — Naturally

## THE BLACK HILLS AND BADLANDS COMBINE RICH HISTORY WITH RUGGED SCENERY

**T**he Black Hills of western South Dakota have long been a favorite of RVers. We came to this area to explore the natural side of the Black Hills — the plants and animals, geology and natural history that existed before the trappers, miners and homesteaders came — and we weren't disappointed.

Traveling east on Highway 85, the moment we pass out of the endless high desert sage of Wyoming we begin to climb into South Dakota's Black Hills. The land changes to rolling, pine-covered inclines of Black Hills National Forest. We climb up and up, only to descend steep grades to our first stop, Jewel Cave National Monument.

The Black Hills are honeycombed with limestone caves. One of the most spectacular (and with 162 miles of passages is the third longest explored cave in the world) is Jewel Cave. Caving experts think only 5 percent of Jewel has been explored.

Ranger Dorothy Perkins meets us for the half-mile, 70-minute Scenic Tour. We board an elevator and descend 240 feet in less than 30 seconds, emerging into a large, cool (49 degrees Fahrenheit) room with a 40-foot-tall ceiling. Experts believe the cave and others in the region were formed more than 350 million years ago when the area was an inland sea. The area's Lakota Native Americans knew about the region's caves, considered them sacred and never entered them. Jewel was discovered by brothers Frank and Albert Michaud in 1900 and, soon after, opened for tours.



**Formations throughout Jewel Cave appear to drip and ooze; others glow or sparkle.**

We move along a series of metal staircases and cement walkways. The lighting illuminates special features such as jewel-like calcite, nubby dogtooth spar crystals, stalagmites, stalactites and vivid colors of various minerals — red iron oxide, yellow dolomite, black manganese. There are places where the rock appears almost liquid, flowing in long ribbons or cascading and dripping like solidified honey. We stop to admire the “bacon and eggs” formation, calcite that resembles multi-colored strips of bacon and two sunny-side-up eggs.

Halfway through the tour, Perkins turns out the lights. It is completely black and several in our group laugh nervously. Then she turns on a small light. The tiny flame is swallowed up by the cave's darkness.



**A star attraction in Jewel Cave is the “bacon,” a type of flow stone.**

PHOTOS: ANNE LEAVER



PHOTO: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

We pause at the lowest known point in the cave, seven stories below the surface, and ooh and ahh at the cave's largest and highest room with a 110-foot ceiling. And soon we're back at the elevator, which whisks us back to the surface.

### T. REX TITANS

Our next "natural" stop is in Hill City, a quaint Western town about 25 miles north of Jewel Cave National Monument. Driving a motorhome in the Black Hills is both beautiful and challenging. Most roads are curvy two laners with plenty of up-and-down elevation changes. Visitors, especially those driving larger rigs, should plan routes carefully against the map for width and weight restrictions caused by tunnels on roads like US16A and SR87.

The topography of the Black Hills makes it a rockhound's dream. Everywhere there are crystals and semi-precious stones. In fact, Fairburn agate, a colorful fortification agate considered the "gem of South Dakota," can be found from Lusk, Wyo., to central South Dakota. Everywhere we go we stuff our pockets with beautiful rocks. The topography and geology have also made this area rich in fossils, the reason we've come to Hill City.

The town has plenty of jewelry stores and souvenir shops, but it's the Museum at Black Hills Institute we're here to see. We pass through the gift shop, step through a small gate into the museum and our mouths drop open. The little 1938 former city auditorium is crammed full of skeletons of the fearsome Tyrannosaurus rex, marine animals and fossils from all over the world. The founders of the Black Hills Institute of Geological Research have put this impressive collection together.

Millions of years ago the Black Hills area was covered by warm seas and swamps and boasted a tropical climate, our guide tells us. It was also home to plenty of large dinosaurs like the T. rex. In fact, it was a volunteer from this institute who found "Sue," the largest and most complete tyrannosaurus skeleton ever discovered. Because the find was on deeded land placed in trust, the federal government seized Sue and the T. rex is now displayed in Chicago's The Field Museum. The Museum at Black Hills Institute has "Stan" on display, the second largest T. rex that was also



**Top: A motorhome heads uphill near Burns Basin Overlook. Middle: Stan, a T. rex specimen, is one of the stars of the Black Hills Institute in Hill City. Above: Visitors can get face-to-face with the remains of mammoths at The Mammoth Site near Hot Springs.**

discovered in South Dakota.

The museum additionally has a collection of giant ammonites, called the "jewels of ancient seas," that are related to the modern day squid. There is also the world's largest shark's tooth, which belonged to a shark 60 to 70 feet long. In addition to skeletons and fossils, the Zeitner Roberts Mineral Room boasts a huge collection of eye-catching minerals, crystals and semi-precious stones, including a spectacular 4.5-foot-long amethyst geode with spiky purple crystals and a huge piece of green Nephrite jade from the Yukon.

Some museums skimp on educational information, but not the Museum at Black Hills Institute. Each display has a plethora of fascinating and easily understandable information. We explore for nearly three hours, but road fatigue finally catches up

with us. We bid our host goodbye and head for Rafter J Bar Ranch Campground a few miles south on Highway 16.

This 210-site camp on 170 acres of rolling meadow and pine is organized into six individual camps, three with their own shower/bathroom house. Most of the camps are nestled under shady pines, though some are near open meadows. The park is located on an original homestead and was a former Deadwood Stage stop (it still has the original barn). It offers a small café, a gift shop and convenience store. It also has a seasonal outdoor pool and hot tub and we spend a comfortable evening listening to owls call from the pines.

### MULTITUDES OF MAMMOTS

Our visit to the Black Hills Institute Museum intrigued us so we head south on highways 385/89 to the little town of Hot Springs and The Mammoth Site, one of the largest mammoth finds in the world and an active archaeological dig. We're met by Dr. Larry Agenbroad, the site director and chief scientist, who takes us into the 36,000-square-foot research and visitor's center. When Agenbroad opens the door to the indoor dig site, we're awed. Everywhere we look are huge mammoth skeletons — tusks, thighbones, skulls, vertebrae — partially or completely covered in dried mud. Some lie alone, while a few have collapsed onto other 10-ton mammoths, creating giant piles of the precursor to the modern day elephant.

"This is a genuine, 3-D mammoth jigsaw puzzle," says Agenbroad, chuckling. "We think this was a sinkhole and that 26,000 years ago young male mammoths were attracted to it because the warm water kept the vegetation green. They became trapped in the hole and couldn't get out."

Agenbroad has been directing this mammoth dig since the first animal was uncovered in 1974 when someone called and said, "I think we have mammoths here."

They did. To date, Agenbroad and his team have unearthed 60 mammoths, most giant Columbian mammoths. Unlike the more familiar woolly mammoth, Columbian mammoths don't have thick, woolly coats and they look more like today's elephants. And they were big, 10 tons with 11-foot tusks, standing 13 feet tall at the shoulder (woolly mammoths, a



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An oasis of green trees can be seen in the midst of the inhospitable Badlands called *mako sica* (“lands bad”) by the Lakota Sioux. Traveling through the area can feel daunting.

few of which have been found here, are a few tons lighter and a few feet shorter).

Mammoths weren't the only ones trapped in the sink hole. They've found short-faced bears, including one at 1,500 pounds and standing 12 feet tall on its hind legs, as well as ancient camels and wolves.

Agenbrood believes the sink hole is very deep, and that it will yield many more creatures. Because The Mammoth Site is so rich in bones, volunteers and professionals dig only one month a year, uncovering so much material it takes Agenbrood and his staff the rest of the year to process, preserve and catalog the finds.

We step into an exhibition hall and the full impact of these giant mammoths greets us in towering reassembled skeletons and models of complete mammoths, as well as skeletons and fossils from around the world. There's a short-faced bear skeleton and a model of the baby mammoth unearthed with skin and hair intact and made famous by photos in *National Geographic*.

We leave The Mammoth Site with our heads filled with visions of a South Dakota millions of years ago and head north on Highway 385/87 toward Custer State Park, our destination for the night. This route, though beautiful, is windy and slow. We enter the park and drive the Wildlife Loop, spotting herds of buffalo, mule deer, pronghorn and flocks of wild turkeys scattered over wheat-colored rolling hills topped with oak and pine.

Our site in the Game Lodge Campground offers large, flat sites next to a small pond, fire pits, picnic tables, and large and clean showers. We walk the dogs on a creekside trail that leads to State Game Lodge, a four-story Arts and Crafts

log structure built in 1920 that served as the summer White House for Calvin Coolidge and Dwight Eisenhower.

As the sun sets, rain spatters the roof, softly at first, then in earnest, thrumming steadily throughout the night.

### ON TO BADLANDS

We wake to rain-washed air and cool blue skies and reluctantly leave Game Lodge Camp. We could easily spend several days in Custer State Park, but our time in South Dakota is dwindling and we're eager to experience the state's infamous Badlands. We tool east on Highway 36 to 79 and finally onto Interstate 90 and churn 50 miles through strong prairie headwinds to the entrance of Badlands National Park.

We stop at the first overlook, Pinnacles, for a 180-degree view of tortured, eroded cliffs that seem to stretch to the horizon. The 244,000 acres of South Dakota Badlands got their name from French trappers who called them *mauvaises terres a traverse*, meaning “bad lands to cross.” And, indeed, it would be impossible to cross these cliffs, gullies, washes and canyons on foot or by modern conveyance.

Scientists believe that 37 million years ago the crystalline core of the Black Hills had already been exposed by erosion. Streams flowing from the west deposited sediments here, mostly wind-blown volcanic ash. The ash weathered into clay and eventually rock. Then, a half million years ago, erosion began to gully the Badlands into its present otherworldly landscape.

We pass two young bighorn sheep with massive curled horns along the roadside that cause a brief traffic jam. At Burns Basin Overlook, one of many broad pullouts perfect for RVs, there's a platform cantile-

vered over the canyon for a dizzying view of weathered cliffs. At White Rock Overlook, the landscape changes from eroded, striated hills to tall, almost lacy peaks like something you'd see in a “Men on Mars” '50s sci-fi movie. We stop at Fossil Exhibit Trail and walk among the gnarled cliffs, careful where we step after seeing several “Caution, Rattlesnake” signs.

We crest Norbeck Pass and angle down to Cedar Pass Campground, one of several RV-friendly campgrounds in the park. The upper and lower paved loops offer easy pull-ins with electricity and restrooms (no showers). It also has water spigots and a dump station.

When the sun sets, the sky is inky black. When I take my dog out, the moon is rising over those eerie Martian mountains, casting a silvery light on their sharp silhouettes. The sight makes me suck in my breath at this, another spectacularly natural part of western South Dakota. ♦



Bobbie Hasselbring is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of [www.realfoodtraveler.com](http://www.realfoodtraveler.com), which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a Class C 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

#### BADLANDS NATIONAL PARK

605-433-5361,  
[www.nps.gov/bad/](http://www.nps.gov/bad/)

#### BLACK HILLS INSTITUTE OF GEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

605-574-3919, [www.bhigr.com](http://www.bhigr.com)

#### CUSTER STATE PARK

605-255-4464,  
[www.custerstatepark.info](http://www.custerstatepark.info)

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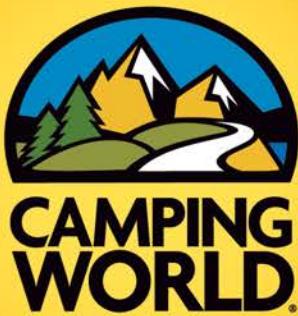
#### RANCH CAMPGROUND

605-574-2527, [www.rafterj.com](http://www.rafterj.com)

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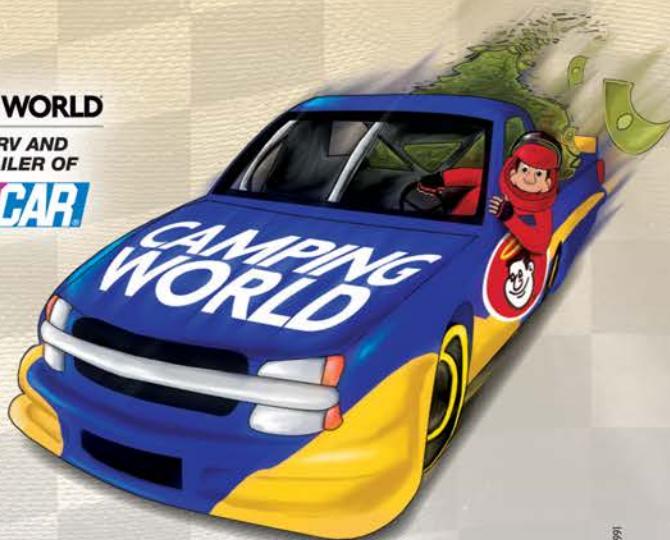
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# WINNEBAGO VISTA 26HE

VALUE-PACKED NEW FLOORPLAN OFFERS CLASS A AMENITIES AT AN AFFORDABLE PRICE

by CHUCK AND TERESA CAMPBELL

**J**ust when it seemed that pricing of new Class A gas motorhomes had reached epic heights, Winnebago Industries of Forest City, Iowa, has rolled out the Vista 26HE — an economical, no-frills floorplan that can fit into just about anyone's budget. The company believes including necessary features, comfort and quality into the new coach at an affordable price ultimately translates into optimum value to its owners.

Even though the 26HE, at 26 feet, 11 inches in length, is relatively short for a Class A, it still boasts a layout with a forward lounge area with streetside slideout, a mid-coach curbside galley, a split, walk-through bathroom, and rear bedroom with a 60-by-75-inch queen bed.

Winnebago's Vista 26HE comes as a complete package, with all necessary essentials thrown in as standard equipment such as 14,800-Btu roof air, 4.0 kW gas generator and a 32-inch LCD TV. Other high-end appointments include Ultraleather captains seats in the cockpit and even

a handy powered patio awning. All told, the coach's layout contains just about every fixture and appliance necessary for comfortable, full-featured RVing for couples as well as smaller families.

The Vista line has been around for several years, and still offers four other economical floorplans up to 35 feet in length. These models, unlike the 26HE, can be accessorized with everything from full-body paint to four-door refrigerators, and multi-featured A/V centers to bunk beds.

As tested, the Vista 26HE is initially being offered at a special promotional rate of \$69,999. By the time this story runs, however, the asking price may have risen to the unit's original suggested retail of \$87,217, plus delivery and handling.

## COACH AND CHASSIS

Our test coach was built on Ford's latest F53 Super Duty motorhome chassis, and weighed in at a svelte 13,780



pounds. Equipped with a three-valve-per-cylinder, Triton V-10 gas engine that pumps out a maximum of 362 HP and 457 LB-FT of torque, this compact coach leaps into action the moment one steps on the accelerator.

The F53's chassis and suspension were given an update in 2011. Of note are an 80-gallon fuel tank, high capacity 175-amp alternator, integrated front and rear suspension system with tapered leaf springs and Bilstein shocks, and a 50-degree wheel cut that enhances this platform's maneuverability and parking capabilities.

Up front, the coach has a nicely configured interior cab layout accentuated by the Ultraleather captain's seats. These comparatively upscale features were a surprise inclusion, considering the unit's bargain basement price point.

Though there is no flashiness to speak of in the cockpit, it still has all the basics for effective, comfortable operation. Dash surfaces are molded vinyl and include a well-appointed primary instrument cluster, a rearview monitor screen, and smallish radio head located in the center that we found difficult to operate when the coach was in motion. The driver's instrument cluster had easily discernible gauges, and made the task of monitoring highway speeds and engine systems quite easy.

The manually adjustable front seats tended to hold us comfortably and were also capable of being swiveled rearward to become part of the lounge area when the coach was parked. The cab also had a generous, one-piece windshield that provided panoramic views of the highway and surrounding countryside throughout the trip.

## CONSTRUCTION

Components used in putting together the Vista's coachwork reflect Winnebago's legendary build quality, and include a welded steel and aluminum superstructure with specially engineered, interlocking joints that connect the floor, side walls and roof. The coach sports a crowned, one-piece fiberglass roof and durable Thermo-Panel side walls consisting of exterior fiberglass, aluminum support members and high-density block foam insulation.

Though the 26HE's exterior is relatively plain in white gel-coat fiberglass including its roof, it is still highlighted tastefully with a few charcoal and gray accent graphics that give it a sporty, contemporary appearance.

Clockwise from top left: The Vista 26HE's streetside slideout houses the dinette and expands living space. A three-burner stove, conventional gas oven and 6.3-cubic-foot refrigerator complete the galley. The queen bed is flanked by wardrobe closets and an overhead cabinet. Ultraleather captain's seats add comfort to the cab layout, which also includes the basics for comfortable operation.

## 2013 WINNEBAGO VISTA 26HE

### WHAT'S HOT

Compact floorplan, good build quality, attractive cabinetry, cavernous rear storage bay, power awning, low price

### WHAT'S NOT

Tiny radio head and controls that are difficult to operate, no DVD player, fuel mileage

## SPECIFICATIONS

## PERFORMANCE

**FUEL ECONOMY:** 7.5 MPG**ACCELERATION**

0-60 MPH: 19.2 SEC

40-60 MPH: 10.3 SEC

## CHASSIS

**MODEL:** FORD F53**ENGINE:** TRITON 6.8-L V-10**SAE HP:** 362 HP @ 4,750 RPM**TORQUE:** 457 LB-FT @ 3,250 RPM**TRANSMISSION:** 5-SPEED TORQSHIFT

WITH TOW-HAUL

**AXLE RATIO:** 4.88:1**TIRES:** 245/70R19.5**WHEELBASE:** 158"**BRAKES, F/R:** DISC/DISC WITH ABS**SUSPENSION, F/R:** TAPERED MULTI-LEAF**FUEL CAP:** 80 GAL**WARRANTY:** 12 MONTH/15,000 MILES

## COACH

**EXT LENGTH:** 26' 11"**EXT WIDTH:** 8' 5"**EXT HEIGHT:** 12' 1"**INT WIDTH:** 8' 0"**INT HEIGHT:** 6' 8"**CONSTRUCTION:** STEEL/ALUMINUM FRAMING,

GELCOAT FIBERGLASS SKIN AND ROOF,

POLYSTYRENE BLOCK FOAM INSULATION

**FRESHWATER CAP:** 60 GAL**BLACK-WATER CAP:** 43 GAL**GRAY-WATER CAP:** 38 GAL**WATER-HEATER CAP:** 6 GAL**LP-GAS CAP:** 18 GAL**AIR CONDITIONER:** 14,800 BTU**FURNACE:** 30,000 BTU**REFRIGERATOR:** 6.3 CU FT**CONVERTER:** 45 AMP**BATTERY:** (1) 12-VOLT CHASSIS,

(2) 12-VOLT COACH

**AC GENERATOR:** 4.0 KW**BASE MSRP:** \$87,217**MSRP AS TESTED:** \$88,320**WARRANTY:** BASIC 3 YRS/36,000 MILES;

POWERTRAIN 5 YRS/60,000 MILES

## WET WEIGHT

(WATER AND HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS TANKS

FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

**FRONT AXLE:** 5,080 LBS**REAR AXLE:** 8,700 LBS**TOTAL:** 13,780 LBS

## CHASSIS RATINGS

**GAWR, F/R:** 6,500/11,000 LBS**GVWR/GCWR:** 16,000/23,000 LBS**ROCC:** 2,220 LBS

(DEDUCT WEIGHT OF PASSENGERS FOR NET

CARGO CAPACITY)

**GAWR:** GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING**GVWR:** GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING**GCWR:** GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT RATING**ROCC:** REALISTIC OCCUPANT & CARGO CARRY-  
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## ON THE ROAD

This has got to be one of the scrappier, and more adept, Class A performers we've had out recently. Right from the start, while threading our way through a congested shopping center prior to beginning our trip, we came to value the unit's shorter length, positive steering attributes and its exceptional wheel cut with a 30.4-foot turning radius.

This tight turning ability would also come into play later in the test, when we unintentionally dead-ended into a construction zone on a lonely country lane in the middle of nowhere. With no wide spots in sight, we had to make several turnabouts within the narrow parameters of the roadway to extricate ourselves from this tricky situation. Had we not been able to make this necessary maneuver, we might still be backing up.

Beginning our trip, and while accelerating into traffic on a busy freeway, the feedback we received from the powertrain inspired confidence in its performance abilities. Increasing speed, passing slower traffic and squeezing back into a limited space between other vehicles was easily done, in a stable manner, and with plenty of power to spare.

We put the unit through several timed speed tests to measure its performance off the line and its mid-range acceleration potential. The peppy coach did well, averaging 0-60 MPH passes in 19.2 seconds, with 40-60 MPH intervals of 10.3 seconds.

The coach's suspension, however, did not take well to the uneven highway surfaces. This phenomenon could possibly have been attributable to the chassis' shorter, 158-inch wheelbase and/or the smaller 19.5-inch wheels. Whatever the reason, when surfaces became rougher,

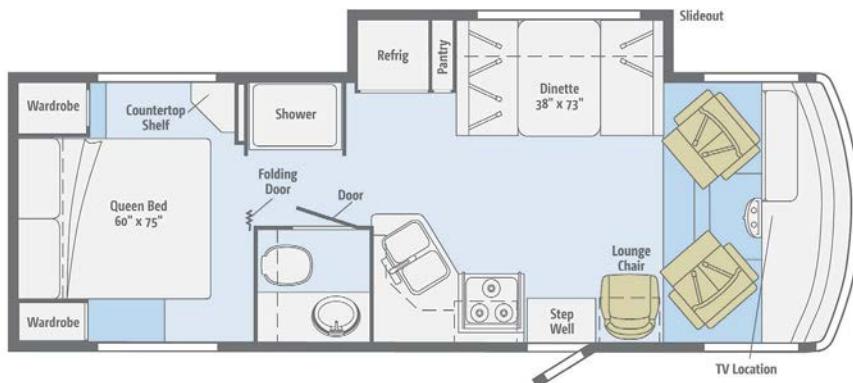


With the Vista's split, walk-through bathroom area, the toilet and vanity are located curbside.

the suspension telegraphed its displeasure to the driver by way of unpleasant vibrations and increased highway noise. When road surfaces were even and compliant, we sailed along smoothly and quietly with no disagreeable suspension feedback.

Encountering a long, meandering grade north of Santa Barbara, we easily forged our way up the 6 percent slope at 58 MPH in third gear at 4,000 RPM. Later in the trip, we tackled a much steeper stretch in the 7 percent range. Though the short but formidable segment slowed us down a bit more, we still managed 55 MPH in third gear at 3,200 RPM.

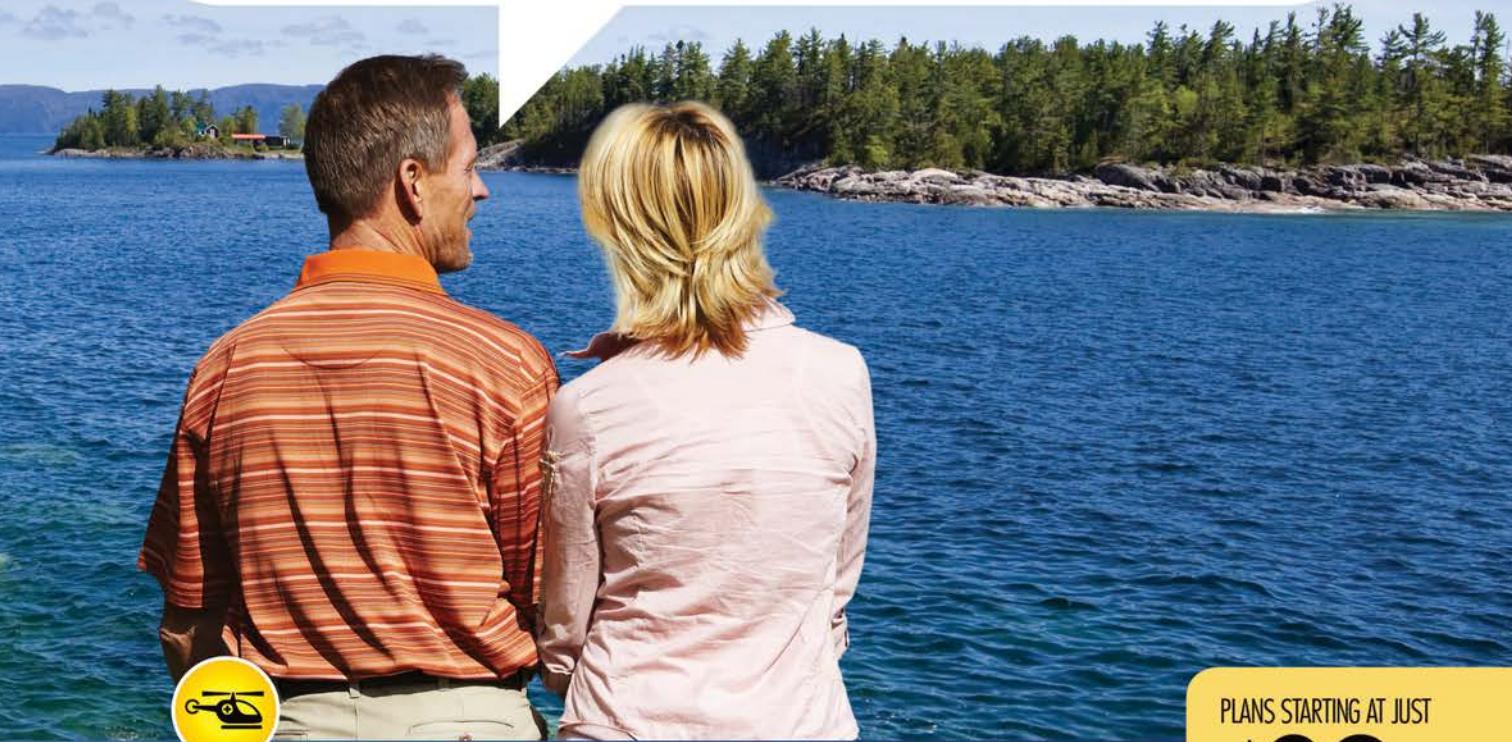
Downhill performance was likewise impressive. The entire process was enhanced by Ford's Tow/Haul feature, which allows drivers to downshift its Torq-Shift five-speed automatic transmission by merely tapping the brake pedal. With the coach fully loaded, our descent on



# Emergency Medical and Travel Assistance

## *Once Upon a Time...*

My wife Nancy and I were half way through our 1,200 mile journey to visit our son for the holidays when we got in an accident in our RV. A large tractor trailer cut us off. We tried to brake but didn't have enough time and crashed right into it. I suffered just a few bumps and bruises, but Nancy needed surgery on her leg. We were told by the doctors at the small hospital we were taken to that she needed to be transferred to another hospital with the specialist she needed. I was worried and didn't know where to begin - we were so far from home! I called my son to explain the situation and see if he could help when he reminded me of my Good Sam TravelAssist membership. With just one call Good Sam TravelAssist quickly located a hospital capable of helping my wife. And they arranged - and paid for - a medical evacuation to that hospital. After a successful operation and a few repairs to our RV we made it to see our family - but not without Good Sam TravelAssist! *Happily Ever After.*



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several grades in the 7 percent category was slowed effectively by engine compression to a maximum of 58 MPH in second gear at 3,800 RPM.

During several days exploring the Santa Inez Valley area, we had occasion to experience many rural highways and quite a bit of small town traffic. Despite all this that one might ordinarily expect in a tourist destination, the coach's handling and performance was reasonably user friendly considering its size and weight.

The test area was a mixed bag of freeways with occasional steep grades, winding county roads through rolling hills and suburban stop-and-go. Though the coach's performance and handling were excellent for the most part, we were unable to squeeze much more out of it than an average 7.5 MPG.

### FEELING AT HOME

The 26HE's floorplan offers a forward, streetside slideout that expands to maximize comfort and livability in the front lounge and galley areas. The slide itself houses a 38-by-73-inch dinette that can convert to an alternate sleeping platform.

A curbside lounge chair affords additional seating in the living area, along with the front captain's chairs that can be swiveled rearward. A split bathroom is located mid-coach, followed by a rear bedroom with queen bed.

Three décor packages are offered on this model, and ours came with the Grayson collection in subtle shades of gray and cream. Two wood species are also available for cabinetry, with the test unit featuring Forest Cherry.

Counter material used in the galley and bathroom consists of dark-hued, Formica-type composites. Floors in the cockpit and bits of the bedroom are graced with beige colored, medium-length shag carpet. The rest of the bedroom — and all of the galley, lounge and bath areas — have received easily cleanable, charcoal-colored vinyl tile.

Since this unit is entry level, it didn't have much in the way of audiovisual equipment aboard except a 32-inch Vizio LCD above the cockpit. What was sort of a bummer though is the package did not at least include a rudimentary DVD player to go with the flat screen.

When dry camping or staying at a

park with no cable, the lack of a DVD player makes TV watching pretty bleak if you are not near an over-the-air signal the roof antenna can pick up. There was nothing of the sort at a county campground we visited near Point Conception. Be that as it may, we did catch up on a bit of reading while we relaxed at the dinette and on the comfy captain's seats.

The galley has all the elements and appliances necessary for multifaceted cooking and food service, including a three-burner stove, conventional gas oven and 6.3-cubic-foot refrigerator. There's also adequate cupboard and cabinet space available above and below the countertop to store a reasonable amount of groceries and utensils. A handy streetside slideout pantry is between the refrigerator and dinette.

We made good use of the galley's microwave oven during our trip, and meals were taken comfortably at the dinette. The galley doesn't provide much counter space for food prep, but that has to be expected in a coach of this length. What the stovetop or sink couldn't provide in the way of working areas we made up for by using the dinette's handy table surface within easy reach.

Bathroom and bedroom facilities worked out well for the most part, but it was apparent where compromises in space allotments were made in these zones. Taking a shower was one example. With the stall being 29 inches wide and 23 inches deep, bathing for taller, longer-limbed people such as us proved a little cramped. Although there isn't much in the way of room to spread out, there is still plenty of head space.

We spent several comfortable nights on the unit's fairly firm queen bed, which is flanked by two wardrobe closets and a roomy overhead cabinet. The bed afforded the average amount of surface area for a platform of this type, and there was enough aisle space at the foot and either side for easy makeups. The bedroom would definitely benefit from a slideout to add more space, but this would



Exterior storage bays are located on both sides of the coach. There is also a rear pass-through compartment.

also boost cost, which Winnebago aims to minimize in this model.

Ample storage alternatives have been seen to in all areas of the coach. Besides providing adequate space inside in the form of overhead cabinets fore and aft, and other areas mentioned previously, this floorplan also has remarkable exterior cargo holding possibilities.

Several of these bays are evident on both sides of the coach and grant a combined storage capacity of 42 cubic feet. It is also outfitted with a cavernous rear pass-through compartment accessed easily through either a back or curbside door. This space can house any number of bulky items in its 72.4 cubic feet.

By and large, the Vista is endowed with approximately 115 cubic feet of exterior storage area, and an overall realistic cargo carrying capacity of 2,220 pounds. All factors being considered, these figures promise plenty of hauling potential for those who like to take lots of gear when they travel.

At nearly 27 feet in length, the Vista 26HE has sufficient residential space and amenities, plus generous storage capacity, to routinely support everything from short weekend hops to extended get-aways. With excellent fit and finish, strong performance, first-rate maneuverability and a comparatively small footprint, this motorhome warrants serious attention from those looking to break into the Class A market at a realistically affordable price point. ♦



Chuck Campbell served 31 years as a sworn member of a state law enforcement agency before retiring. He is a frequent contributor to *MotorHome* and enjoys traveling in his Class C coach.

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## A QUICK GUIDE TO GENERATOR CARE AND MAINTENANCE

by BILL AND JENN GEHR

# POWER ON DEMAND

**M**uch of the freedom we enjoy by traveling in a motorhome can be attributed to the benefits of self-containment, which is supported in large part by the onboard AC generator. Travel anywhere you wish and with the push of a button, you have full access to myriad options such as heating food in the microwave, making a hot cup of coffee, operating a hair dryer or keeping things cool inside via the use of your air conditioner. Following a few simple steps for proper care and maintenance

will ensure many hours of trouble-free service from the generator.

We've come to expect generator power to be available on demand, not realizing that without following regular maintenance and exercise programs, the generator may not even start. Just like the human body, if we want positive performance results, exercise is important to generator longevity. Generally, motorhome manufacturers recommend operating the generator under load at least once a month.

For exercise, run the generator with

a minimum of 50 percent load capacity. For instance, if you have a 4.0 kW (4,000 watt) generator, your load will need to be approximately 2,000 watts. The use of several appliances and accessories can meet these load requirements: one or two roof air conditioners, one or two electric heater(s) or a combination of an electric heater and an electric water heater. It's OK to run the generator for exercise at loads that vary by 10 percent in either direction.

All generators in motorhomes are equipped with an hour meter. It's pru-



The air filter of the Onan Quiet Diesel, which requires access from underneath the generator, is still easily accessible for servicing.



The air filter of the Onan 4.0 kW Microquiet is accessible by removing a single wing nut and cover.

dent to keep a log that notes the run hours each time you check and/or change the oil level and inspect the air filter. Also include the specific hours when the generator will require service and note any other important service intervals, i.e. repairs. It might surprise you just how quickly 500 hours can accumulate.

Complete an overall visual inspection every eight to 10 run hours. This may include removing a panel to gain visual access. Fuel filters should be changed every 400 to 500 hours, or every one to two years. Valves, in older-style generators requiring such maintenance, need adjustment every 800 hours. Check sliprings and brushes every 500 hours. Check the exhaust system, which includes the brackets and spark arrestor. Not all generators have spark arrestors, but those that do may require annual cleaning.

If you have a diesel generator, the coolant must be drained from the fuel system annually or every 100 hours of run time. The coolant, thermostat and radiator caps need to be replaced every two years on diesel models as well. Again, check the details in the owner's manual for suggested scheduled maintenance in order to stay in compliance of specific requirements.

All models get their fuel from on-board tanks, making it important to check the rubber fuel supply lines once a year for cracks or other types of damage. Fuel leaks can be dangerous and often go undetected, especially if a leak occurs far underneath

the motorhome.

Just like any vehicle, the engine oil, filter and air cleaner must be changed in accordance with the manufacturer's suggested intervals. Consult your generator owner's manual for the specific service details. Most gas and propane generators require oil and air filter changes every 100 to 150 hours, or once a year. Some generators do not have oil filters while others require the use of a proper type of oil filter since it may have a built-in check valve. All generators use standard automotive oil, although most manufacturers recommend synthetic oil. Viscosity and climate temperature requirements may vary from model to model; check the owner's manual for a graph or chart that lists specific parameters and closely follow the recommendations.

Extended storage can create problems with the generator's carburetor because the parts and passages are very small. Varnish is a result of old fuel that can collect in the jets or on the needles and will diminish their function. A few signs that the generator may be experiencing this problem are difficulty in starting, surging and abnormally high or low run speeds. Take into account that varnish can also be cumulative. Fuel stabilizers work wonders in preventing this problem when used properly. If the varnish buildup has already occurred, you will probably need to have the carburetor either rebuilt or replaced. Most motorhomes are designed so that the generator will stop running when the fuel tank



The Onan Marquis Models air filters are easily accessible from behind the main generator cover.

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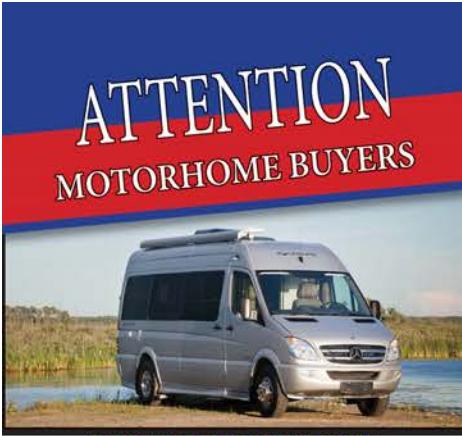
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When the generator cover has been removed, take this opportunity to give an overall visual inspection for any disconnected or loose wires as well as oil or fuel leaks. Gently clean out dirt or cobweb build up as you familiarize yourself with the normal appearance of your generator before there is a problem.



Generac generators are thoughtfully designed for easy of access to all components for visual inspection, including the oil filter, as shown here.



No matter what model generator is in your motorhome, checking the oil level is the single most important maintenance item.

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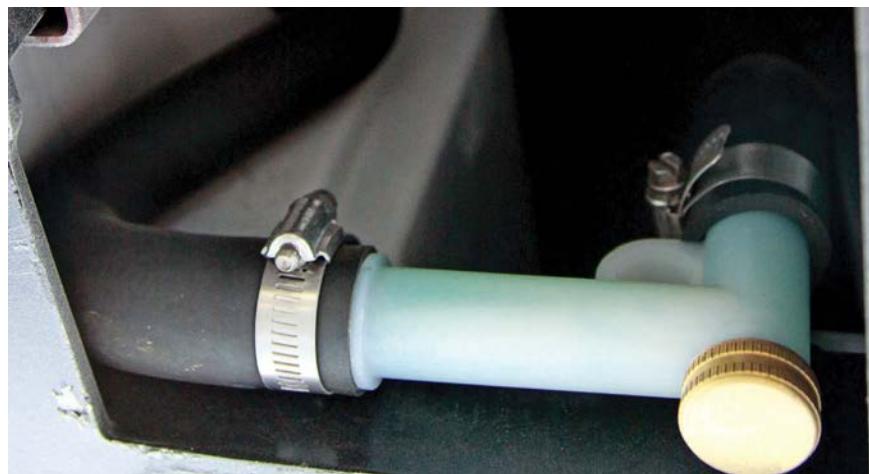
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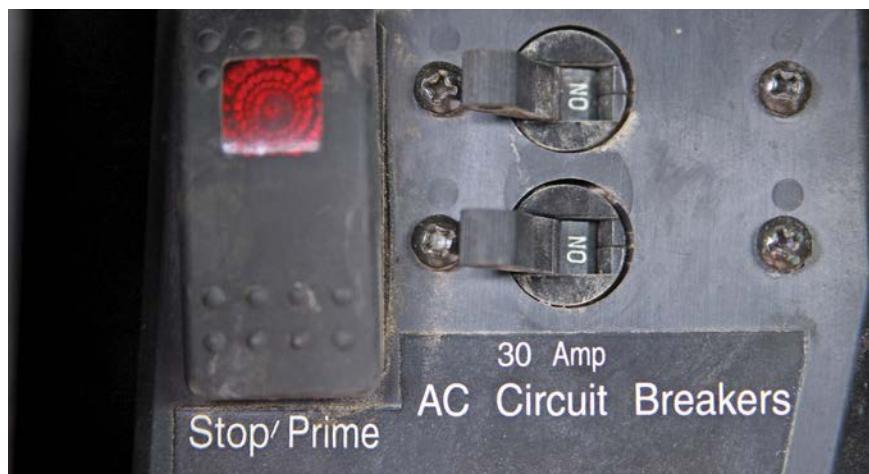
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The Onan Quiet Diesel models provide easy access for checking oil and anti-freeze levels.



Although the fuel filter of the Onan Quiet Diesel Generator is not easily accessible, with a little patience, it can be changed by the owner.



All brands of RV generators have a circuit breaker or two that protects the sensitive electronics contained inside. Tip: If your generator is running and you are still not receiving power inside your coach, check breakers.



The hour meter is very important for monitoring all of your necessary scheduled services.

is around the quarter-full mark. After the fuel treatment (STA-BIL is a good choice) is added, exercise the generator for the recommended time and load; you will then be ready for extended storage.

Voltage and hertz are commonly overlooked maintenance considerations, yet these are critical values for proper and safe operation of 120-volt AC appliances and accessories. When linkage and carburetors begin to wear they collect dirt and dust. As a result, many of the adjustments slowly begin to change. After a few hundred hours or several years of normal use, voltage will also change. Sometimes you can detect these problems as the run speed may become a little faster or slower.

A simple meter such as the Kill A Watt P4400 can measure voltage and hertz at a glance by way of its digital read out. If the readout on the Kill A Watt meter is outside the normal limits of your generator's voltage or hertz, service is in order. You might want to avoid powering sensitive electronic devices until that service is completed.

Whether you're using the generator or shorepower, being continually mindful of necessary voltage parameters is an important part of RVing. In addition, making a plan to properly care for and maintain your generator will ensure years of extended service so that the next time you push the start button, you'll have the power to meet the electrical needs of a motorhome without the convenience of hookups. ♦



Bill and Jenn Gehr, along with their two Boston bulldogs, are full-time RV adventurers who enjoy sharing their technical knowledge with fellow RV enthusiasts wherever they travel.

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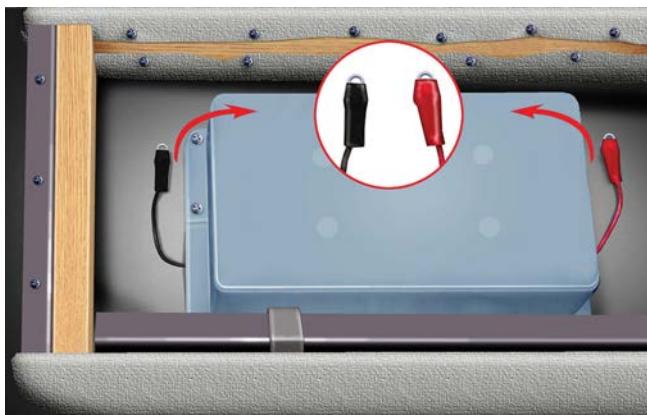
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## BETTER BATTERY ACCESS ▼



Our house battery is in a vented battery box located in a storage area under the couch. Accessing the battery requires removing a dozen screws, some of which are difficult to reach. In order to connect an automatic charger or a digital multimeter directly to the battery terminals, I made jumper wires that extend outside the battery box. The OEM deep-cycle battery was replaced with an AGM maintenance-free type more than four years ago, thus eliminating the need to periodically check water level in the cells. The positive terminal is covered with a length of red vinyl tubing and the negative terminal is covered with black vinyl tubing. The tubing is left in place when the terminals are not in use, then slid back when a charger or multimeter is to be connected.

**MORRIS THUNBERG | BOWMANVILLE, PA.**

## FRESHWATER SUN PROTECTION

We traveled to Texas in August for our shakedown cruise in our new coach. The first thing we found was the freshwater line got extremely warm while attached between the coach and the water supply. We tried to provide shade for it by tucking it under various objects, none of which worked well. While shopping at Walmart, we bought an 11-by-11-by-12-inch soft-sided insulated cooler that was sturdy, had a carrying strap, a zipper and was washable.

We tucked the excess coils of the freshwater line into the case leaving only what was necessary to attach out. It provided sun coverage, thus keeping the amount of sun-heated water to a minimum. While we were in camp, we stored the cooler and hose under the coach, and when it came time to break camp we drained the hose, coupled it together, tucked in our pressure regulator and placed them into the new carrying case. Because we can zip it shut, we don't worry about dirt or other substances getting to the line. Plus, if the hose leaked, the water wouldn't harm other items stored in the same bay.

**LINDA AND LYNN DAY | SEABECK, WASH.**



## SIMPLE SHELF ▲

My coach doesn't have a nightstand on the right-hand side of the bed. I needed something to hold my coffee cup, watch, etc. I made a shelf that fits on the sides of the top drawer. It has grooves on the underside and can be removed or slid back out of the way when not in use.

**PETE WIEJEK | CHEYENNE, WYO.**

## QUICK CLIPS ▼

We usually dry camp, so we bought some battery-operated Coleman string lights. To hang them, we use ID badge clips that we purchased in the stationery section at Walmart. The clips are very inexpensive, and now we can hang our lights just about anywhere.



**TED AND MICHELLE PRETTY | NOVA SCOTIA, CANADA ♦**

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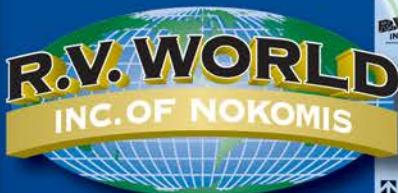
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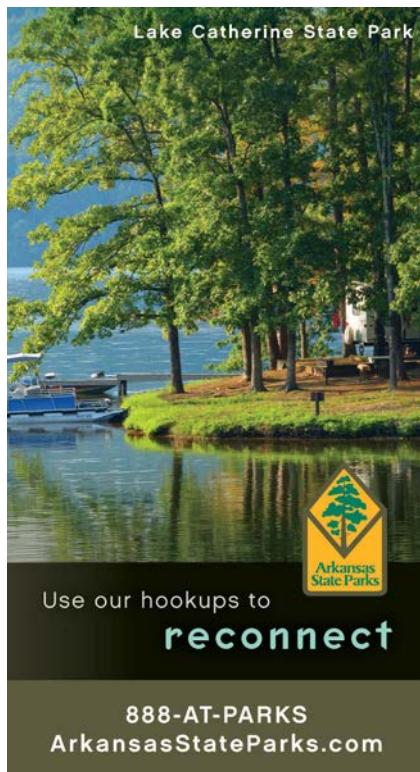
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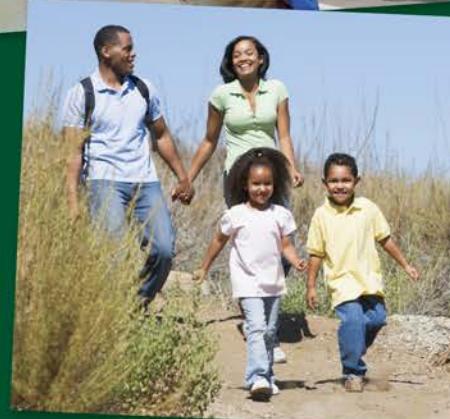
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# techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & POWERTRAIN

HANDS-ON | by BOB LIVINGSTON

## HOME PHONE CONNECT

Device and service from Verizon adds a new wireless dimension to on-the-road communications

**We've come a long way from having to run to a phone booth to make calls.** Almost everyone travels with a cellphone these days, which makes staying in touch on the road simple. In a new slant on cellular technology, the Verizon Home Phone Connect allows travelers to take their home phone with them, and say "goodbye" to a landline altogether.

The device is basically a cellphone that connects to a standard-type cordless handset commonly used as a landline in homes. Setup is plug-and-play using any existing or newly purchased cordless handset. Once the battery is installed, the Home Phone Connect base station is plugged in to 120-volt AC power to fully charge the battery, which could take up to 3.5 hours.

From here the antenna is connected to the device and a handset is placed nearby and plugged in to the unit using a common phone cable, and then plugged in to 120-volt AC power. Before any calls can be made, the device has to be activated by Verizon, using standard wireless protocol most of us are familiar with.

A big selling point is the ability to transfer your home phone number (landline) to the device, but that's not required. Activating a new number can be done quickly; transferring the home phone number to the device can take a minimum of two days, or up to 10 depending on area and service.

In keeping with cellphone activation tradition, the Home Phone Connect is free if a two-year contract is signed; otherwise the device sells for \$129.99, which frees the user from a contract. The monthly service fee is a flat \$19.95 with unlimited local and long distance calling. Voicemail, caller ID, call forwarding and three-way calling are included in the monthly fee, but the system is not compatible with a home security system or other devices typically hooked to a home phone (i.e. fax machine, DVR, medical alert services, etc.). Although it can be used to dial 911 in an emergency, the location will not be identified.

Expect about two hours talk time on a full charge and 36 hours of standby operation, when disconnected from AC power. The battery is really only for backup purposes in the event of



PHOTOS: RICH COX

a power loss and needs to be removed if the system will be unplugged for more than two weeks. Since the base station and cordless handset require continuous 120-volt AC power, a generator or power inverter will be needed when staying in locations without hookups.

To make the system even more convenient, we opted for an additional handset that can be placed in the bedroom. Prices for these cordless phones are pretty inexpensive and most systems allow wireless connection of additional handsets with cradles that hook to 120-volt AC.

Clarity is fairly decent depending on the cell signal. During our evaluation, lights in the base station indicated two bars out of three, which was enough to keep signals from dropping. On the other end, users were able to identify the caller by voice recognition most of the time.

Eliminating the landline and replacing it with a cellphone is becoming trendier every day; using a system that can be connected to standard cordless handsets adds a new dimension to phone service on the road.

**Verizon Wireless, 877-228-5774, [www.vzw.com/homephoneconnect](http://www.vzw.com/homephoneconnect) ♦**

## Blowout Blues

SEEKING COMPENSATION FOR A TIRE BLOWOUT, A READER ASKED FOR HOT LINE'S INTERVENTION. HE WROTE:

I purchased a 2007 Georgie Boy Landau motorhome on May 30, 2007. The coach came with six 245/70R19.5 tires. In Pennsylvania, where I live, motorhomes have to undergo an annual inspection. During the 2011 inspection, which was conducted by Johnson Tire Service of Clarendon, Pa. (a Goodyear dealer), the air pressure was checked and the tires were rotated.

In July 2012, while I was heading home from Canada, an inside dual tire blew out. I had the tire replaced and continued my trip home. Then I took the blown tire back to Johnson Tire Service to see about an adjustment. I was told, "The new tire coverage of this warranty ends when the tread wear indicators become visible or five years from the date of purchase, whichever occurs first."

Johnson Tire Service told me to call Goodyear since it was only 48 days past the five-year date of purchase. I called Goodyear and was told to go back to the dealer for an adjustment. Johnson Tire Service then told me that Goodyear will not give an adjustment on the tire because it was beyond the five-year period. That means I will have to pay \$529 per new tire. I am asking Hot Line's help to get me an adjustment on the failed tire.

**JOHN LYON | RUSSELL, PA.**

*Lyon's plea was forwarded to The Goodyear Tire & Rubber Co. with our request for further consideration of his problem. A company representative responded as follows:*

I contacted John Lyon and offered to refund him 50 percent (\$264.50) of the \$529 he paid for the new tire. He has accepted. I reviewed with Lyon that the Goodyear Manufacturer warranty is covered up to five years from date of the vehicle purchase, which he was a couple of months outside of going by his motorhome purchase date of May 2007.

**KIM ROY, CONSUMER RELATIONS  
THE GOODYEAR TIRE & RUBBER CO.  
AKRON, OHIO**



### TURBO TROUBLE

*Seeking compensation for repairs that he believed should have been covered under his extended warranty, a reader asked Hot Line to get involved. He wrote:*

When I started RVing, about 10 years ago, I joined the Good Sam Club. I purchased my current coach in 2006 (a 2003 Winnebago Journey with a Cummins diesel engine). At that time, I was offered a Good Sam Extended Service Plan (ESP) through Affinity Brokerage Inc. I reviewed the plan, including the fine print, which said it would cover all (reasonable) breakdowns (excluding wear parts, belts and hoses), less a \$250 deductible. I enrolled in ESP to gain peace of mind. All went well during the first five years with the plan.

To abide by the plan, I keep careful records of all scheduled service and repairs. The log entries are in ink, and the log is a bound volume. Details of each oil change such as date, mileage, brand of oil, quantity and comments (the drain, plug size, etc.) are recorded. I felt confident this would be adequate evidence that the oil changes were performed well within the manufacturer's required oil change schedules.

During a trip in May 2012, the coach experienced a loss of power. I located Southwest Diesel Service Inc. (an authorized Cummins dealer) in St. George, Utah, and pulled into the facility. They performed a diagnostic test and concluded the turbo was not putting out adequate boost, which would result in significant loss of power. The problem was with the electro/servo mechanism (a sealed unit) that controls the amount of boost to the engine. Since Cummins doesn't sell these components separately, the entire turbo unit (turbo, plus electro/servo unit) needed to be replaced.

When Doug, the shop manager, contacted ESP he was asked for copies of my service records. I submitted my receipts and my coach's service log. ESP then requested copies of all cash receipts for the oil I had purchased since 2006. I told Doug that I do my own oil

changes and I buy the oil when it's on sale and keep it in stock until I need it. I didn't have any cash receipts specifically with the quantities and dates that would match the motorhome oil changes.

Even though the turbo assembly failure was not related to oil changes or engine lubrication, the absence of cash receipts for oil was the reason (in my understanding) why ESP denied my claim for assistance for the cost of repairs. In addition to the repair costs of \$5,188.52, I incurred additional expenses such as accommodations for four nights in an RV park (\$168.39) and two nights in a hotel (\$115.41).

**JAMES BINGMAN  
BREMERTON, WASH.**

*Hot Line asked QBE Insurance Limited (the policy's Underwriter) to review Bingman's circumstances. Soon after, we received a phone call and the following email from a QBE North America representative. It read:*

Per our phone conversation addressing Jim Bingman's claim on his turbocharger, the issue that brought Bingman to Hot Line's attention was that the failed part was considered an internally lubricated part of the turbocharger, which the policy terms and conditions require the adjuster to verify service records showing the unit has been maintained per the manufacturer's service intervals. The service records submitted were not complete and therefore unacceptable.

However, after further review of the failed part, the claim office was able to determine that the part in question experienced a mechanical failure that was not due to a lack of proper service and we were able to proceed with the claim.

Since during the investigation Bingman had paid Southwest Diesel Service for the repair, the claim office reimbursed Bingman \$3,469.63 for the covered portion of the repair cost plus trip interruption benefits as outlined in the policy.

**JACK CURRIER, APPRAISER  
GOOD SAM ESP  
QBE NORTH AMERICA ♦**

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 8.

## Hello, Dolly

We purchased a used Monaco 40-foot Class A motorhome with a 400-HP diesel engine. The car we want to tow is a 4,300-pound automatic front-wheel-drive automobile, so we will need a tow dolly. The tow dolly I am looking at has hydraulic disc brakes. Do I need to purchase an in-car electric brake system?

**STEVE DRISCOLL**  
KANSAS CITY, KAN.

*Some front-wheel-drive cars with automatic transmissions are flat towable, Steve. Did you look it up in MotorHome's annual Guide to Dinghy Towing? I believe the dolly brakes meet legal requirements for towed-vehicle braking in all states, and should be sufficient for flatland towing. However, please review the laws of the states you intend to travel in; here's a URL of one guide: [www.trailerlifedirectory.com/plan/sizelimits.aspx](http://www.trailerlifedirectory.com/plan/sizelimits.aspx). If there was concern about having maximum possible stopping power, such as in the mountains, an in-car system would provide additional braking for the car's rear axle.*

### TOWING A SMART CAR

Four years ago we purchased a used 2001 Coachmen Mirada. While searching for a dinghy, we came across an article on Smart cars. We liked that these can be towed four wheels down, and we liked the idea of these vehicles. These Smart cars were so new to the United States at that time that we had to wait for Blue Ox to come out with a hitch that would work for the Smart car. Our local RV dealership installed the hitch but we didn't have much success towing the Smart. Sometimes (usually when turning corners) its front

wheels would begin slamming right then left, back and forth. We didn't go far from home to camp so usually my husband drove the motorhome and I drove the car, which sort of defeated the purpose of having a Class A coach.

We recently upgraded to a 2003 Pace Arrow and, now that we're retired, plan to go farther from home. As we started to install the old hitch onto the new motorhome, we saw a notice that said the height of the hitch and connection area on the dinghy need to be within 4 inches of each other. Maybe that explains why the Smart car didn't tow well behind the Mirada. We ordered a hitch adapter that put the hitch and the Smart car within the 4-inch limit.

We thought we had covered all the bases and were ready to go without

any more issues, but when we hooked everything up, the Smart car's front wheels still slammed back and forth.

We contacted Blue Ox, and a company representative told us that the problem is caused by the Smart car's "narrow wheel frame and caster of the wheels." The representative suggested that we crisscross two bungee cords from opposite sides of the steering wheel to under the driver's seat. That seems like a strange solution to a fairly serious issue. And there was no mention of how long the bungee cords should be or how tight. We noticed the Smart car is no longer listed in *MotorHome's* 2012 dinghy guide. Perhaps it has been determined that flat towing Smart cars is not advisable?

Can you help us determine what we need to do so that we can tow this cute little car behind our motorhome? We are so excited about traveling around the country, but we need a solution before we can head out.

**VICKIE AND BOB CARLTON**  
MONTICELLO, ILL.

*You may have noticed the car is "darty" on the highway at speed. Normally, a driver's hands would damp this action right away, preventing it from getting worse. But with no hands on the wheel, it can develop into a real shimmy at a harmonic frequency that builds upon itself. This has happened to some other brands and models of cars over the years that were dinghy towed.*

*The recommended solution for the Smarts and other models has been to attach a pair of regular bungees. These are fastened to the seat frame and crossed diagonally and attached to the steering wheel at the 9- and 3-o'clock positions. They need to be long enough to allow the wheel to turn in normal corners (when towing the steering wheel doesn't normally go all the way around). You can ride in the car while it's being towed in a large parking lot to verify that your setup works. It may not be a very elegant solution, but it seems to work for many people, and it's simple and inexpensive.*

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*As for the tow bar, yes, it should be as close to horizontal as possible.*

*We should note that our 2012 Guide to Dinghy Towing did not include the Smart car because the manufacturer does not approve flat towing of the vehicle. According to a representative from Smart, "We never approve flat towing on any of our cars. But, if you have to or need to, you must follow the specific instructions of the owners manual. It is very critical to avoid damage to the engine or transmission." The Smart car is also not included in our 2013 Guide to Dinghy Towing.*

**TREE SAP OR PITCH REMOVAL**

I don't know if you can help me, but I parked my Coach House motorhome on the Oregon coast for more than a month under some fir trees, and now I have a fiberglass roof that's covered in tree sap/pitch. I have tried dish soap, Simple Green and other cleaners to remove it, but it will not all come off. There are black spots and streaks on the fiberglass and I am afraid of damaging this roof if I continue to use these products. What, if anything, can you recommend? I live in a small town and do not have access to large retail stores and my closest Camping World is about 40 miles away.

**K. E. PETERSON  
CROWLEY, TEXAS**

*Try a rag soaked in turpentine. You should be able to obtain turpentine at hardware and paint stores. Follow with a cleanup using Simple Green and clean water.*

**ELECTRICAL PROBLEMS SOLVED**

I own a 1999 Fleetwood Bounder on a Ford chassis. For years I have experienced several problems. The chassis battery loses charge even when plugged in to shorepower. On several occasions, when the ignition switch was on, there would be no electrical power to the dash or any of the systems powered from the coach distribution panel. This panel is located on the left, behind the grille. The battery disconnect relays are in this panel in back of the printed circuit board/fuses. Power to the dash, steps and levelers is supplied through this circuit board.

My problems were caused by the internal failure of the chassis battery dis-

connect relay. Installing a jumper wire around this relay solved several problems.

**RON DALBY | CROWLEY, TEXAS**

*Your experiences may help others with similar problems. Thanks for writing, Ron.*

**TIRE LIFE?**

My question pertains to motorhome tires I just purchased. These are 245/70R19.5 Goodyear tires. Motorhome tires are normally replaced before their treads are gone. What is a general rule for the life expectancy of motorhome tires? Should I wait until a certain mileage, or how old should the tires be before I start replacing them? Also, what do you recommend on helping to preserve their life span?

**WILL HUSSEY | JACKSONVILLE, FLA.**

*Most tire manufacturers recommend replacement every seven years or sooner. I rarely hear of tire failures due to age before five years, and I think a lot of owners who are reporting earlier failures may not be aware that their tires were manufactured long before they were purchased. Most motorhomes don't wear out the tires before that age, and you should replace them when tread is at the minimum legal depth if you drive a lot, or by age as recommended by the manufacturer, whichever occurs first.*

*To preserve them, ensure they are always properly inflated according to the manufacturer's load-inflation table and keep them covered to block the sun when parked.*

**AGM BATTERIES**

There are two 6-volt flooded cell Trojan batteries in our coach; they are seven years old and still functioning well. There is nothing wrong with the batteries except they are getting old. I want to replace them with AGM batteries. Are there 6-volt AGM batteries on the market? I want to use two of them in series. I use solar panels with a controller and check the batteries monthly for water. They maintain about a 12.6-volt reading. Can I use solar panels on AGM batteries? If so, how do I maintain them if they do not require water? What safeguards are needed to ensure they are not being overcharged, either by the solar panels or the generator (operating a

battery charger) when we use it?  
**JASON ALBRECHT | AUSTIN, TEXAS**

*Yes, there are AGM 6-volt deep cycle batteries. Here is one source: Power Stride ([www.powerstridebattery.com/lifeline-agm-batteries](http://www.powerstridebattery.com/lifeline-agm-batteries)). An Internet search for "AGM 6V deep cycle batteries" will yield more sources. A good controller for solar panels will maintain voltage properly. If you use a battery charger, use one that's "automatic" and has an AGM setting so it controls the charging cutoff point.*

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InfiniStar DRTM has up to two hours run time. The flashlight is 9 inches long and weighs only 1 pound. It has a modular design that allows an upgrade for the LED light module and battery technologies as they become available in the future. The flashlight comes complete with a wall charger and an available DC car charger can be purchased separately.

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**GENSET GRIEF**

My 2000 motorhome has an Onan generator model 5BGEFA 26100P that I just had serviced at an Onan repair shop. This unit has been trouble since 2009 and at that time the genset was removed from the coach and decarbonized at an Onan shop in Connecticut. It ran for about two days on the way back south.

In 2010, a new fuel pump and new carburetor were installed. It ran OK until I was on a trip north last summer. When I got home, I took it to an Onan repair shop; again a new carburetor. I was told I needed to run this unit two hours twice per month under load and that I also needed to use fuel stabilizer, this to be added each time the unit is not on the road getting gasoline each day. I was also told the new carburetor is the same one Onan has been using since my unit has been built. No change for the 10 percent ethanol gas we now get.

I have not made any contact with Onan on this at this time. I would like to know if other people have this problem, and if running the unit two hours twice per month and using the stabilizer will give me a unit I can count on.

**ED GRAVELINE  
DOWLING PARK, FLA.**

*The new gas with 10 percent ethanol has been causing a lot of problems with small engines. The tiny jets gum up readily when this fuel sits in the carburetors too long. Keep in mind that even though you are using gasoline and putting fresh gas in the main tank when you are traveling, if you are not using the generator, the old gas sits in the genset's pump, carburetor, filter and fuel lines going to the tank and deteriorates until the jets and passages are clogged.*

*Some shops, as a matter of policy or expediency (and high labor rates), replace gummed-up carburetors rather than attempt to clean them. There is a new product from Gold Eagle, the makers of STA-BIL fuel stabilizer, called Start Your Engines! that is designed to help clear gum from carburetors if the generator will run at all. You might want to try this before paying for repairs.*

*All manufacturers require that the generator is exercised (run under load)*

*every month, even if you don't need the electricity. Although it is more work, you can run it long enough to get the old gas out of the filter and fuel lines.*

*Try shutting off the fuel to it and running it dry until it stalls when you're done with it until it is time to exercise it again. Adding fuel stabilizer in the main gas tank is not necessary if you are using the generator regularly.*

**STICKY STEPS**

I purchased a new 2000 Itasca Suncruiser 35U and have never been more pleased. I have kept the unit in exceptional shape and everything still operates as new, except the retracting step. No matter how much WD-40 I use, it still stops retracting. Is there a better lubricant, or should I bite the bullet and replace the step entirely? It goes out and back about half way.

**WAYNE FLETCHER | VIA EMAIL**

*WD-40 has its uses, but it is not a very good lubricant, as the oil in it is diluted. The step may be slightly bent, or a pivot is corroded. Most electric-step manufacturers recommend not using WD-40 or a silicone-based lube. A quality moisture and heat-resistant penetrating grease should be used every 30 days after a through cleaning. Step manufacturer Kwikkee sells KwikLube, which is designed for steps.*

*Spray the moving parts with fresh water, remove salt, mud and grime from all moving parts and let them dry. Lubricate the shaft bearings, bushings and any bearings. Electrical connections should be protected with a dab of dielectric grease. Cam stops may need adjusting if your steps feel loose. See the owner's manual for the proper adjustment.*

*If they still stick I suggest you disconnect the power drive and work it by hand to see exactly why it's binding. It would also help to check the voltage being supplied to the step's motor. If the wiring connections are loose or corroded, the motor may not have enough power to move past an otherwise harmless bind in the system. ♦*

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & POWERTRAIN, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 8.

# Stuck on a project?

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**While motorhomes are reasonably well equipped for dry camping** — boondocking, as it's often called — many come up short of 12-volt DC reserve power except in limited use. The result may be extended use of an AC generator for battery recharging, which can be annoying.

A popular remedy comes from the sun in the form of solar panels. No noise, no fuel consumption and the sun's rays

get you through the dark hours.

A solar system consists of two or more panels, a charge controller, a monitor panel and associated wiring. The need for 12-volt DC power can vary widely depending on size of the coach, the time of year and on personal choices, such as how much time is spent in front of a TV during dark hours.

The panels, consisting of photovoltaic cells in a rigid frame, are available in various physical sizes and output ratings, the most popular being those ranging from 50 to 150 watts. The wattage numbers don't take panel efficiency into account, and the realistic output rates vary from one panel to another, necessitating comparison when shopping.

temperature into account.

Size (and cost) of the system must be determined by individual needs, which can be based on actual use or by calculation using a vendor website as a guide. An actual use situation involving two minimum-size Group 24 batteries (85 amp hours each) could consist of dry camping for two days. Batteries should not be depleted beyond 80 percent of their rated capacity, so the available amp-hour total is 136 (85 x 2 = 170 x .8 = 136).

The motorhome owner would record how long it takes to draw the batteries down approximately 80 percent (11.8 volts, measuring with no load on the batteries). If it takes two days, your usage is about 68 amp hours per day — maxed out in two days, or less. Limiting depletion to 50 percent (12.1 volts, no load) extends battery life.



**This monitor from Blue Sky displays battery voltage, output current and charge control system status.**



**The Solar Boost 2512iX charge controller can increase charge current up to 30 percent or more.**

**Solar panels, consisting of photovoltaic cells in a rigid frame, are a popular option for providing 12-volt DC power.**

keep battery banks charged to provide all or part of our daily 12-volt DC power needs. Arrays of silicon cells in each panel convert sunlight into electrical power, the amount of which is limited only by the number of panels and the efficiency of associated hardware.

Of course, there is a catch: Solar panels and hardware are relatively expensive, although the prices have come down in recent years. Also, your battery bank must be large enough to store enough power to

One high-efficiency example, the GS100 panel offered by AM Solar ([www.amsolar.com](http://www.amsolar.com)), is listed at 100 watts and 5.8 amps maximum output (full sun) at 17.7 volts. The actual battery charge voltage is regulated downward to levels varying from 13.2 to 14.8 depending on battery type and charging conditions.

Sophisticated controllers are designed not only to create multistage charging — bulk (fastest rate), acceptance (reaching full charge) and float (DC voltage is reduced after batteries are fully charged) — but are capable of boosting the charge rate by operating the solar panels at their optimum voltage output. They also take battery

Assuming that each 100-watt panel will deliver about 30 amp hours per day, three panels would be required to provide all the power (except on cloudy days) needed in this example. Larger battery banks may range upward to 1,000 amp hours, calling for quite an array of solar panels.

For motorhomers who have limited funds and/or roof space, fewer solar panels can be used, providing only part of the power for battery charging, while an efficient multistage converter powered by an AC generator provides the remainder.

Check specs to make sure your converter truly is multistage, rated for at least 45 amps output, or extended generator running time will be needed. ♦

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