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MOTORHOME

AUGUST 2014

2014 RV
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AWARDS!**
And the Biggest
Blunder is ...
Pg. 67



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On The Cover: Newmar's Canyon Star has a garage that's nearly 8 by 10 feet with a pair of bunk beds that raise and lower using an electric lift (see page 52). Inset photo by Shawn Spence Photography.

RUSH OF PLEASURE

The other day my wife, Lynne, and I were at a party and were asked, "What's the most exciting motorhome trip you've been on?" My immediate response to that question was, "It depends on how you define 'exciting.'"

Obviously, getting into a jam because of poor judgment or from a simple mistake can be exciting. Our annual RV Oops Awards on page 67 can attest to that. This year's crop of dubious champions may not have thought their blunders were funny at the time, but come on, we all need to laugh at each other as long as no one was hurt. Trust me; I have plenty of stories to tell.

OK, just one. Pismo Beach, California, is one of our favorite stomping grounds and we've visited this central coast playground frequently since 1969. For many years we camped right on the beach; Pismo is one of only a handful of beaches where it's legal to drive on the sand. As RVs got bigger, and we got less gutsy, we transitioned to Pismo Coast Village, an RV resort on our top 10 list. Before we retired from sand camping, we ventured on the beach with a 38-foot gasser with a tag axle.

Minutes from descending the ramp, we were stuck — actually buried in the sand. In my infinite wisdom, I drove the motorhome too far from the hard-packed sand. Now, a stuck motorhome is a beautiful sight to tow truck drivers who patrol the beach. Don't get me wrong; these guys provide a valuable service to, shall we say, "less than careful drivers."

As expected, the tow truck arrived quickly and the verbal exchange went something like, "One hundred dollars to push or \$200 to pull." I quipped back, "No thanks, I'll dig it out myself." A less than wise decision, but one driven by years of off-roading in a Jeep.

After hours of strenuous digging and creative use of the leveling jacks and boards, the motorhome was free again. It was certainly a spectacle!

But "exciting" doesn't have to be a hair-raising adventure or the result of



stupid mistakes. For me, there's excitement in every motorhome trip. Professor G. Clotaire Rapaille, a French-born psychologist and marketing expert, described the euphoria of motorhome travel best when he suggested that the moment one enters the on-ramp, a rush of pleasure is experienced. The pre-trip work is done and what's up ahead fulfills the gratification of motorhome ownership.

For some people, a motorhome is the vehicle that provides a foundation to pursue other adventurous hobbies. The popularity of RVs with garages to haul "toys" has spilled over to the motorhome fraternity and a number of manufacturers are offering coaches that can transport motorcycles and ATVs in style. These specialized coaches are presented in the article that starts on page 52. As you can see, some of these coaches are quite high-end, leaving nothing to chance when it comes to comfort after a hard day on the trail.

I really haven't answered the question yet, because I don't think I can. I learned long ago (especially after fuel prices spiked) that an exciting trip doesn't have to be one that's far from home. Once you clear your mind, location is secondary; the love of being in a motorhome is primary.

To us, the social aspect is a key element for great trips. We often travel with other owners and can honestly say that we've had as much fun celebrating a special event as we've had touring a beautiful national park.

Maybe one day we'll be able to pinpoint our most exciting trip, but for now, we'll add new places to our list, continue to visit favorite haunts and share a few laughs when "oops" enter the picture. ♦

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HAVE YOU CROSSED THE BORDER IN YOUR MOTORHOME, AND, IF SO, DO YOU HAVE ANY TIPS FOR OTHER RVERS?

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

CROSSING INTO CANADA

In reference to Douglas Flannery's request in the May issue for border crossing information, here are a few insights.

Upon approaching the customs office, stop at the stop sign, and proceed when commanded. It is not a tollbooth; you are being photographed. When asked where you are coming from do not answer, "The U.S." They want your hometown and city. Specify the farthest place you intend to visit when asked where you are going, and have some sense of the length of time you expect to be in Canada. Know your legal U.S. status, especially when returning.

If you do not have a license plate on the front of your rig, know the number, as they will ask for it.

Agents are trained to be intimidating, asking carefully chosen questions that engage conversation. Let them. The driver should be the spokesperson, without coaching from others. Remove sunglasses; they want to see your eyes as they converse. Keep animals restrained and out of the conversation with the agent.

Be sure your passport is signed. Re-entering the U.S. can be more demanding. Being a U.S. citizen does not exempt you from interrogation.

Do not transport firewood of any kind, and be willing to surrender foodstuffs and alcohol. Be prepared to be fully searched in person and in the entire rig, so hide nothing!

Notify your bank debit card and any credit cards you carry, that you will be out of the country and give dates. They track your cards and may refuse your use until you prove you are traveling. Cards work best as they automatically compute any differences in currency. Get Canadian dollars at a bank, not on the street corner! Tipping in either currency is appreciated. Carry a limited amount of cash.

Be aware that your cellphone provider will add steep use fees and probably not easily forgive large charges "because you did not know they charge a lot more." Ask your provider and possibly prepay. Cellphones work in some places. Wi-Fi is available but not dependable and may not be secure. Satellite phones work the best.

GPS is helpful, but carry good maps as well. People

will gladly assist you, and most speak English. Be gracious.

Fuel is plentiful. Try to purchase it in busy stations where the fuel is fresh. Use credit cards.

Do not speed, be careful in construction zones and give large trucks plenty of space. If you are holding up more than a few vehicles, pull over.

In the Yukon, be ready for frost heaves that can be destructive at any speed. They are marked with little orange flags at the roadside. Road construction is prevalent with many roads very dusty. Tape your windows shut and keep a good distance behind other vehicles. Prior to traveling in the Ice Fields, check to see that they are safe for a motorhome.

Most importantly, be aware that you are a guest in Canada, so keep your opinions to yourself and enjoy a wonderful country and gorgeous scenery — but be willing and able to pay for it.

JIM EDDS | MIDDLEBURY, INDIANA

RE-ENTERING THE STATES

Last July, my wife, our two daughters and our dog, Scout, traveled to Canada. We learned some very interesting things, especially upon our return to the U.S.

Customs agents will confiscate fresh fruit and vegetables, and possibly meat products. We keep our dog food in a sealed plastic container; they took it because it wasn't in the original package. Scout enjoyed a spaghetti dinner that night since his food was left at the border. The agriculture inspector who took our food was quite serious and made a point that he could fine us for not going by the rules. We now know to learn the latest prior to embarking on a trip to Canada.

We had a great trip with our teenagers; the best part was I didn't pay for them to have cell service in Canada so they weren't preoccupied with technology the whole time.

RICK CHAMBERS | MINDEN, NEVADA

NO HITCHES ALONG THE WAY

In response to Douglas Flannery's letter, my wife and I traveled from Indiana to Fairbanks, Alaska, in our 24-foot Four Winds Majestic motorhome with virtually no hitches along

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the way. We crossed five Canadian provinces and drove more than 1,500 miles in Alaska, and we loved it.

We found the roads to be quite good (except for limited parts of the Alcan Highway), and fuel was readily available with some minor distance planning required in the Yukon. We paid as high as \$5.50 a gallon in Canada and close to \$5 in parts of Alaska. We drove 10,270 miles, with a total fuel bill of \$4,700.

Seat belts must be fastened and some provinces require drivers to keep their headlights on during the day.

There are campgrounds galore; our Good Sam Campground guide was very helpful in planning stops.

Get a preloaded debit card that is not tied to your bank account. We used this card exclusively. If you lose the card, you only lose what's on it, with no name or ties to your home account.

Cellphone service and 3/4G wireless reception was very sketchy in parts of British Columbia and much of the Yukon, so be prepared to be cut off occasionally.

All in all, the Canadians were very friendly and helpful. I highly recommend making the trip.

DON BENNETT | SHELBYVILLE, INDIANA

MILLARD SAYS RELAX

We have crossed into Canada in a motorhome often, as my wife is from Nova Scotia. Mostly they ask you about the purpose of your trip, how long you will be in country, what you have that will remain in the country ... stuff like that. Answer questions directly and concisely without elaboration. There is not much difference in travel in Canada than in the U.S. except the money looks different. Relax, Doug, and enjoy the trip.

MILLARD ADAMS | PACE, FLORIDA

DON'T LEAVE THE MOTORHOME WITHOUT A PASSPORT

Having been to Alaska previously, we knew how busy Skagway can be when there are cruise ships in port. Therefore, we decided to leave our rig in Carcross, Yukon Territory, and drive our dinghy to Skagway when we made our second trip to Alaska. After spending a wonderful day, we returned to the border crossing where a pleasant young man asked for our pass-

ports. Duh! They were in the motorhome in Carcross. How about birth certificates to go with your driver's license? In Carcross! The dog's papers? In Carcross! He did eventually let us cross after we showed him our driver's license and Costco card, which had a picture, and I gave him the dog's collar with rabies tag and license.

Others may not be so lucky, so make sure you have your passports and papers.

**SYLVIA BURNS
MORRO BAY, CALIFORNIA**

AN EASY TRIP, EVEN FOR NEWBIES

I am responding to Douglas Flannery's letter. We basically did the exact trip in reverse. We went to Canada from Idaho and came back into the U.S. via Montana.

What to expect when going into Canada? You pull up in the RV lane. They take your passports, you park your rig and go inside. They obviously run your passports through their security measures. This process took about 20 minutes for us. They never looked inside of our rig. They did ask about alcohol, and fruits and veggies.

We notified our car insurance company and got waivers for the six weeks we were in Canada. We also notified our RV insurance carrier. No supplemental insurance was needed.

I recommend not doing the Washington border crossing. But both Idaho and Montana were a breeze. We spent the first night at the Fairmont RV resort in British Columbia, which has great hot springs!

Please tell Doug we just bought our rig last year. We had never owned a motorhome or even a tent prior to this. Our trip was not daunting at all. If we can do it, he certainly can. Canadians are very nice about RV drivers.

MELODY PFINGSTEN | VIA EMAIL

FROM A CANADIAN POINT OF VIEW

Crossing the border is not as intimidating as you may think.

Alcohol is limited to 1 liter per person, but many times they will allow more.

Don't try to fool or lie to the border guard/customs officers; they have tremendous power and know all the tricks. If you get caught, it will stay with you for a very long time.

Your bank may supply you with a Canadian-dollar Visa or MasterCard to avoid

exchange charges. Large cash bills, \$100 or \$50, sometimes are not accepted.

Diesel in Alberta is about \$4.50 U.S. per U.S. gallon (\$1.30 per liter in Canada), but more in British Columbia, so fill up before you enter.

You have many more roadside rest areas than here in Canada and RV parks are available, but not as plentiful.

Propane supplies are same as yours and about the same price.

Hope you enjoy Canada as much as we do the United States. Happy trails.

RENE N.J. BLEI
COCHRANE, ALBERTA, CANADA

TIPS ON BORDER CROSSING

This is in response to Douglas Flannery's letter about crossing the border into Canada. First, do not bring any firearms into Canada; if found on your person or your motorhome, your well-planned vacation could become a nightmare. Generally the driving laws are the same, but the speed limits are posted in kilometers, so 100 kph is approximately 62 mph. If towing a vehicle behind your motorhome, most, if not all, of the provinces require that a supplemental braking system be used. There are plenty of fuel stations and service centers that will accommodate both motorhome and toad. Any GPS unit you have now will have a fairly detailed map of any place in Canada; be sure to update the maps just in case. Traveling through the fabulous rocky mountains of Alberta and British Columbia you will encounter some steep grades. My recommendation is to set up a home base in West Glacier (KOA) so you can explore Glacier National Park, and once you arrive in Banff, stay at Tunnel Mountain and then take day trips to Lake Louise.

VICTOR KLIMAVICIUS | VIA EMAIL

MULTIPLE BORDER CROSSINGS

My wife and I live in Alaska and in 2010 drove our 30-foot Winnebago from Anchorage to the Lower 48 through Canada. It was a wonderful trip. We felt welcome and were treated well everywhere we went.

When we crossed the border, we were asked if we had enough funds to make it all the way through Canada. The big surprise was, "Are you transporting any wood?" They did not want us to bring fire-

wood into the country.

The road from the Alaska border to Dawson Creek, the Alcan, is a decent road all the way; a bit rough in spots but mostly paved or sealed in some way. Frost heaves are bad in areas so caution is always best. We had no problems whatsoever and were able to travel at the posted speed almost always. They drive on the same side of the road as the rest of North America and follow the same basic rules.

Once we got to Dawson Creek and farther, we found the roads to be very similar to Lower 48 roads. As for steep grades, there are some on the Alcan but we did not encounter anything worse than, say, heading west out of Denver through the Rockies.

The provinces we drove through had very nice provincial campgrounds; most supplied free wood for fires. They were not paved, landscaped RV parks but very beautiful, well-maintained and inexpensive.

The one vital tool if planning a trip, on the Alcan at least, is *The Milepost*. It is published annually and has grown to a rather large book. It provides information on an almost mile-per-mile basis.

Our original plan was to drive our RV to the Lower 48 and find storage, returning once or twice a year, to move around the states until we covered it all. Having elderly family still here in Alaska, we do not want to squander the remaining years with them by leaving for extended periods, so we are not ready to go full-time.

So far, we have been back to the RV 13 times. Our longest trip was two months and our shortest two weeks. We have been to all but four states and have had adventure on top of adventure. We plan our trips to start and finish in places Alaska Airlines flies to. We find storage facilities at our terminus and go back home for a while. We build in a few days at the beginning and end of each trip to prepare the RV. This method has been great for us. We never get tired of the road. We have seen wonderful places and met a wide variety of people.

BRUCE AND FRANNY MAIN
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

TRAVELING THE MARITIME PROVINCES

While we have only traveled to the Maritime Provinces, here are some answers about motoring into Canada.

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PO. BOX

Crossing the border requires declaration of any duty-free items, or other goods that may be taxed on their value. Any previous felony on your record will prohibit you from entering Canada (e.g., a DUI) so make sure you know what your record reveals. Canada is exceedingly strict with regard to DUI violations throughout Canada.

We always have our insurance company print out proof-of-insurance cards for use in Canada.

All of your U.S. liability insurance coverage will follow you in Canada; your health insurance will not, so travel insurance is advised for that, if necessary.

U.S. credit/debit cards can be used, but there is a surcharge for each transaction. Some card companies have special editions designed for use in other countries without requiring a surcharge. U.S. dollars are easily exchanged at most stores throughout Canada. There is also a high surcharge for cellphone usage, especially data retrieval, so make sure you have Wi-Fi access for Internet, or a plan that will accommodate Canadian phone charges.

RV parks are available, and there are numerous provincial as well as national parks that are accommodating. Most provincial parks offer water and sewer but not electric hookups.

We had use of CAA, which is the Canadian affiliate of AAA, without problem. Make sure your AAA card is RV-specific. Just let them know you are AAA before having them create the bill of service.

NAPA stores and the like are located throughout the provinces, so service and parts are available. There are not as many larger RV Class A repair facilities as you would find in the States, however.

**RICHARD PIERPONT
JACKSONVILLE, FLORIDA**

BORDER CROSSING IS NO BIG DEAL

Last fall, we went through New Brunswick to Prince Edward Island for a week. We had a great trip. To many of us living in Maine, a trip into Canada is no big deal. Things are not all that much different there. I think you are supposed to use running lights during the day. If you don't have daytime running lights, I think headlights or fog lights will do.

In the places we were in, RV parks were plentiful and available. On the east

coast of PEI, we stayed a night at Red Point Provincial Park. It was very nice and we got a beautiful full-hookup site for \$33. We stayed several days at Twin Shores, a private campground in Darnley. It was huge and had lots of amenities.

With our cellphone provider (U.S. Cellular), it was going to be expensive to add Canadian service. Instead, we bought the equivalent of a TracPhone at a Walmart in Fredericton, New Brunswick. We used the phone only a few times, but it gave us peace of mind, in case we had trouble on the road.

DENNIS FOLSOM | VIA EMAIL

THOUGHTS FROM AN EXPAT

As a Canadian who lives in the U.S., but travels to Canada in our Class A 36-foot motorhome, I have a couple of thoughts.

U.S. currency is widely accepted in Canada and most make an effort to exchange fairly. Your best bet is at any bank that will exchange U.S. currency right at the teller. Canadian banks are very user friendly. But on the way home, if you have Canadian currency, exchange it back to U.S. before leaving Canada as it can be difficult and time-consuming in the U.S.

I recommend a credit card with a chip. Canada, as in Europe, is a few years ahead of the U.S. with their system.

Using a U.S. cellphone can be very costly across the border. Your plan can give you an international rate before leaving, but it's still costly. Stopping at a Canadian store and purchasing a prepaid Canadian phone may be an option.

If you need to visit a doctor, they will offer you a very fair office-visit rate to pay in cash.

Enjoy Canada, as it's a big, beautiful, friendly and safe country to travel in with all the conveniences you are used to in the U.S. Outside of natural resources, tourism is the next biggest income to Canadians so they will welcome you with open arms.
ISABEL LEACH | JOHNSON CITY, TEXAS

CANADIANS ARE THE NICEST PEOPLE

Here's what to expect when crossing the border into Canada and back to the U.S.

We called our motorhome insurance company and it issued a Canadian insurance card, which didn't cost us anything.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 14

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- Four Wheeler Magazine

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PO. BOX FROM PAGE 10

Regarding credit cards, we never found a place to use American Express. Our banks issued us a credit card with a chip, which every place in Canada uses.

We almost had a problem fueling up in Canada; in the U.S., diesel handles are green, in Canada they are yellow.

RV parks are plentiful. Canadians love to camp.

We encountered some steep grades. The steepest we found was near Penticton, British Columbia, which was a 10 percent grade. We lost our hydraulic steering but managed to get down; just held our breath, slowed down and did not have power steering. We are still alive, got it fixed and went home. Still getting hydraulic oil off our motorhome and pickup.

One more thing: Canada does not use pennies anymore. Prices seem to indicate that they do by using 99 cents, 59 cents, etc., but they do not use the penny.

We have always found Canadians to be the friendliest and nicest people. We love to go to Canada. It's a beautiful place.

JILL WILKINS | VIA EMAIL

FULL-TIME WRONG

I read with interest the broad discussion in May's letters of what constitutes the perfect rig for full-timing. I do, however, take exception to Ron Jones' narrow definition of what defines a full-time RVer. As he defines them, "true" full-timers are "those RVers who live full-time in their coaches and travel North America — not those who use the RV in place of a condo or apartment and park for months at a time." Such a definition is short-sighted and dismisses any number of people I consider to be "true" full-timers — people who live full-time in RVs, people who perhaps winter (for months) in some warm and sunny location, not to mention people who work-camp for months at a time before resuming travel.

To me, a full-time RVer is anyone whose RV is their primary place of residence, both when traveling and when stationary. Jones' further assertion that true full-timers "travel to unknown (to them) areas and constantly face some unusual problems ranging from weather to campsites," also precludes the possibility (albeit perhaps remote) that an RVer might experience months or even years of full-

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timing without ever facing any "unusual problems," let alone "constantly" facing them. To my way of thinking, Ron Jones is "full-time" wrong.

WALT HUNTSMAN | BOISE, IDAHO

QUESTION:

What is your definition of a full-time RVer? Send your comments to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. ♦

escapes

edited by EILEEN HUBBARD

ROAD FOODIE | WHEELS & GEAR | NOTEWORTHY | CROSSROADS



CHIHULY IN COLORADO

TWO EXHIBITS FROM THE MASTER OF BLOWN-GLASS ART

Dale Chihuly is the undisputed master of blown-glass art. His colorful large-scale installations are featured in more than 200 museums and gardens around the world. I've been a fan ever since I joined the 80,000-plus other visitors who were awed by the Chihuly at the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center exhibit in 2005.

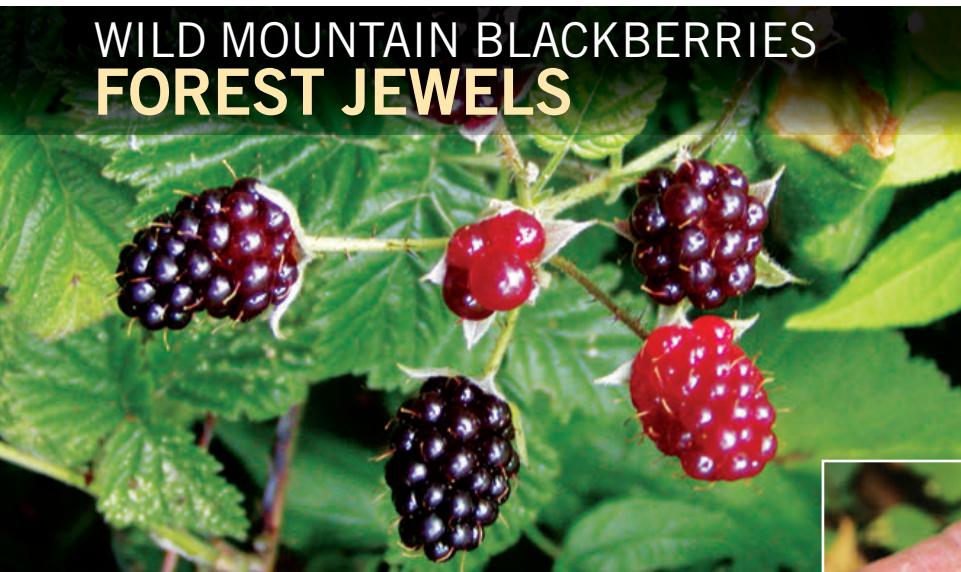
Since then, the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center has accumulated the largest private Chihuly collection in Colorado, which includes three chandeliers and numerous pieces of blown-glass art and drawings. In the Chihuly Rediscovered exhibit, this collection is supplemented with works borrowed from local collectors in the community.

The highlight of the exhibit is "Orange Hornet Chandelier." Originally installed in Venice, Italy, in 1993, it was redesigned for the Fine Arts Center in 2007. The chandelier consists of 384 pieces of glass and weighs about 1,200 pounds. You can watch a time-lapse video of the Chihuly team installing it at www.csfineartscenter.org.

The exhibit runs through Sept. 28, 2014. In addition, The Denver Botanic Gardens is hosting Chihuly, the first major outdoor exhibit in the Rocky Mountain region, from June 14 to Nov. 30, 2014. A ticket from either show will earn \$5 off admission to the other.

— Mary Zalmanek

WILD MOUNTAIN BLACKBERRIES FOREST JEWELS



In northern climates like the

Pacific Northwest, a little forest jewel is ripening — wild mountain blackberries. And for RVers who are traveling to Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, or the Yukon and love to forage, wild mountain blackberries are a treat worth seeking out.

Most of us are familiar with blackberries, those pesky thorny bushes that take over empty lots and untended backyards. These are evergreen blackberries (*Rubus laciniatus*), transplants from Europe that have naturalized in the U.S. to become an invasive noxious weed. While these common blackberries are tasty, people who love the smaller wild mountain blackberry often complain that evergreens are watery and lackluster in flavor.

True wild mountain blackberries (*Rubus ursinus*) have a tangy, sweet-tartness with a deep berry flavor. Wild mountain blackberries are to evergreen or cultivated blackberries what farmed blueberries are to wild huckleberries. Renowned chef James Beard considered wild mountains the most prized of all the wild berries.

Wild mountain blackberries grow on trailing vines along the ground. Evergreen berries grow to be the size of a thumb; wild mountain berries are only as big as the tip of a little finger. It takes a lot of these little berries to make a pie or a batch of jam, and they're tough to pick. Imagine bending over picking these

tiny fruits for hours at a time. And these black jewels are only available for two or three weeks — here today, gone in the blink of an eye.

To be a successful wild mountain blackberry forager you'll need a bucket and a pickin' stick. My mother-in-law, who was famous for her wild mountain blackberry pies, used an old Folgers coffee can her husband fashioned with a wire bail for a handle. A 3- to 4-foot-long stick helps push back the thorny vines to get at ripe berries underneath.

So how do you find these little

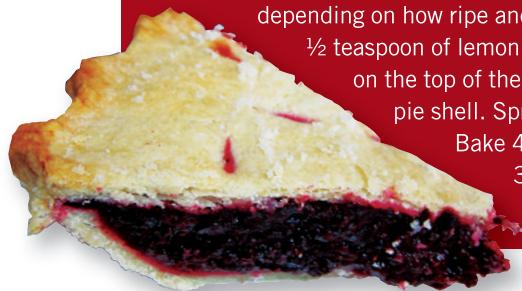


gems? Wild mountain blackberries like sun and they're opportunistic. They're some of the earliest plants to come up after a forested area has been logged. Look for clear cuts or along roadways where there's plenty of sun. And don't miss along streams. Wild

mountain blackberries that get plenty of water can be twice the size. Look for long trails of snaking vines and small berries with deep black color. Wild mountain blackberries are naturally less sweet so avoid the berries that are still red. They're pucker-sour.

What's your favorite foraged food? Let Bobbie know by sending an email to hasselbring@bctonline.com with "Road Foodie" in the subject line.

While picking wild mountain blackberries requires some time, it takes only 4 cups of fresh berries to make a pie. A 4-cup pie needs $\frac{1}{3}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup of sugar, 2 tablespoons of cornstarch (or more, depending on how ripe and soupy the berries are), $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of lemon juice and a little butter to dot on the top of the mixture. Pour into a two-crust pie shell. Sprinkle top crust with white sugar. Bake 425 degrees for 10 minutes; then 350 degrees for 35-45 minutes until brown and bubbly. Enjoy!



CLUELESS IN MONTREAL: In my June column, "Take a Bite Out of Montreal," I incorrectly stated that Montreal is the capital of Quebec. A reader kindly let me know that Quebec City is the capital. I'll be visiting this beautiful city soon and will bring you back a taste here.

RECORDING GENIUS

With all the distracted drivers out there, it has become even more important to protect yourself legally with a dashboard camera. Genius brand has introduced its new DVR-FHD650 Vehicle Recorder, which captures a full view of the road in high definition. The 127-degree wide-angle lens has an f/2.0 aperture for brilliant and clear recording, even in low light, according to the company. The T-buckle design makes it easy to install, and the recorder powers up through the vehicle's 12-volt DC accessory port whenever the engine is started. The DVR-FHD650 uses microSDHC cards up to 32GB for long recording times and includes a 2.4-inch LCD screen, a 500-milliamp-hour lithium-ion battery and a resolution of 1920 x 1080m at 30 frames per second (FPS) or 1280 x 720m at 60 FPS. The MSRP is \$169.99 and the recorder is available at www.amazon.com.

Genius/KYE Systems Corp., www.geniusnet.com



A NEW LEASH ON LIFE

Safely securing your dog in an RV park can sometimes be a challenge, but the innovative 3Sixty Fun leash tie-out makes it easy. Simply push the steel spiral stake into the ground and turn the integral handles to provide a rigid anchor point capable of securing small to midsize pets up to 55 pounds, according to the company. The easy-glide pull mechanism allows the leash cord to smoothly extend and retract via a 360-degree swivel case as your dog moves around, preventing him or her from becoming tangled. 3Sixty Fun is 19 inches tall, and the leash cord measures 16 feet when fully extended. MSRP is \$39.99.

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EASY RV WASH

Washing a motorhome is a time-consuming task, and it's often not even possible at a campground. When all you need is a quick touch-up, Meguiar's offers its new Rinse Free Wash-N-Wax, specifically formulated for RV surfaces. The product is designed to lift away dirt and grime, leaving behind a high-gloss layer of wax with one spray, according to the company. The product can be applied without water on wet or dry surfaces — just spray on and wipe off with a microfiber towel. The hydrophobic formula leaves a water-beading, high-gloss finish. It's said to be safe for use on glass, plastic, instrument panels, polished metals, fiberglass, gelcoat and clearcoat. MSRP is \$19.95.

Meguiar's Inc., 888-888-3143
www.meguiarsdirect.com



THE RALLY RETURNS TO PHOENIX

After a year's hiatus, the Camping World/

Good Sam Rally returns in 2015 with a March 19 through 22 event at Arizona's Phoenix International Raceway in Phoenix, Arizona. (Early-bird arrival days are March 18 and 19.) The racetrack hosted the March 2012 Rally, which drew 3,370 RVs and thousands of RV enthusiasts, and was selected again not only because of the success of the first Phoenix event but because it's one of the few venues that can comfortably stage such a large RV gathering. The Rally celebrates the RV lifestyle with hundreds of RVs for sale, thousands of camping accessories, a full slate of informative RV seminars and world-class entertainment. "We are excited to announce the return of North America's largest RV rally to the RV community," said Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of Camping World and Good Sam Enterprises. To register for the Phoenix Rally and learn more about what's on the agenda, including the entertainment lineup, call 877-749-7122, or go to www.therally.com.



RV SHOWS

AUGUST 7-10

59th Annual Midwest RV Super Show
RV/MH Hall of Fame
Elkhart, Indiana, www.rvshows.org

AUGUST 21-24

Michigan City RV Show
Michigan City, Indiana
219-878-3138

News Briefs

On May 20, **Camping World Inc./Good Sam Enterprises** announced its 2015 forecast for expansion and development of its products and services in new markets. The newest developments will raise the total number of Camping World SuperCenters to nearly 110 nationwide. Plans are under way to expand the company's footprint in the first quarter of 2015 with additional SuperCenters in Idaho Falls, Idaho; Jackson, Mississippi; and Lexington, Kentucky. "Camping World and Good Sam are committed to offering quality outdoor products and services to the customers of these markets," said Marcus Lemonis, chairman and CEO of Camping World. "As part of our growth strategy, the brand is making major investments in the quality of its dealer network. Our reputation and commitment to customer service in the marketplace allow us to expand and evolve, while continuing to serve as our customers' one-stop shopping location for everything outdoor and RV." The new market expansion is on the heels of this year's SuperCenters openings in Lake Park, Georgia; Coburg (Junction City area), Oregon; Fresno, California; Saukville (Milwaukee area), Wisconsin; and Rossford (Toledo area), Ohio.

On April 23, **Ohio Department of Natural Resources** (ODNR) Director James Zehringer and Ohio Senate President Keith Faber announced that the state of Ohio will invest more than \$88.5 million in capital improvements at **Ohio State Parks** during the next two years. "This unprecedented investment will allow our facilities to match the impressive natural beauty that defines Ohio State Parks," said Zehringer. According to a press release, these funds are not meant to expand Ohio State Parks, but to serve as a step toward improving and updating the parks. This capital

improvement funding will be used to improve state-park facilities across Ohio. Additionally, bathrooms and campsites will be updated or replaced through much of the park system. Ohio is one of only seven states in the nation where state park admission is free.

Arlington National Cemetery Historic District in Virginia has been added to the National Register of Historic Places, the official list of America's historic places worthy of preservation. The historic district was determined to be nationally significant in three ways: as America's most sacred national cemetery and as a national memorial to the military history of the United States; it contains the burials of persons of national importance, including presidents, Supreme Court justices and countless military heroes; and as the final resting place of service men and women from the Civil War to the current wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, it continues to serve as a national monument to America's war dead.





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THE TIFFANY COLLECTION IN WINTER PARK

I've always loved the glass art of Louis

Comfort Tiffany, especially his detailed mosaic lamps, and lush stained-glass windows. But I didn't understand the breadth of his creativity until I visited the Charles Hosmer Morse Museum on a tree-lined street in the charming town of Winter Park in central Florida.

The museum was begun in 1942 by Jeanette McKean and named for her grandfather, the wealthy industrialist Charles Hosmer Morse. She and her husband, Hugh F. McKean, assembled their collection over several decades, ultimately focusing on Tiffany.

Inside the museum are examples of every medium Tiffany explored, and from every period of his life. Jewelry, pottery, paintings, art glass, leaded-glass lamps and windows are showcased. His famous Rose Window is there as are many of the other panels and windows he produced.

But, astoundingly, there is more.

The Morse Museum is the only place in the world where visitors can see so much of the actual remains of Tiffany's celebrated sprawling mansion, Laurelton Hall, completed in 1905. And it is the only place where visitors can sit in the chapel Tiffany designed for the 1893 Chicago Expo, with its marble and glass-mosaic furnishings, leaded-glass windows, glass-mosaic-encrusted columns, a 10-by-8-foot chandelier and a baptistry.

Despite the wonders of the Morse Museum collection, Tiffany's real legacy may be his use of art to take us beyond our daily lives and inspire us.

For more information, call 407-645-5311, or visit www.morsemuseum.org

— Neala McCarten



WANNA BUY A BURRO?

Have you ever thought about adopting a wild horse or burro? The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has several adoption centers scattered across the country where you can do just that.

The centers, such as the one in Elm Creek, Nebraska, hold wild horses and burros gathered from Western states and prepare them for adoption. The animals are taken from the range because as they reproduce, their numbers increase and the ability of the land to sustain them decreases.

There is little cost for the actual procedure, but the BLM wants the adopted animals to be well cared for; therefore, there are qualifications for adoption. Visit the BLM website (www.blm.gov/adoptahorse) for more information and to see a photo gallery of animals available for Internet adoption. — James Richardson ♦



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Most of us enjoy the discovery of a small town where friendly smiles and pleasant vibes make us feel right at home; a town with charm and character that beckons us with arts and crafts, antiques and homemade meals; a community that heralds and preserves its history.

During a Southern sojourn recently, a companion and I came upon just such a town, nestled on the Mississippi Gulf Coast about 90 miles east of New Orleans, Louisiana. That would be Bay St. Louis, Mississippi — and we certainly aren't the first to tout it for its small-town virtues. The seaside hamlet of about 10,000 was named one of America's Best Little Beach Towns by *Coastal Living* magazine in 2010, and last year *Budget Travel* magazine rated Bay St. Louis No. 3 on its list of America's Coolest Small Towns.

Such lofty recognition came as no surprise to us as we were captivated by the place from the moment we parked the Winnebago at the historic 1927 Train Depot to begin our stroll through Old Town. The first thing to strike us was Bay



Top: Infinity Science Center, NASA's newest visitor center, features state-of-the-art exhibits; artifacts such as an astronaut's suit and moon rocks; spacecraft mock-ups; rocket and shuttle engines; all designed to help visitors understand the history and importance of space exploration. Above: Placards honoring legendary blues performers hang inside the 100 Men D.B.A. Hall in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.



Left, top to bottom: The late artist Alice Moseley gained national acclaim for her endearingly primitive portrayals of rural Mississippi life, such as this one, on display at the Alice Moseley Folk Art & Antique Museum. Jesse and Kerrie Loya restored historic 100 Men D.B.A. Hall after it was nearly destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. The landmark hall, where leading blues, R&B and soul music stars performed from the 1940s-1960s, was recently designated an official site on the Mississippi Blues Trail. The handsome 1927 Bay St. Louis Train Depot serves today as a visitor center and home to the Alice Moseley Folk Art & Antique Museum.



St. Louis' colorful and intriguing variety of architectural styles — ranging from the mission-style Depot to the 1895 Gothic Methodist Church, to the stately neoclassical Hancock County Courthouse, to an eye-pleasing mix of Creole and craftsman cottages.

Although most buildings extant today (and that have survived numerous hurricanes, including Katrina, which we'll discuss in a moment) are from the late 19th to early 20th centuries, Bay St. Louis dates all the way back to 1699, when it was visited by French Canadian explorers.

Pierre LeMoyne d'Iberville and his brother John Baptiste arrived on Aug. 25, 1699, feast day of patron saint King Louis IX of France, so Baptiste named the area Bay St. Louis in his honor.

Fast-forward to Aug. 29, 2005 — 306 years almost to the day later — when Katrina discovered Bay St. Louis. This monster hurricane, which devastated much of the Gulf Coast from Mississippi to Florida, propelled a 30-foot storm surge through the town, followed by sea waves of nearly 50 feet. Most of Bay St. Louis was either flooded or blown down by Katrina's 140 MPH winds.

Amazingly enough, we didn't see any lingering signs of damage resulting from Katrina, so you've got to hand it to Bay St. Louis residents for their resiliency and determination in rebuilding their town. Citing one of the main reasons they selected Bay St. Louis as one of their "Coolest Small Towns," *Budget Travel* editors noted, "Everybody loves a comeback and Bay St. Louis has come roaring back from Hurricane Katrina. ..."

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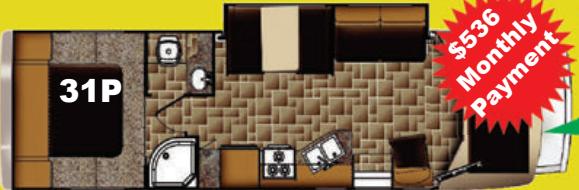
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These flashy Mardi Gras costumes, by fashion designer Carter Church, are on display at the visitor center in the historic Train Depot in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi.

and antique shops scattered about Bay St. Louis. We spent several hours perusing the shelves at Bay Books; wandering among a huge collection of antiques and collectibles at Magnolia Antiques; checking out the art, furniture and jewelry in the beautifully restored 1909 Century Hall; viewing the work of more than 20 local artists at the art deco-style Gallery 220, and admiring the designer linens and accessories at the shop of Bea Connick (she's the aunt of singer Harry Connick Jr.).

Local eateries of particular note

include the Mockingbird Café, a coffeehouse by day and a restaurant/pub serving up paninis, salads and its popular Mockingburger at night. Blind Tiger Restaurant on the harbor gets a thumbs-up for its tasty oysters and homemade fries — but for finer fare, go directly to Trapani's. This family-owned restaurant, famous throughout the region for its seafood, steaks and pasta, has been around since 1994 but now occupies a new beachfront two-story building with an upstairs balcony bar.

There's no way you'll go hungry during a visit to Bay St. Louis and, in fact, it was just the opposite for us — but we found a great way to work off the excess calories. The new Bay of St. Louis Bridge, which replaced the one knocked down by Katrina, features a walking/bike path that makes for a great 4-mile round-trip hike or ride over to Pass Christian and back. Views are fantastic from the bridge, which has won national awards for its people-friendly design, featuring the work of local artists posted at 528-foot intervals across the span.



Admission to the Infinity Science Center includes a bus tour of neighboring Stennis Space Center, the largest rocket-engine test facility in America.

Hikers and bikers can get a further workout on the 3-mile path along the beach leading from Bay St. Louis to neighboring Waveland. Or, if you'd simply like to stretch out your towel on a nice white sandy beach, just go to the end of Main Street and pick your spot. The bay here is shallow and well protected by barrier islands so there's not much wave action. Water conditions are usually warm and gentle.

Back at the old Train Depot, we discovered that this handsome building no



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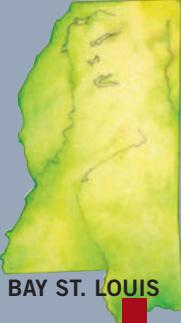


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longer serves its original purpose, occupied nowadays by a visitor center and the Alice Moseley Folk Art & Antique Museum. Moseley, a self-taught folk artist who made her first painting at age 65, rapidly gained national acclaim for her endearingly primitive portrayals of rural Mississippi life. "Miss Alice," as she was known, passed in 2004 at the age of 94, but her legacy lives on at the museum, which displays 35 of her original acrylic-on-wood paintings. The spacious museum also includes collections of vintage bottles, Majolica vases, Tiffany glass, Weller and Newcomb College pottery. Admission is free. The adjoining visitor center features a flashy display of Mardi Gras costumes by local fashion designer Carter Church. As you might imagine, Mardi Gras is celebrated in earnest in these parts — with parades and parties holding forth for weeks leading up to Fat Tuesday.

Another outstanding Bay St. Louis cultural attraction is linked to Mississippi's renown as root source and birthplace of the blues. The 100 Men D.B.A. Hall, a

FOR MORE INFORMATION

<p>100 MEN D.B.A. HALL 228-342-5770 www.100menhall.org</p> <p>ALICE MOSELEY FOLK ART & ANTIQUE MUSEUM 228-467-9223 www.alicemoseley.com</p> <p>BAY HIDE AWAY RV PARK & CAMPGROUND (quiet, secluded, lots of greenery) 228-466-0959 www.bayhideaway.com</p> <p>BUCCANEER STATE PARK (waterpark, 102 RV sites on/near the beach in nearby Waveland) 228-467-3822 www.mdwfp.com/parks-destinations</p>	<p>HOLLYWOOD CASINO RV PARK (highly rated, waterfront sites, casino, golf) 866-758-2591 www.hollywoodbsl.com</p> <p>INFINITY SCIENCE CENTER 228-533-9025 www.visitinfinity.com</p> <p>SILVER SLIPPER CASINO RV PARK (on the beach, casino, fabulous buffet) 866-754-7737 www.silverflipper-ms.com</p>	 <p>BAY ST. LOUIS</p>
--	---	---

large, unremarkable-looking frame building on Union Street, originated in 1894 when a group of African-American men formed a social organization known as the

One Hundred Men Debating Benevolent Association. Not much is known about the association's early days, but the hall apparently served as something of a man



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BEACHES, THE BLUES & BEYOND

cave where local gents could knit friendships, bend elbows, sing and play music.

In the 1940s, the hall began attracting many of the region's greatest blues, R&B and soul music artists who performed regularly on its makeshift stage. For better than three decades, names like Big Joe Turner, Etta James, Guitar Slim, Earl King, James Booker and the Sounds of Soul played the 100 Men D.B.A. Hall, eventually earning this treasured local landmark recognition as an official site on the Mississippi Blues Trail. The event was marked with the dedication of a historical marker at the hall in June 2013.

The mere existence of the Hall today — after being nearly destroyed by Katrina — must be credited to Jesse and Kerrie Loya, who lovingly restored the hall to its original state, with the help of a grant from the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The Loyas host blues and jazz concerts throughout the year.

While it is essentially a down-to-earth little town, Bay St. Louis' main attraction is all about outer space. During your approach on Interstate 10, you can't help but notice that Bay St. Louis is home to the NASA Stennis Space Center, the largest rocket-engine test complex in America. A companion facility, the IN-FINITY Science Center, is NASA's newest visitor center. It features an exhilarating 3-D Immersive Theater, state-of-the-art interactive exhibits, such as "Great Nations Dare to Explore," and artifacts such as Fred Haise's astronaut suit, chunks of moon rock, and actual rocket and shuttle engines that relate the history of space exploration.

NASA Astronaut Haise is assigned to the center and often is on hand to interact with visitors. Admission (\$10 adults; \$8 seniors and military; and \$6 children) includes a bus tour of Stennis Space Center for a look at the facility's huge rocket-engine test stands.

An all-around great place to visit under any circumstance, we found Bay St. Louis an especially friendly RV destination, offering a number of excellent full-service campgrounds. ♦



Florida-based writer/photographer Dave G. Houser has contributed regularly to *MotorHome* magazine since 1985.

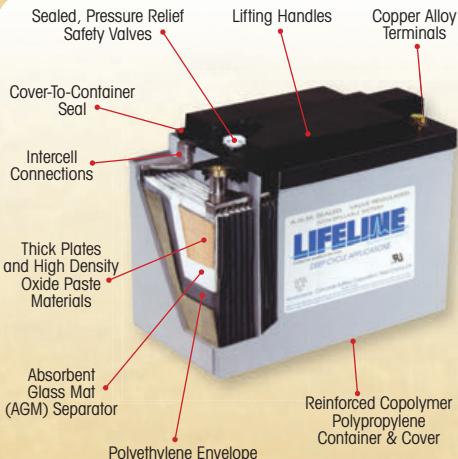


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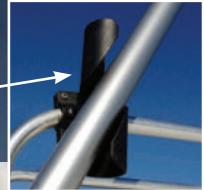
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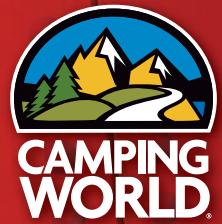
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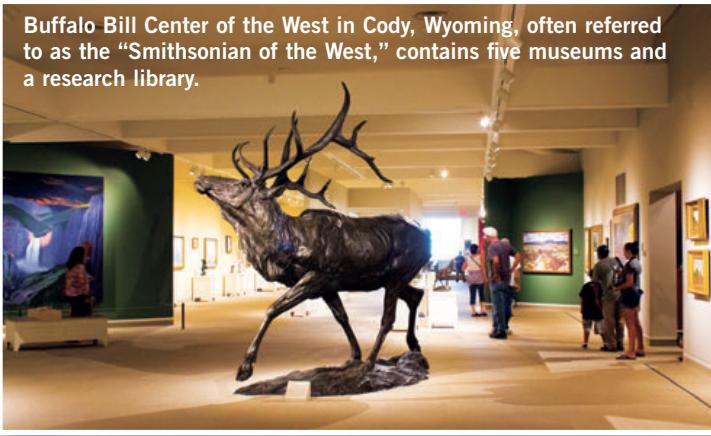
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by MARY ZALMANEK



Our trip to Wyoming was the kind of vacation I used to fantasize about in my pre-motorhome days: no stress, no expectations and a generous deadline. When we got to the Colorado-Wyoming border, we had six days to cover the state from south to north. At the visitor center south of Cheyenne, Wyoming, I asked about interesting attractions. This gave us a general direction, but we were open to spontaneity.

At Laramie, Wyoming, we got off Interstate 80 and opted for the Snowy Range Scenic Byway that took us through the Medicine Bow Mountains. Even in early August, the Snowy Range lived up to its name, with a wet snow falling at higher elevations. Nevertheless, the picturesque high-mountain lakes and the spruce-fir forests made the drive worthwhile.

After settling into Deer Haven RV Park in Saratoga, Wyoming, we went to the city's "Hobo Pool," a natural hot springs on the banks of the Platte River. The pool, which is open 24/7, has been free to all since the Great Depression. Temperatures in the Hobo Pool range from 108 to 119 degrees. After a brief soak, we walked a few feet to the "Not-So-Hot Pool" with a temperature around 100 degrees. A bathhouse with toilets, sinks and showers for the uninhibited (no shower curtains) sits beside the well-maintained pools. For those preferring a natural setting, there are warm pools in the river.

A pleasant conversation with three local men who visit the pools daily made us regret our decision to leave our fly-fishing gear at home. Seventy miles of the North Platte River around Saratoga are Class I Blue Ribbon waters. The area is known for its large brown and rainbow trout. If you make the same mistake we did, local outfitters can supply equipment and guide services.

The next day we drove to Sinks Canyon State Park near Lander, Wyoming. The park lies along the eastern border of the Popo Agie (pronounced puh-POE zha) Wilderness. It's named for the disappearing river that goes underground for about a quarter mile. It then bubbles up in a beautiful trout-filled pool called the "Rise." We parked our coach at the Rise, then walked the trail to the "Sinks." While the parking lot at the Sinks was larger, the slope would make it difficult to level a motorhome.

Clockwise from below: Guests at the Ponderosa Campground in Cody, Wyoming, can stay in their motorhome or a tepee. The Cody Gunfighters take to the street in front of the historic Irma Hotel with a skit performed six nights a week from June through September. The Watanabe family from Illinois participates in the Wyoming Dinosaur Center's "Dig for a Day." Minerva Terrace can be seen from the boardwalk in Mammoth Hot Springs in north Yellowstone.



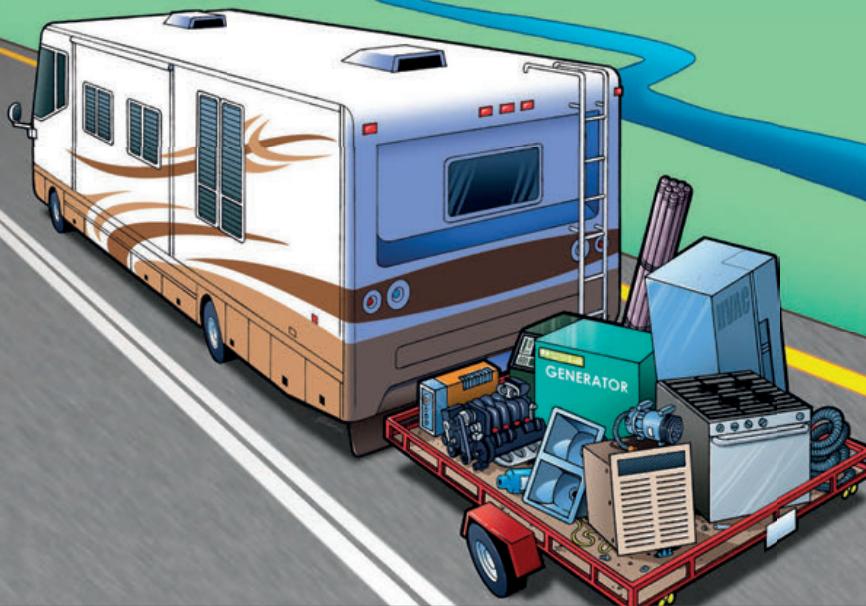
Tepee Fountain in Hot Springs State Park has grown from a tepee-shaped pyramid of rocks in 1909 to its present shape with built-up minerals.



PHOTOS: MARY AND JIM ZALMANEK

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The Not So Hot Pool in Saratoga, Wyoming, is a natural spring on the banks of the Platte River. Admission has been free to all since the Great Depression.

From Lander we drove north to the Wind River Canyon National Scenic Byway past Boysen Reservoir and through the dramatic canyon. The Big Horn River has carved its way through layers of vertical pink and black Precambrian cliffs, some of the oldest rocks on Earth at 2.9 billion years old. The scenic byway ends near Thermopolis, Wyoming.

We decided to stay two nights in Thermopolis to take in all the area has to offer. Our first stop was Hot Springs State Park. We spent 20 minutes relaxing in 104-degree waters at the free State Bath House. If you or your traveling companions have too much energy to sit still in a hot pool, you can pay admission to two other water-fun options: Star Plunge has three water slides, including the Super Star 500, one of the world's longest, measuring more than 500 feet, and the 60-foot Lil' Dipper, perfect for children. In addition to indoor and outdoor pools, it has a Vapor Cave heated by natural mineral waters and a weight and fitness room. Hellie's TePee Pools is a nearby water park with similar attractions.

Refreshed from our soak, we explored the park on foot. A boardwalk crosses the mineral terraces and leads to the Swinging Bridge, a foot suspension bridge over the Big Horn River. From the other side, we saw just how massive Rainbow Terraces are. Leaving the park, we saw Tepee Fountain, a great example of how minerals build up over time. In 1909 a tepee-shaped pyramid of rocks was built to vent steam from water piped through the park. Photographs on site show how it

has grown in a little more than 100 years.

We were excited about the next day's excursion, a 9 a.m. dig-site tour at the Wyoming Dinosaur Center. Bill Wahl, research paleontologist, took us on a tour of the SI (Something Interesting) Quarry where several groups were working various dig sites. There were experienced groups of volunteers in the field including one led by Malcolm Bedell whose T-shirt summed it up: "25 Years Investigating the Last Billion Years." Most of these teams, however, were families with young children doing a "Dig for a Day." Three children, ages 9, 7 and 3, from Illinois were patiently brushing away dirt alongside their parents. Yes, even the 3-year-old — after his nap — was looking for fossils. The quarry has surrendered more than 10,000 bones since 1993 when fossil hunters first unearthed them. Dinosaurs populated this area between 65 and 145 million years ago during the Triassic, Jurassic and Cretaceous periods. It's one of the few documented Allosaurus feeding sites in the world, which explains the abundance of bones, teeth and footprints. The museum has more than 30 mounted skeletons from bones collected locally and around the world. It's no wonder the Wyoming Dinosaur Center was named one of the World's 100 Best Vacations in LIFE magazine's *Dream Destinations*.

Legend Rock State Petroglyph Site, the next stop on our agenda, has been a sacred site for Native Americans for thousands of years. More than 92 prehistoric petroglyph panels and 300 figures are carved into the 1,312-foot-long, near-

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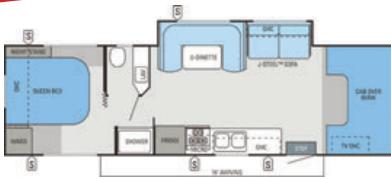
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WYOMING'S WILD SIDE

vertical cliff. With the help of the interpretive trail brochure and 15 markers along the path, we identified the anthropomorphic (people) and zoomorphic (animals) petroglyphs ranging in age from 200 to 11,000 years old. Depending on the time of year, the access road to Legend Rock may be locked; a key can be obtained at Hot Springs State Park.

We overheard someone comment about Wyoming Whiskey, a distillery in Kirby, 12 miles north of Thermopolis. We caught the last tour of the day at 3 p.m. This distillery is the first legal bourbon distillery in Wyoming. Master distiller Steve Nally earned his Bourbon Hall of Fame credentials in Kentucky. He moved to Kirby to oversee the distillery's operations. They hand-make whiskey in small batches. Even though production is shut down during summer months, we got a fine tour of the facility and samples in the Whiskey Shop afterward.

Cody, Wyoming, 85 miles northwest

of Thermopolis, is the eastern gateway to Yellowstone National Park. Colonel William F. "Buffalo Bill" Cody founded the town in 1896; it was incorporated in 1901. He was the most popular celebrity of his time, famous as a buffalo hunter and performer in his Wild West Show. After the popular show was invited to England in 1887 to perform at Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee, she presented him with a cherrywood bar that is still the focal point at the historic Irma Hotel. The hotel has the feel of the Old West, especially when the Cody Gunfighters take to the street with a skit performed six nights a week from June through September.

Kitty-corner from the Irma Hotel, the Dug Up Gun Museum has hundreds of relic guns and weapons from various periods and locations, ranging from the American War of Independence to World War II. Hans Kurth, who co-owns the museum with his wife, Eva, began collecting rusty old guns nobody wanted when he went to gun shows with his dad when he was 9 years old.

The must-see attraction in Cody is the Buffalo Bill Center of the West, often referred to as the "Smithsonian of the West." The complex contains five museums and a research library. Visitors to the 15,000-square-foot Buffalo Bill Museum are greeted by a life-size "helio display" (a ghostly illusion of mist and light) of the man himself. Items on display include Cody's Congressional Medal of Honor; the largest surviving Wild West poster (28 feet long by 13 feet high) printed in 1888 commemorating the command performance for Queen Victoria; costumes, a stagecoach, saddles and guns used in the Wild West Show; a scale model of the 20-acre venue of the show; and the "Wheel of Fortune" originally installed in the Irma Hotel. Interactive exhibits and multimedia presentations chronicle the life of one of America's best-known legends.

The Cody Firearms Museum tells the story of the West with the most comprehensive collection of American firearms in the world. While gun enthusiasts may marvel at the muzzleloaders, shotguns and pistols, they were all the same to me until we got to the presidential guns in the Embellished Arms Gallery. The collection includes rifles presented to presidents

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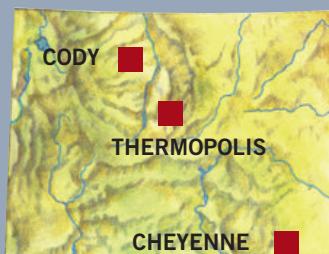
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WYOMING'S WILD SIDE

Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Reagan. Reagan's Winchester Model 64 lever-action rifle had gold inlays representing stages of his career: a football, drama masks and Presidential Seal of the United States, to name a few. A 7-foot musket inlaid with gold owned by President Jefferson and a rifle owned by Catherine the Great are on loan from the Smithsonian through the fall of 2015.

Visitors heading to Yellowstone will benefit from the Draper Natural History Museum, which showcases the natural history of the Greater Yellowstone region. The information about grizzly bears, wolves, raptors and wildfires will enhance a visit to the national park. The Whitney Western Art Museum has a collection of sculptures, paintings and prints depicting Western landscapes, wildlife, Native American scenes, Western heroes and historic events. The Plains Indian Museum portrays their cultures, arts, traditions and histories. The McCracken Research Library houses one of the most complete collections of original materials about the history of the American West.

Our last day in Wyoming was spent in Yellowstone National Park, a place where many people actually enjoy traffic jams since they are most likely caused by buffalo herds. We saw plenty of these magnificent creatures en route to Mammoth Hot Springs. Once we lucked into the last RV parking place below the Lower Terrace, we hiked up the boardwalk to the Upper Terrace. This gave us a close-up view of the ornate travertine formations of crowd favorites such as Palette Spring and Minerva Terrace. We arrived at Palette Spring just in time to hear a park ranger tell visitors how these deposits of calcium carbonate can grow several inches a year; the boardwalks are constantly being rebuilt to accommodate growth.

Our six-day, 600-mile journey through Wyoming had come to an end. We felt renewed by exploring old things: dinosaurs, petroglyphs and legends of the Old West. Of course, soaking in natural hot springs never fails to refresh. ♦



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



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The Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum in Fiesta Park is loaded with exhibits about the worldwide history of ballooning.



Campers rush to assist when a balloon lands in the RV park, and many volunteer to serve on chase crews during the International Balloon Fiesta.

Some days it pays to get up early. Last October we rolled out of bed, donned our warmest jackets, and left our Class B Sprinter motorhome in the dark. The world's largest ballooning event — the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta — was about to get underway a few hundred yards from where we had slept.

Would the balloons fly? The day before, my husband, Bob, had driven us through a dust storm and 60 MPH wind gusts that had blown shipping containers off a moving freight

train. We had checked into the RV lot in a downpour and our first anticipated evening event had been canceled.

But now, less than 12 hours later, we watched Dawn Patrol pilots ascend to test wind speeds and directions at different altitudes. We walked from balloon to balloon as pilots and crew prepared to launch. At sunrise, two balloons took the American flag aloft and a gathering crowd sang the Star Spangled Banner. Amazing shapes and colors rose into a brilliant autumn sky one by one for two hours. It was a “bucket

UP, UP AND AWAY

AT THE ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL BALLOON FIESTA





At the Special Shape Glowdeo and other evening sessions, pilots light their tethered balloons and are more available for chats than at other times.



The Albuquerque Police Department Horse Mounted Unit controls crowd movements from high atop their draft breed steeds when balloons need space to land.

list” day that we’ll never forget.

Lesson learned: Weather in Albuquerque, New Mexico, can be fickle. If you plan to attend the Fiesta, it’s a factor worth considering, along with when to arrive, how long to stay and where to park the motorhome.

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

At first glance, planning a night or two to see a few major events during the nine-day Fiesta might sound feasible. But

we learned that the Balloonmeister (that’s a real title) will postpone or cancel flights for safety, sometimes at the last minute, due to rain, visibility less than 3 miles, clouds below 1,500 feet or winds faster than 10 knots.

Pilots also may decide to cancel when winds seem too light. Like Goldilocks’ porridge, conditions have to be just right. So it’s a good idea to plan on coming for at least half, if not all, of the Fiesta.

The fun kicks off on an early October Saturday and wraps

THIS 9-DAY EVENT FILLS THE SKY WITH COLORFUL, FANCIFUL FIGURES AND PUTS RVERS RIGHT IN THE HEART OF THE ACTION

by CHRISTINE GOODIER



PHOTOS: ROBERT GOODIER

Folding chairs are allowed, but most people roam from balloon to balloon on the 78-acre grass launch field.



Above: Motorhomes are treated to a morning show in the RV park next to the launch field. Left: Special shapes, like "Pigasus," are more difficult to fly than traditional teardrop-shaped balloons.

up nine days later on Sunday, with the busiest schedules on the two weekends. Sessions start early in the morning or around sunset, and very little takes place midday.

LOCATION MATTERS

Traffic and parking are major issues when 100,000 people converge anywhere. Lucky RVers can skip the hassles by booking the Balloon Fiesta Park's sites. Reservations open online almost a year in advance, and a downloadable map on the website shows the facility's layout. You'll have four site choices, all rally-style:

"Standard" (\$30 per night, dry camping on a dirt field) and "Premium" (\$65, 30-amp electricity and water provided) have free shuttles to the launch-field entrance. Event admission is not included (\$8 per person, 12 and younger free, two tickets needed daily if you attend morning and evening sessions).

"VIP" (\$85 per night) is dry camping on a paved lot adjacent to the launch field, with a three-night minimum stay and convenient entry passes included. Generator fumes filled the air and our site needed a lot of leveling, but we would choose this option again. From the West VIP lot, we could walk to events in minutes.

The "President's Compound" (\$150 per night) provides city water pressure and 30-amp electricity on a bluff overlooking the launch field. These sites, with a three-night minimum stay and four entry passes included, sell out very quickly.

Wherever you stay, there are no dump stations, showers or restrooms other than portable toilets. (A pump-out wagon or water truck will visit you for \$25.) Sites are 19 feet wide by 50 feet deep, assigned when you arrive. On check-in, you'll receive window cards, including a parking permit for your dinghy vehicle. (Avoid driving during event arrival and departure times.)

If you belong to an RV club or owners' organization, you may want to investigate whether a Fiesta rally is scheduled with a block of reserved sites. Commercial caravan companies also include the Fiesta in their itineraries.

Can you just show up? "An RV can arrive without a reservation for a Standard site, what we call our drive-ins," advised Jennifer Garcia, who handles reservations. "The price is still the same, but this allows

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RV SITES

Reservation forms are online or call Jennifer Garcia 505-821-1000 ext. 107. Leashed pets are allowed in the RV lots, but not on the launch field.

VOLUNTEERING

Application forms are online or contact event coordinator Sandy Wylie swylie@balloonfiesta.com

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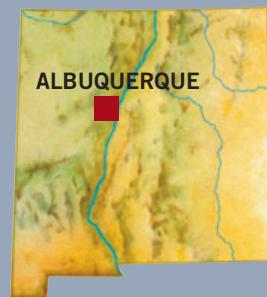
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for the RV traveler who is either traveling through town or has arrived earlier than expected to come and enjoy the festivities."

If you stay elsewhere, be prepared for Fiesta-inflated pricing and stiff cancellation penalties, and ask about availability of shuttle services. If you drive your car, you'll pay \$10 each time you park on-site (Park & Ride locations are also available around Albuquerque). Arrive between 4:30 and 5 a.m. for weekend morning ses-

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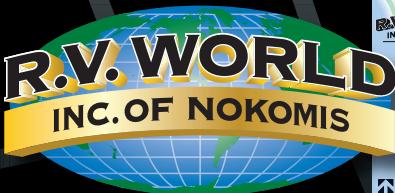
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Depending on wind conditions, RVers can set up chairs and watch balloons fly over, with all the comforts of home at hand.

sions, and by 4 p.m. for evening events.

UP, UP, BUT NOT ALWAYS AWAY

You'll hear people refer to the Albuquerque Box, a morning ballooning phenomenon caused by wind patterns in the Rio Grande Valley beside the Sandia Mountains. Pilots launch into cold surface winds from the north and ascend into winds from the south that can reverse their direction when the box effect is occurring.

However, with light morning winds during our stay, campers were sometimes treated to the sight of dozens of balloons hovering over and landing in the RV lot near the launch field (perhaps not much of a treat for passengers who had an abbreviated flight). Pilots can control altitude but balloons tend to go where the available wind takes them.

A lot of the fun is on the ground. Unlike most aviation shows, the Fiesta allows attendees to roam freely on the launch field among the balloons instead of confining them behind barricades in viewing stands. You'll get a chance to see how pilots inflate their balloons with propane burners, and watch crew members at work close up. Dress warmly since temperatures in the 30s are common on the 78-acre grass field.

The big crowd pleaser is a mass ascension at dawn when 550 or more hot-air balloons rise into the air in two waves, surely one of the happiest events on the planet. Five of these are scheduled, weather permitting; a Flight of the Nations before the midweek ascension features international pilots who display their country's flag. In 2013, 18 nations were represented including the United States.

You, too, can climb into a rattan basket and head for the sky during a mass ascension. Schedule your ballooning through Rainbow Ryders, the official ride concession for the Fiesta.

In addition to classic teardrop-shaped balloons, almost 100 "special shapes" participate annually, including a cow, pig, daisy, stagecoach and Darth Vader. People wait, cameras poised, to see their favorites in action, such as Brazil's bee balloons that sometimes "kiss" as they rise with a little help from their pilots. Snow White (from England), Angry Bird (from the U.S.) and eight others were newcomers in 2013.

"Zebras" (launch directors in black-and-white striped shirts) keep the activities well organized, along with the Albuquerque Police Department's Open Space & Horse Mounted Unit team. Riding high on draft breed horses, these officers survey the scene 360 degrees and perform the impressive task of moving the crowds quickly when balloons need to land.

Pilots have several opportunities to

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compete for accuracy during the Fiesta by flying to designated targets, dropping weighted markers on targets, attempting to navigate to tall poles with prizes attached, and so on. Speed matters only in the long-distance America's Challenge Gas Balloon Race. Teams flying hydrogen balloons depart on the first Saturday, and the one that travels the longest distance wins.

HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF IT'S A GO?

While you're sipping coffee in your coach before dawn, Albuquerque's NBC-TV station, KOB channel 4, is a great source of up-to-the minute launch information from an on-site team. We had no problem picking up local channels at the Fiesta RV park using our over-the-air antenna.

In 2013, Fiesta officials came up with a low-tech system to let visitors already milling around the launch field know what's happening. A flagpole by the stage in the Main Street vendor area displayed a colored flag for event status: green meant on schedule; yellow, a delay or pending decision; and red, cancelled for the session.

MORE THINGS TO DO

If you enjoy volunteering, sign up online in the spring or summer, or ask around after you arrive. The Fiesta relies on 900 to 1,000 volunteers each year, plus another 2,000 who sign up to be part of a chase crew. Around 25 percent of the volunteers come from out of state.

Shoppers will find Fiesta pins and other merchandise in the vendor area on Main Street alongside the launch field. People line up to buy about 60,000 collectible pins each year and attend pin-trading sessions on both weekends.

You can also buy food and beverages on Main Street, including the Fiesta's traditional breakfast burritos topped with green chile. (Culinary alert: It's spelled chile, not chili, and locals don't refer to it as "sauce.")

The Anderson-Abruzzo Albuquerque International Balloon Museum just south of the launch field has balloon-shaped glass walls and is well worth a visit. Exhibits explain the history of ballooning and trace the Fiesta's progress from its 1972 start in a parking lot with 13 balloons.

MOMENTS OF MAGIC

Even after developing "balloon neck" from

tilted heads, we couldn't get enough of the colorful array in Albuquerque's skies each morning. Delightful days ended with Afterglow fireworks we could watch from the comfort of our motorhome's front window.

Just before dusk on our final evening, we walked back to the launch field to see crew members fire up their propane burners one last time and hear the "whoosh" as pilots inflated balloons, tethered to glow instead of go. We couldn't help noticing

pure joy on the four upturned faces of a young family standing next to us as they watched and pointed at the flashing lights. For all of us, young and old, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta had delivered yet another magical moment. ♦



Christine Goodier is a freelance writer and editor 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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Most of us can't live without the sun, yet many of us still don't consider what we can do *with* it. Beyond pining for it during the winter, chasing it in the spring and basking in it during the summer, we don't tend to think about how we can put it to good use beyond a few solar panels to keep our rigs charged.

But that's starting to change.

Solar power accounted for 29 percent of all new electricity generation capacity added in 2013, up from just 10 percent in 2012, making solar the second largest source of new electricity generating capacity beyond natural gas, according to solar industry data. In fact, the U.S. ranks among the top

countries in the world in solar-generated electricity.

Solar's momentum, combined with tax incentives, have created new awareness and enthusiasm for solar power — but in our motorhomes, it still remains a costly proposition that may not have the same return on investment as it does in a residence, especially those who frequent full-hookup RV parks. In fact, some would argue that there's no point in it whatsoever, as the generators in most motorhomes can produce as much power as we're likely to need while dry camping. However, with the advances in solar technology have come a wide variety of solar-powered products with pretty amazing capabilities. These, combined with a number of available



FUN WITH THE SUN

**SMALL SOLAR-POWERED DEVICES ARE AFFORDABLE,
CONVENIENT AND DELIGHTFUL**

by CHRIS HEMER

high-capacity compact batteries, are making it possible to power up our phones, tablets, cameras and more with energy generated by the sun.

Indeed, when plugged in or running the generator, we have the capability to charge anything we want to — but we're not always plugged in, and it doesn't make a lot of sense to run a 4-kW or larger generator to charge your phone, now does it? Small solar-powered devices can not only charge up electrical devices quickly, they do it quietly and cleanly — something we can all appreciate. And though it's unlikely we'll recoup the cost of portable solar panels by using "free" energy to recharge our cellphones, few could argue that it's more convenient and

far less wasteful. Imagine charging two devices at the same time with a small solar panel on the dash, or using a solar-powered lantern for a soft glow at your picnic table at night.

Beyond all the socioeconomic impacts of solar power, using solar-powered devices is just plain fun. We've rounded up just a few of the devices we think are pretty interesting from some of the leading names in portable solar — but there are lots more out there. For example, just searching "solar powered" on Amazon netted lots more interesting products, more than we can feature here — but we encourage you to do your own research and learn more about all the cool stuff a hot sun can do for you.



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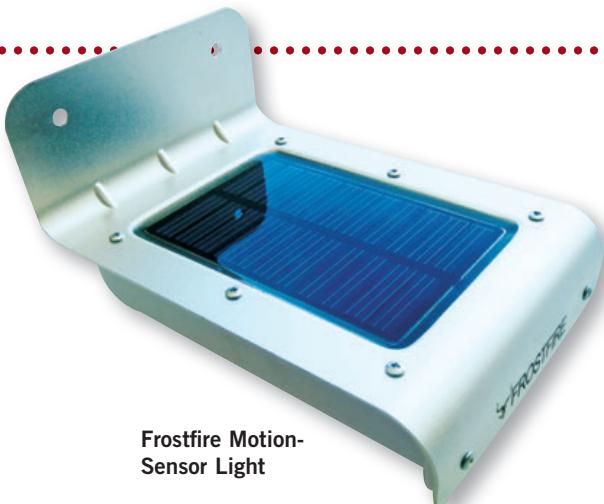
D.LIGHT DESIGN

This company has a commendable mission: to create new freedoms for customers around the world without reliable power. As such, d.light design offers a variety of products that are surprisingly low-cost, such as the d.light S20 LED rechargeable lantern, which retails for just \$18.95. This product features an integral solar panel that will fully charge the unit in eight hours (it can also be plugged into AC power, but the charge time is the same), after which it will provide eight hours of light on the low setting, four on high. A glow-in-the-dark on-off button makes it easy to turn on at night, and the unit is weather-, dust- and impact-resistant.

Another product of interest to RVers is the d.light S300 LED rechargeable lantern and cellphone charger, which retails for \$49.95. The lantern takes eight hours for a full charge, and features a wide-angle beam in four brightness settings (four hours on high, eight hours on medium, 16 hours on low and 100 hours on bed-light) and offers a USB output that can charge mobile phones and other low-power devices. The portable solar panel includes an outdoor cable for solar charging, or the S300 can be charged from a USB source or standard Nokia AC charger. d.light designs, www.dlightdesigns.com (available at www.Amazon.com and other retail outlets).



S20 Lantern



Frostfire Motion-Sensor Light

FROSTFIRE USA

Frostfire offers a lot of interesting products, but the one we think is the coolest is the Frostfire 16 LED wireless, solar-powered motion-sensor light. It features a small solar panel on top and a motion sensor with a 9.8-foot activation zone. This would be perfect for mounting above an entry door, or mount one or more on the other side of the rig as scare lights. The solar panel has a life span of five years, according to the company, while the LED should last up to 50,000 hours. They're affordable, too, at just \$29.99. Go to www.frostfireusa.com for more information.

PHOTOS: CHRIS HEMER AND PARTICIPATING MANUFACTURERS

GOAL ZERO

Goal Zero offers a wide variety of products, from solar-rechargeable batteries to solar panels and small, medium and heavy-duty solar kits. What caught our eye, however, is the new Torch 250, which offers a variety of features useful to RVers. It has a built-in solar panel that charges an internal 4,400mAh



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lithium battery, which can be used to operate the flashlight, floodlight or red emergency light. Or, plug into the integrated USB port to charge a phone or boost tablet battery life. No sun? No problem — the Torch 250 also has a USB charging cable and a hand crank to generate light anywhere. Considering all its capabilities, it's a bargain at \$79.99.

Next on our hot list is the Lighthouse 250 lantern and USB hub. Fully charged in seven hours from a solar panel or its integrated USB cord, the Lighthouse 250 offers 250 lumens of light output and can run for up to 48 hours. And while you're enjoying its LED light, you can also recharge your MP3 player, smartphone or e-reader, or give your tablet a 40 percent boost. The Lighthouse 250 also features directional lighting so you can brighten a walking trail with 180 degrees of light, or light up an entire area with 360 degrees of light. Like the Torch 250, it can also be powered via hand crank (one minute of exercise yields 10 minutes of light). It also retails for \$79.99.

If you've got bigger power needs,

consider one of Goal Zero's solar kits, like the Sherpa 50 (\$359.98). Representing the lower end of Goal Zero's midsize solar kits, the Sherpa 50 includes the Sherpa 50 power pack and Nomad 13 solar panel, which together weigh just 2.8 pounds and can power a tablet, laptop, radio, DVD player, etc., with the available Sherpa 120-volt AC inverter (\$49.99). Check out all of Goal Zero's products at www.goalzero.com or call 888-794-6250.

SUNTACTICS

Suntactics is a unique manufacturer in that the company only builds portable solar chargers, and builds them right here in the United States. The smallest



CONTINUED ON PAGE 50

sCharger-14

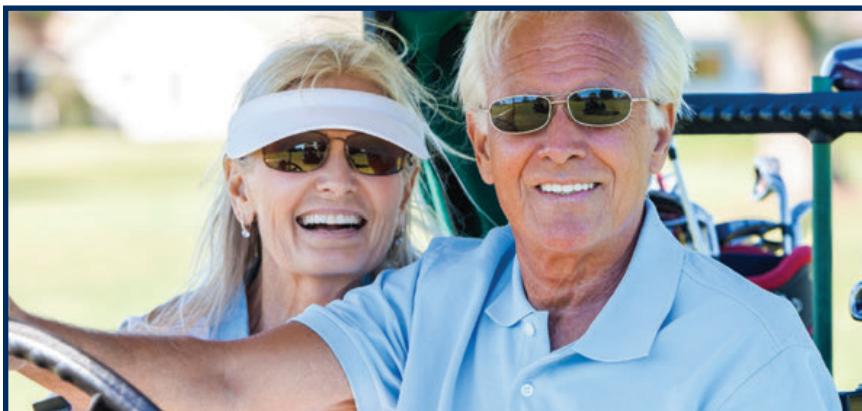
LIMEFUEL

Limefuel isn't a solar-powered product, per se, but the company offers a wide range of powerful, portable lithium-ion batteries that can be charged by a solar panel, then used to power up virtually any portable electronic device. For example, the Blast



Limefuel Blast L156X Battery

battery is available in 6,000, 13,000, 15,600, 18,000 and 24,000mAh sizes, starting at only \$29.99. We once used the midsize L156X to fully charge two smartphones with energy left to spare. The Blast battery line has an auto on/off feature, and a four-LED indicator tells you how much charge is left. It even has a built-in safety flashlight should you get caught in the dark. Or if your travels take you to more rugged locales, you might consider the 15,000mAh Rugged battery, which is water-, dust- and shock/crush-resistant. Like the Blast, Rugged is compatible with smartphones, tablets, e-readers, music players, gaming devices, digital cameras and more. Learn more at www.limefuel.com (available at www.Amazon.com).



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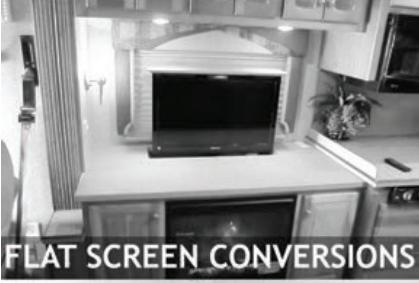
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sCharger-5
with an
iPhone

unit, the sCharger-5 (\$139.95) is capable of solar charging any smartphone at wall-outlet charging speeds (iPhone, 1.5 to 2.5 hours; Samsung Galaxy, 3 to 4 hours). In fact, its single outlet can charge anything with a USB connection. Suntactics' biggest unit, the sCharger-14 (\$239.95), is billed as "the ultimate tab-



Suntactics
sCharger-5 Tripod

let solar charger," and is claimed to be the only portable solar charger of its kind that can run and charge two devices at the same time (iPad, 3 to 7 hours; Samsung Galaxy tablet, 3 to 4 hours). All Suntactics solar chargers feature the company's Auto-Retry Technology (which will re-start charging within minutes after being temporarily blocked from the sun). In addition, all Suntactics solar chargers are waterproof up to 40 feet, according to the company. Suntactics, 888-308-4786, www.suntactics.com. ♦

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THESE MOTORHOMES WITH GARAGES
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by BRUCE HAMPSON

Thor Motor
Coach Outlaw
37LS with
Party Patio



Thor Motor Coach Outlaw 37LS Class A



Thor Motor Coach Outlaw 37LS main living area

Not every advancement in motorhome design and functionality is easily remembered in later years — coaches have been evolving, in fits and starts, ever since Ray Frank began bolting together “housecars” in his Michigan barn in the '50s — but the first motorhome toy hauler is more easily traced. It appeared in 1996, the year the Olympics came to Atlanta, Georgia.

Even so, when Four Winds International decided to partner with RV rental company Cruise America and build one-off toy hauler variants of its highly successful Class C motorhomes for use as support vehicles for the 1996 Olympics' national torch relay across America, “there really weren't a lot of expectations” that it would develop into anything bigger in terms of product development, recalled Jon Crider, now vice president of product development for northern Indiana-based Thor Motor Coach (TMC).

As it turned out, however, the newly monickered “Fun Mover” by Four Winds — later merged with Thor Industries' sister company Damon Motor Coach to form TMC — captured a lot of interest thanks to nearly nonstop television coverage of the relay. It wasn't Four Winds' only foray into new product frontiers — the motorized company also tried its hand at towables in the early '90s — but there were more than a few motorhome enthusiasts in that TV audience and the idea gained traction.

More than that, it helped carve out a small, but thriving, segment. Just don't call them “toy haulers.”

“We refer to them as ‘everything’ motorhomes,” said Crider. “It doesn't matter if you have toys — be they dirt bikes, motor-

cycles, buggies or golf carts — a mobile office, a DJ studio, a mobile dog-grooming business ... we're seeing all these kinds of applications opening up for a motorhome with a garage.”

It's that versatility, in fact, that has been fueling a surge in toy haulers throughout the RV industry.

“Some people who don't even have toys gravitate toward a toy hauler because they like the flexibility of space,” said Don Clark, president of Middlebury, Indiana-based Grand Design RV Co. “A toy hauler gives you space that you can do whatever you want with in the garage as long as your toys are out. The other thing it adds is economical space — patio space. Now, with the advent of the patio addition with a ramp that converts into a large patio room, it brings the outside in. The versatility of a toy hauler in today's market, if done correctly, is amazing.”

Matt Zimmerman, president of Keystone RV Co., Goshen, Indiana, concurred — to a point. “I think versatility is a big part of it,” Zimmerman agreed, “but it's not only versatility — it's also the level of appointments in a toy hauler today versus just a few years back. It's a much ‘softer’ piece and isn't as edgy in terms of interior appointments. It appeals to a wider demographic today.”

Granted, neither Clark nor Zimmerman build motorized products, but the viewpoints of the seasoned RV executives — versatility and upscale amenities — reflect the changing toy hauler landscape and are on display in contemporary motorhomes with garages.

Interestingly, while TMC's predecessor, Four Winds, can



Thor Motor Coach Outlaw 35SG Super C main living area



Newmar Canyon Star with garage



Thor Motor Coach Outlaw 35SG Super C



Newmar Canyon Star

be said to have built the first Class C motorhome toy hauler 18 years ago, it's still the only mass-marketed Class C in the segment. The company is, in fact, the only manufacturer that, as Crider noted, has a "truly dedicated product line" of toy haulers. Marketed under the Outlaw brand, the line includes the 29H — a traditionally styled 30-foot, 9-inch Class C built on a Ford E-450 chassis powered by a 6.8-liter V-10 Triton with 305 horsepower and 420 LB-FT of torque — along with a "Super C," a 36-foot, 9-inch model (35SG) constructed using Ford F-550 truck underpinnings, and a pair of Class A coaches.

Aside from the added length, there are some notable differences between the two Class C's, mostly due to the F-550's added capacity, which allows for a slightly larger garage area (10 feet by 8 feet, capable of supporting 1,500 pounds, compared to about 7 feet by 8 feet and 1,000-pound limit in the 29H), and gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR)/gross combined weight rating (GCWR). The 29H carries the E-450's familiar 14,500-pound GVWR, along with a 22,000-pound GCWR, while the bigger F-550, with a 6.7-liter diesel V-8 pumping out 300 horsepower and 660 LB-FT of torque, bumps those capacities up to 19,500 pounds and 35,000 pounds, respectively. There also are dramatic differences in the fuel, water, LP-gas and holding-tank capacities between the two, but you get the idea.

The Outlaw Class A also sports a cantilevered roof line out back, allowing TMC to add a unique permanent loft bedroom above the garage area; in the two Class C models, all sleeping arrangements are forward of the garage in the living quarters.

Differences between the two Class A's — TMC's Crider hinted that a third may be in the pipeline later this year — might initially seem to be mostly a choice between having a single streetside slideout in the 37LS, home to the dinette and sofa/air bed, or the two-slideout-equipped 37MD, but slide-room positioning really affects the floorplans. Everything from the loft access and wardrobe space to the bathroom and even the kitchen sink shifts, so each unit has its own personality. There's a slight difference in overall length, as well, but each is built on the Ford F53, 24,000-pound-rated gas chassis.

In fact, you won't find a toy hauler in the Class A market on anything but a Ford F53 chassis, a decision made to keep the price down on the versatile units. Newmar Corp. did offer a diesel-based garage coach several years back, but dropped it after Spartan Motors discontinued the mid-engine diesel chassis it was based upon. Today, the Napanee, Indiana, builder offers a pair of 39-foot, 11-inch gas Class A floorplans within its popular Canyon Star lineup.

"There's just so much you can do with it," said Dave Garl, Newmar account manager for the eastern states. "We have people on the East Coast who buy them for attending dog shows — you can't damage the garage with water — and we've even sold them to people raising exotic birds."

Building a more specialized motorhome isn't unusual for Newmar — the Canyon Star line also includes a wheelchair-accessible unit with a wide aisle and very open floorplan — and the two models with near-8-foot-by-10-foot garages share the

WHO SAYS YOU CAN'T TAKE IT WITH YOU?



ShowHauler Motorhome Conversions

same sort of upscale amenities Newmar is known for.

Where they differ is, again, in floor-plan development and slideout rooms. Model 3921 incorporates the galley, dinette and a rear wardrobe in a full-wall streetside slideout while model 3920 uses a smaller slide on the same side to nestle the dinette and jackknife sofa. Both also feature curbside slideouts for the mid-coach queen bed.

Additionally, Newmar has fitted the garage with a pair of bunk beds that raise and lower using an electric lift. Maintained near the ceiling during travel, they can be lowered for two tiers of sleepers — and the bottom bunks convert into

bench seats. The Canyon Star also sports a second curbside entry into the garage to reduce tracking dirt through the cabin.

And, while the garage area itself provides nearly limitless opportunities, the ability to transform a cargo ramp into a patio on larger coaches can't be overemphasized. Given the limited floor space available in a motorhome, adding another 64 square feet or so of optional outdoor space can really "ramp up" the lifestyle.

There are other vehicle options, as well, depending upon the thickness of your wallet. While TMC offers the only Ford E-series Class C garage coach, a number of more specialized OEMs build "Super C" versions.

A relatively low-volume manufacturer specializing in custom motorhomes, toy hauler trailers, sports decks and race car stackers for big-trailer owners and professional racing teams, Elkhart, Indiana-based Haulmark Motor Coach has its \$475,000 (MSRP) Motor Garage, a retro-looking motorized toy hauler assembled on a 500-horsepower Freightliner Cascadia truck sporting a lift gate for motorcycles or ATVs that converts to a patio in the stationary mode.

"We receive a ton of requests for a motor garage where you would have a double-slide coach with full living area and a separate bedroom, salon and galley with the ability of hauling motorcycles or ATVs in the rear," noted Mike Nichols, national sales manager.

Among custom shops, Renegade RV, based in Bristol, Indiana, and ShowHauler Motorhome Conversions, Middlebury, Indiana, build to specification using, for the most part, Class 8 Freightliner trucks with weight ratings north of 50,000 pounds.

"All of our toy haulers are custom-



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ShowHauler Motorhome Conversions interior (left) and exterior (above)

built,” said Danny Lagunas, national sales manager for Renegade/Kibbi. “We work with the customer to find out how big of a garage he needs, then we’ll tell him how many feet of usable living space that will be available. He can use some of it, or all of it, so long as he doesn’t go beyond 45 feet.”

The biggest garage Renegade/Kibbi has constructed? “Twenty-six feet,” Lagunas responded. “That particular buyer was a collector-car enthusiast. He’d load his car into the unit to take to shows. We used a lift gate, the same one we use on

our race trailer. It’s hydraulically operated and also serves as the rear door.”

That NASCAR-type of ramp/lift also figures prominently in many of ShowHauler Trucks’ units, where, as Sales Manager Lonnie Troyer pointed out, interior configurations run the gamut and all-steel construction provides a measure of strength. “Right now, for instance, we’re building one for hauling the car over the bedroom — so, there’s a garage in the bottom where we can put a golf cart in the bottom, and in front of it is the bedroom; on top, the owner puts his car. The area is massive.”

When it comes to filling the garage, there really is no limit to the versatility of a toy hauler. “I think that what makes the (toy hauler) motorhome stand out is that it’s fully contained. You don’t need a separate vehicle to go somewhere,” said TMC’s Crider. “And in a 30-foot Class C with an 8-foot garage, there are so many possibilities of ‘what can we use this for?’” ♦



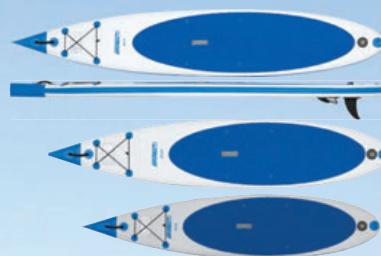
Bruce Hampson has been writing about cars, boats and RVs for more than 30 years. A former senior managing editor at *MotorHome*, he lives in the “RV Capital of the World,” Elkhart, Indiana.

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GET BIG-THEATER SOUND IN A SMALL SPACE



A SIMPLE UPGRADE THAT MAKES A MAJOR IMPACT ON THE AUDIO/VIDEO EXPERIENCE IN A MOTORHOME

by DENNIS C. BREWER

There is nothing quite like visiting a big-screen theater equipped with digital sound. While some at-home theater systems can rival big-box theater systems, what about inside a motorhome? That thrilling sound can be experienced in an RV with the help of a product called a digital-to-analog audio decoder, a little bit of DIY knowledge, a budget of about \$150, some hand tools and a few hours of effort.

Most RVs are equipped with sound systems based on stereo sound, which is essentially two analog sound channels outputting to a left- and right-side front speaker. Adding a bass or low-frequency effects (LFE) speaker or woofer to stereo sound is referred to as 2.1 sound. The 2.1 is indicating a speaker for reproducing the deep treble and bass sounds. Modern satellite receivers, Blu-ray players, free-to-air (FTA) receivers and computers will support conveying multiple sound channels, commonly known as 5.1 digital or digital surround sound (six speakers) or 7.1 (eight speakers), as do many models of over-the-air (OTA) TVs, including when Internet-streaming Netflix to smart TVs. Advanced digital sound and video playback devices, and the media they play, are recognized by

trademark names such as Dolby Digital, SDDS, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS-ES.

Because space is always at a premium in motorhomes, a full-size 5.1 sound receiver is generally too big to fit in the area allocated for satellite receivers and DVD players. Fortunately, there is a product that overcomes the space issue and decodes the digital sound tracks out to an inexpensive portable or permanently installed set of six speakers. One such product is the HD digital 5.1 Audio Gear decoder priced at \$60. Similar decoders are sold under the name Panlong, JMT, Orei, Vktech and KEEDOX.

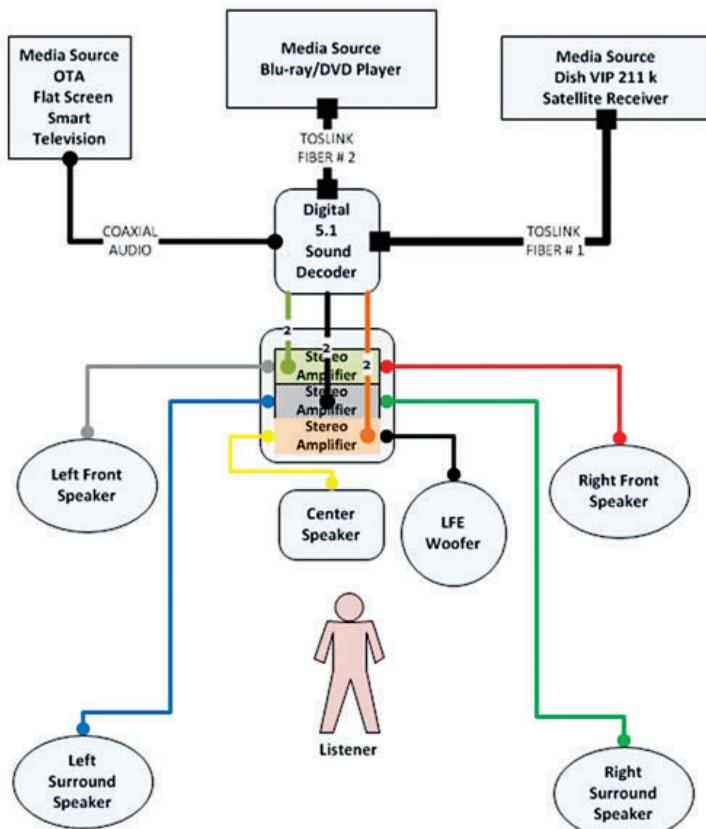
In order to reproduce the advanced sound experience in a motorhome, five elements need to work in concert. The first is a multichannel sound source, which can reside on any transport media including an OTA TV signal; a DISH, FTA or DirecTV satellite transmission; an Internet download; and a DVD or Blu-ray disc. Next is a media player or playback device such as a satellite receiver, computer, DVD or Blu-ray player equipped with a multichannel sound output jack. The multichannel output will either be an RCA coaxial output jack or an optical audio cable (TOSLINK).

The insulating ring inside a coaxial RCA output jack is color-coded orange. Optical outputs (fiber connections for a TOSLINK cable) can be recognized by the red glow emitted when the device is on.

The third element, referred to as a sound processor, receiver or digital sound decoder, is a device capable of decoding, or splitting off each of the multichannel digital sound streams that make up the whole soundtrack out to multiple individual speakers as an analog signal. Some



The HD digital 5.1 Audio Gear decoder is small and decodes digital soundtracks out to a set of six speakers.



Fiber TOSLINK cables are available in various lengths to reach from the equipment to the location of the decoder.



Here, the 5.1 Audio Gear digital sound decoder is on and working. There are three stereo 1/8-inch plug jack cables connected to the jacks on the other end of the decoder that bring the six sound channels out to the amplifiers and speakers. The power-supply cable is the connection on the left; the audio coaxial is the connection on the far right.

These are the connections that bring a surround-sound system together in a motorhome.

computers have sound cards with a built-in six-channel decoder, characterized by six speaker output jacks on the back of the card. The six separate sound channels are referred to as center, LFE or woofer, left front, right front, right (rear) surround and left (rear) surround.

The fourth part of the equation requires separate and sufficient amplification for each of the final analog sound-

streams sent out to the speakers. The fifth, and final, component is the speakers, which are available in a range of specifications. The closer the speakers' frequency response specifications are to the 20-hertz to 20,000-hertz range of human hearing, the better. Speaker placement is also important, as the ear is capable of differentiation of sound sources down to a 2- or 3-degree radius.

Making the connections to the digital audio decoder is easy. The decoder accepts 5.1 sound digital inputs on either or both of two fiber connections, one coaxial cable connection, and a standard analog stereo (two-sound channel) connection.



The insulating ring inside of a coaxial RCA output jack is color-coded orange, as shown on the back of this DVD player.



On a DISH receiver, the optical fiber connection is labeled Digital Audio Output. It accepts the TOSLINK fiber cable.



The digital sound decoder for this project is shown with the included power supply and one short TOSLINK fiber cable.



Use a speaker set, such as the Edifier M1550 shown above, in portable mode or install them permanently in the main TV viewing area in the coach.

Your connected devices govern which of the three connection types on the decoder to use. The recommendation is to use fiber from the DISH or DirecTV satellite receiver, fiber from a Blu-ray or DVD player, and use the coaxial as input from your OTA TV, if it's equipped with a coaxial sound output. You can buy fiber TOSLINK cables in various lengths to reach from the equipment to the location for the decoder.

Decide where to mount the decoder using hook-and-loop fastener and which connections you will use from the playback devices. Measure the distances needed for each cable and buy longer TOSLINK cables if the included one is not long enough. To connect the TOSLINK into the satellite receiver, remove the clear plastic caps protecting the cable-end plug jacks and insert the cable into the digital audio output jack. It only fits one way, as it is keyed. Then remove the black protective plug from one of the optical inputs on the decoder and insert the other end of the TOSLINK cable. Be sure to remove the clear protective cover. Repeat these steps for the Blu-ray/DVD player. For coaxial audio cable from the TV's or other device's output, buy a coaxial audio cable of the right length or make your own RG6 coaxial as long as needed with RCA plug-end conversions. On the 5.1 Audio Gear decoder, three stereo 1/8-inch plug jack cables are connected to the jacks on the back of the decoder that bring the six sound channels out to the amplifiers and speakers.

With limited dimensional space in motorhomes, amplification power measuring in the hundreds of watts is not necessary. Sound power levels are measured in decibels (dB). There is a narrow dB range where the sound is loud enough to easily hear — beginning with normal person-to-person speech at about 65 dB. Prolonged sound levels higher than 85 dB are strong enough to cause permanent hearing damage. Volume levels that are too high create short-frequency echoes from walls, and other surfaces, that detract from the sound quality. Multichannel sound is about improving quality so that the listener feels like they are at a live event. In the real world, sound waves reach the ear from all directions. By adding additional speakers from independent soundtracks, the sense of being part of the



The LFE speaker can be placed on the floor near the listener and its sound vibrations will be felt as much as heard.



Above: Portable speakers can be set up as needed. Below: Speakers can be permanently mounted in existing cabinets.



action is made more realistic without the need for extreme loudness.

There are two easy options for connection of the final two stages: the per-channel amplification and the speakers. The first is to leverage what is already installed in the motorhome. My Fleetwood Terra has two stereo sound systems; one associated with the Magnadyne Linear Series LS5050 DVD player/radio, and the other with the chassis car stereo in the

driver's area. Each has a stereo input jack, making four of the six needed channels available. Your motorhome may be similarly equipped with a Jensen DVD player/radio with a stereo input jack for an external sound source. Because my Terra has a center-cabin TV and the Magnadyne and its cabinet speakers are also located there, these work as the left-front and right-front speakers. The chassis radio and its ceiling-mounted speakers are to the rear of the cabin TV and seating, making the radio's amplifier and installed speakers ideal for the two rear-surround channels. With this setup, all I had to do was provide amplification and speakers for the LFE and center-sound speakers. I went to a secondhand store and for \$5 purchased a used Harman/Kardon 5.1 computer speaker set, and only used the amplifier, woofer and front speaker.

The second, simpler, option is to use an amplifier and speaker system intended for use with a computer. One such set is the Edifier M1550; its wiring connections are shown on the diagram on page 57.

An LFE channel delivers sound frequencies less than 200 hertz and the directionality of the sound source is mostly irrelevant, although the woofer is usually placed front and center along with the center speaker. The LFE speaker can sit on the floor near the listener and its sound vibrations will be felt as much as heard.

Speakers F/L, F/R, W/CEN, should be placed in front of the listener, and the R/S and L/S behind the listener. The radial speakers can be temporarily placed on a shelf or permanently mounted in an existing speaker cabinet next to the factory-installed ones. The rule for placement is to keep both front and back pairs equidistant from the listener, and make sure the right and left speakers in each pair are separated at least 4 feet from each other, maintaining an equal distance from the listener, if possible.

For operation, follow the manual instructions to select 2.1 or 5.1 sound and to switch on any one of four inputs. Installing this small-scale decoder and modest amplification can bring any motorhome up to theater-like sound quality. ♦



Dennis C. Brewer and wife, Penny, have spent four years full-timing and three years snowbirding in their motorhome. Dennis is a technology author and consultant.

THE VOLTS ARE IN

UNDERSTANDING HOW MOTORHOME BATTERIES OPERATE, AND HOW TO MAINTAIN THEM, CAN LEAD TO EASIER TRAVELS

by BOB CARPENTER AND CHRIS HEMER

When all goes well on an RV trip, we rarely stop to reflect on the systems and components we rely upon to have a positive experience even when our surroundings may be less than accommodating. And when it comes right down to it, batteries may be the single most important part of the equation; they get the motorhome started, run the 12-volt DC electrical system, even operate some 120-volt AC appliances with the help of an inverter. As such, understanding how they operate, and how to maintain them should be considered a priority — or they'll get your attention by failing at the worst possible time.

A LITTLE HISTORY

Batteries have been starting motor vehicles since about 1912 when Cadillac put an electric starter on production models. Less than a decade later, Ford ditched hand-crank starting on its Model T, and the rush for batteries was on.

Way back then, a battery was made of lead and acid, and you might be surprised to learn that the majority of batteries today are still made with essentially the same ingredients. The rechargeable battery that starts a motorhome engine is typically a lead-acid type that uses six galvanic (electric currents produced by a chemical reaction) cells in series to provide a 12-volt system. The battery usually has six plates of lead, additional lead dioxide plates, and is submerged in a solution of sulfuric acid and water called electrolyte. The resultant chemical reaction releases electrons and allows them to flow through conductors to produce electricity. This type of battery is called a flooded cell.

Now, more than 100 years later, the demands that we put on batteries have gone up dramatically. Just starting the



Need a new battery? Some retail outlets only offer one brand, but that particular model may not have the specs you're looking for. Do your research first, then you can make a more informed decision.



Building a battery bank that will meet the demands of the individual owner will usually be dictated by the available space to mount the batteries. Here, two slide-out trays can handle four batteries. It's important to have access to the batteries for maintenance and enough clearance to remove caps to replenish flooded-cell batteries.

engine is only one of its duties. Today's motorhomes often come with navigation units, power-adjustable seats with electric heating and more. And over the years, consumers have found plenty more electric-powered devices to add to their rigs too, from auxiliary lighting to power-operated steps, awnings and more.



Batteries get used and abused more often than they are treated kindly. Keeping them charged and clean, and discharging them properly, are usually all it takes to get maximum battery life.

BATTERY TYPES

As the years progressed, battery technology changed to keep up with rising demands. Flooded-cell batteries are still the most widely used batteries today — but perhaps the greatest advancement was the valve-regulated lead-acid (VRLA) design. Commonly called sealed lead-acid batteries or maintenance-free batteries, VRLA batteries are sealed and have a one-way valve to vent gases if they exceed atmospheric pressure by a selected amount.

A gel battery, also known as gel cell, is one in which silicates are added to the electrolyte material to make it a gel. These VRLA batteries are of the maintenance-free variety but should not be confused with absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries, which are incorrectly referred to as gel-cell batteries. An AGM battery utilizes a fiberglass mat material in which the electrolyte has been absorbed. These batteries are therefore “dry” internally and are more resistant to vibration and shock than their flooded-cell counterparts.

STARTING BATTERIES VERSUS DEEP-CYCLE

Every RVer has two types of batteries to deal with: the batteries that start the engine (and typically the generator, if



AGM technology batteries, such as the Intimidator from Deka, are much more durable, cannot spill and live better with periods of infrequent use. They are available for both starting and deep-cycle applications.

so equipped), and deep-cycle batteries that provide 12-volt DC power when not plugged in.

When considering a new starting battery, most owners are prone to the bigger-is-better mentality, but you might be surprised to learn that this isn't always the case. For example, most of us gravitate toward the battery with the highest possible cold cranking amps (CCA) or the ability to start an engine in cold temperatures. Those of us who live in hot climates likewise gravitate toward high-CCA batteries because we know that hot engines can also be difficult to crank, but in this case, higher CCA is not the solution. The higher the CCA rating, the more plates per cell the battery has, which displaces the liquid electrolyte and actually makes the battery run hotter. A hot battery doesn't perform as intended, and won't last as long.

Since most motorhomes have electrical accessories that can be used when the engine is turned off as well as parasitic components like stereo presets and the carbon monoxide (CO) detector, it's possible to exceed the capacity of the stock battery and discharge it more than it was intended. This is why you should seek a battery with maximum reserve capacity. This attribute, which often isn't on the battery's label, is the amount of minutes the battery will take to discharge with a 25-amp draw. For example, a 120-minute reserve-capacity battery would be completely discharged after two hours but could still possibly start the engine after one hour. The counterperson at an



Gel batteries, like this one from Interstate, can be mounted in virtually any position.



Lifeline batteries are nonspillable and are manufactured to aircraft-class construction, passing military specifications for shock and vibration.



The Odyssey Extreme AGM battery boasts 1,150 CCA and 205 minutes of reserve capacity. These batteries have 99.99 percent virgin lead, not lead alloy.

auto parts store should be able to look up the reserve capacity of the battery (or batteries) you're considering. Alternately, the technical services department of a battery company can also help you find a battery with adequate reserve capacity.

A deep-cycle battery delivers a lower level of power for a much longer period of time. Deep-cycle batteries don't have as



If batteries are used through a power inverter to run a microwave, TV and other 120-volt AC appliance when dry camping, a gel-design deep-cycle battery like the Deka Dominator is a good choice.

many CCA as starting batteries and won't provide as many starts. However, where a starting battery might survive only 20 to 30 deep discharges, a deep-cycle battery can withstand repetitive discharges to a 50 percent depth of discharge or more and continue to provide the rated capacity

AN ABBREVIATED HISTORY OF BATTERIES

- 1800:** Italian physicist Alessandro Volta makes the first battery, the voltaic pile, using stacks of zinc, copper and saltwater-moistened cardboard.
- 1859:** French physicist Gaston Planté comes up with the lead-acid battery that we are all familiar with as a device for starting vehicles.
- 1866:** French chemist Georges Leclanché creates what evolves into the dry-cell battery. It's much cheaper to construct and more robust.
- 1896:** Cleveland's National Carbon Company (later the Eveready Battery Company and today known as Energizer) makes the first commercially available battery, the 1.5-volt Columbia.
- 1900s:** Thomas Edison improves the car battery, making it lighter and cheaper to manufacture. However, several missteps lead to his battery missing out on powering electric-starter motors on vehicles, which come to prominence around 1912.
- 1960s:** German engineers come up with a spill-proof lead-acid gel-cell battery. The batteries contain sulfuric acid mixed with silica powder to form a gel-type substance.
- 1970s-'80s:** The lead-acid car battery continues to be refined with absorbent glass mat (AGM) technology. The acid is not mixed with a gel, but instead microfibers keep the acid contained. Internal ventilation systems prevent spilling.
- 2000s:** Lithium-ion batteries become popular for use in laptop computers, mobile phones, digital cameras and toys, as well as in electric cars and golf carts. They are still prohibitively expensive for use in an RV.



AGM batteries, like this Exide, can be recharged much faster than a flooded-cell battery. It takes about two to three hours for a full charge compared to eight to 10 hours for a flooded cell.



Running two golf-cart batteries in series (to get 12 volts) is a common RV practice.



Trojan's OverDrive AGM 31 is a true deep-cycle battery designed for the rigors and abuse of deep-discharge situations, but still able to give a coach a strong starting crank.



Optima Batteries use SpiraCell technology in an AGM design for both tight manufacturing control and a unique look that has seen strong sales since coming to the market in the early '90s.

after hundreds of cycles. This characteristic, combined with more reserve capacity, makes deep-cycle batteries ideal for use in an RV application.

A deep-cycle battery differs from a starting battery in its internal construction. There are typically fewer plates inside a deep-cycle battery than a starting battery, but they are normally thicker and hold more lead-oxide paste, which chemically reacts with the sulfuric acid of the electrolyte. The paste itself is usually a higher density as well.

In an RV, reserve capacity is the primary consideration, and you can get more by going bigger, by adding batteries, or by doing both. Most motorhomes have more than one house battery, and if they suit your needs already, you may choose to go with direct replacements, or upgrade to bigger batteries, if they'll fit. You'll want batteries with the highest amp-hour (Ah) rating you can find. For example, a 100-Ah battery is one that will produce 5 amps for 20 hours at 80 degrees Fahrenheit (26.7 Celsius) before it reaches 1.75 volts per cell, or 10.5 volts.

For those with more demanding power needs, adding 12-volt batteries and connecting them in parallel will double the amount of time before the batteries are discharged. If you go this route, you might as well opt for 6-volt golf-cart batteries, which are connected in series to produce 12 volts. This setup can endure more deep discharges than a 12-volt marine/RV product (sometimes twice as many), which makes it popular with motorhome owners who want the ability to operate their rigs through an inverter on battery power only. Remember: Parallel combines amps, not voltage. Series com-

bines voltage, not amps.

If your motorhome has multiple batteries, it's important to consider them as a single system. As such, it's not a good idea to replace or upgrade only one battery; all of the batteries should be replaced with the same size and type. Placing a new battery in parallel with older or weaker batteries makes the new one work harder and will eventually make it as weak as the others.

BATTERY MAINTENANCE

Battery maintenance is the key to long-lasting performance, although it's typically not required as frequently as it once was. Though the vast majority of batteries in use today are the flooded-cell variety, most of these, even those with removable caps, are still considered maintenance-free under normal conditions. However, it is still a good practice to have the battery visually inspected and tested every few months.

If the battery does require water, it is preferred to replenish with distilled water, though tap water is acceptable in a pinch. Also, make sure that the electrolyte (water) covers the plates inside by a minimum of ½ inch. If air contacts those plates for any length of time, it hardens the chemical-paste material on the plates and causes them to sulfate. Once that happens, there is a good chance that part of the plate is not going to be chemically usable anymore. In other words, the percentage of battery performance that's lost is not coming back.

Keeping batteries charged is obviously important, but what may not be so obvious is how to keep them charged. Leaving a motorhome plugged in when

not in use isn't necessarily a good idea, as an overzealous charger can cook the batteries dry. A simple check is to plug the rig in for about a week; if the battery gets hot or loses water, it's being overcharged and shouldn't be left plugged in. Otherwise, the charger can be plugged in for a couple of weeks at a time, but a more reliable solution is to charge the batteries for a day or so once a month. This will keep them topped off without the danger of overcharging.

If the batteries are removed from the motorhome and you want to recharge them, make sure a compatible battery charger is used. It is best to recharge batteries at a current (amp) level of battery amp-hours divided by 5 for fast charging, 10 for slower charging. Example: A 100-Ah battery divided by 5 equals a 20-amp charger. Many battery chargers have adjustable amp settings, which is handy for different battery types.

RECYCLING



While it might seem on the surface that a product made of lead and acid would be a nightmare for recycling, the reality is quite the opposite. About 98 percent of all battery lead is recycled. Compare that to 55 percent of aluminum cans, 45 percent of newspapers, 26 percent of glass bottles and 26 percent of tires. Being first in class for recycling is the result of a closed-loop life cycle; a brand-new battery actually contains 60 to 80 percent recycled lead and plastic. Every time a battery is discarded, it is sent to a permitted recycler where the lead and plastic are reclaimed using strict environmental controls and then sent to a new battery manufacturer.



A hydrometer is an easy and inexpensive way to check the health of an open-cell battery. Simply insert the tube into a cell, squeeze and release the bulb, and electrolyte (water) is drawn into the hydrometer's chamber. Ideally, the specific gravity number should be 1.265 to 1.275 when fully charged. Repeating this process in each cell will help determine if there are any weak or dead cells. Temperature-correcting hydrometers (not shown) are best.

Battery maintainers are also a popular choice for keeping batteries topped off, but here again, make sure it's compatible with the battery or batteries. Prior to using the maintainer for an extended period of time, make sure the unit is actually maintaining the proper voltage and check to see if it's making the battery lose water. After a few days, disconnect the maintainer for a couple of hours and then use a voltmeter or hydrometer to check the level of charge. A voltmeter should be around 12.7 to 12.8 volts, while a hydrometer should show a specific gravity number of 1.265 to 1.275, meaning the battery is at or near 100 percent charged.

After the batteries have sat for several months without charging or being on a maintenance charge, they may require equalization. While this is a fairly involved topic unto itself, suffice it to say that equalization is a term meaning to desulfate or equalize individual cells of a battery. This is done through the use of a charger or converter that has the ability to charge at a high voltage (typically 15.6 to 16.2 volts) at a low current level in an at-



tempt to break the sulfate crystals off the inner-cell paste material. Some manufacturers recommend equalization after 30 to 50 charge/discharge cycles, while others don't recommend equalization at all;

Handheld battery-load testers are available for as little as \$35. However, they typically apply only 75 to 85 amps, which is not adequate to test an automotive starting battery with high CCA. To do this correctly requires a professional-quality load tester that can apply half of the battery's CCA for 15 seconds.



A digital voltmeter, or multimeter, is a great tool. The one shown here is a professional model, but you can find a simple one for around \$20. Touch the probes to the appropriate terminals, and the battery's voltage is displayed on the screen. This one's at 12.33 volts — about 70 percent charged.

check with the battery manufacturer to be sure. Note: Battery equalization is for flooded-cell batteries only. Don't attempt to equalize a gel-cell or AGM battery.

Last but not least, always make sure the battery is properly secured, the terminals are clean and the connections are tight. An improperly secured battery can bang around on its tray, causing internal damage. Loose or dirty connections can cause starting or charging problems.

If the terminals are caked in whitish powder, it's time for a thorough cleaning. Disconnect the battery, then mix about one part baking soda in four parts water and pour it over the terminals. When the foaming subsides, rinse well with water, and the terminals should be clean. Mix another batch, and dip the connectors (terminals), one at a time. Dry everything thoroughly, reconnect the terminals and apply a small amount of grease or commercial terminal protectant to the connections to help retard oxidation.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Battery technology continues to evolve, and advances in lithium-ion engineering may completely upend the industry eventually. But for now, lead acid is still the mainstay of the RV market. It is important to pick the right product for the application and then pay attention to it over the years.

Like one battery manufacturer says in its literature, "It's not always blue skies and open roads. Be ready." ♦

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SUNSEEKER 3170 DS

Class C from Forest River offers thoughtful family-friendly amenities inside and out

Ah, the great outdoors. The perfect place to wet a line, go for a hike, explore the mountainside or watch TV. Wait, what?! Like it or not, today's generation of RVers has come to expect all the luxuries of home when in their rig, and that includes the evening news or Friday-night flick. And because that new money definitely talks, RV manufacturers have taken notice and offered up floorplans that not only include top-shelf entertainment amenities, but also a comfortable den-like atmosphere in which to view them. In fact, Forest River subscribes so heavily to that notion that the RV builder has included *four* separate, distinct viewing areas, each with its own TV. My initial reaction when touring the delightfully over-the-top Sunseeker 3170 DS was, "What, they couldn't put a TV in the bathroom?"

All kidding aside, the clever use of available space for entertainment areas truly sets the 3170 DS apart from similar floorplans. As the tech-savvy family troupe RVers emerge onto the scene, the mid-coach bunk layout is definitely gaining in popularity. But the Sunseeker 3170 DS is the first instance this tester has encountered of a manufacturer truly embracing the possibilities of a family of adults/teens/pre-teens/toddlers and their electronic leisure-time preferences in a relatively affordable price point.

Of course, the allure of the Sunseeker goes well beyond some high-definition TVs. Forest River has also seen fit to



address some of the everyday usability concerns of this type of floorplan, including a few practical yet necessary tweaks to the norm.

Those tweaks begin on the coach's exterior. The rear storage compartment is not only pass-through, but the lockable rotocast lining means cleanup from road grime (and things like fish guts, campsite mud and barbecue grease) is rather easy. The electric awning with LED lights is another high-tech inclusion, and the integrated access step makes for effortless passage in and out of the coach. The walls are made from 2-inch gelcoat fiberglass over an aluminum structure with steel backers and block-foam insulation. The fiberglass front cap (\$350), fiberglass roof and aluminum running boards not only look great, but should hold up to the elements in the long run.

Oh, and did I mention the optional exterior entertainment center (\$1,085)? More front than center, the 32-inch TV, DVD player and integrated speakers are a pleasant surprise. Viewing in the midday sun is a bit difficult (glare plagues RVs as well as residential living rooms), and I found myself wishing the compartment hinged up rather than down so I could use the door to help block the sun. But talk about splitting hairs ... the entertainment setup outside worked as advertised once the light dimmed and the grill was fired up.

Upon entering the Sunseeker, there's an "Easy-Access" battery compartment within the entry steps that features a battery shut-off switch in a convenient location. There is a pair of shallow storage cabinets immediately





SPECIFICATIONS

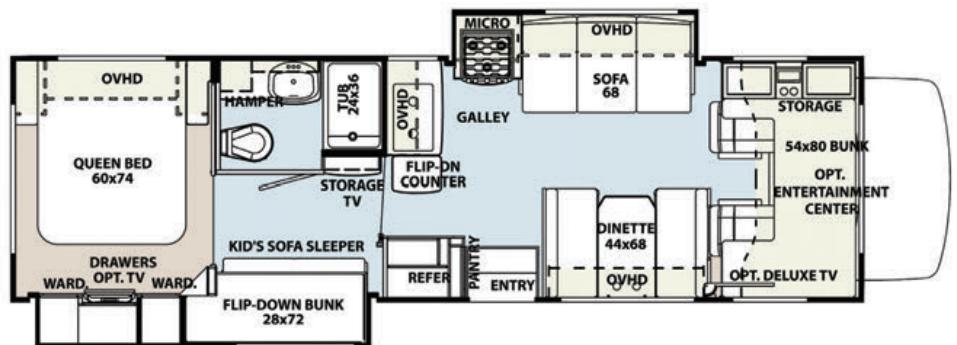
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FUEL: 55 GAL	FRESHWATER CAP: 50 GAL
GVWR: 14,500 LBS	GRAY-WATER CAP: 39 GAL
EXT. LENGTH: 32' 3"	BLACK-WATER CAP: 39 GAL
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on your left that will likely become catchalls, but your eyes are immediately drawn to the cabover area, which features a 32-inch TV (that's No. 2), surround sound (\$413) and a dual twin-bed area (\$1,113). A stepladder that mounts to the wall when not in use, and an integrated "storage" tray in the cabover, complete with cup-holders and bins for remotes, DVDs, iPods and such, are refreshing inclusions. The TV is mounted on a swing arm that makes viewing from most any angle in the living area (save the dinette immediately below it) a pretty easy affair.

The four-person Ultraleather dinette offers four belted positions for travel, and also integrated storage drawers beneath the seats. A pair of cup-holders is molded into the tabletop, and three more line the adjacent window (yet another nod to the RVing family). The Ultraleather sofa bed and overhead storage across the way share the 100-inch streetside slide with part of the galley.

The galley, at first glance, is exactly what's expected in this configuration. However, a little living therein reveals some pretty cool add-ons. The seemingly no-brainer addition of a flip-up counter extension greatly improves counterspace for meal prep; that you can't open the wood-panel (\$105) 6-cubic-foot fridge completely when the extension is in place is entirely forgivable (just plan ahead). I was especially impressed with a particular drawer configuration below the sink. Where the under-sink plumbing would normally not allow for a second drawer, Forest River has simply made the drawer shorter to make it work. The more, the merrier when it comes to storage, even if it's in a



smaller area. The rest of the galley consists of the standard three-burner range, oven and microwave, in addition to a stainless-steel sink and slightly upgraded hardware.

Heading rearward takes you to the bunk area, which is separated from the galley via an accordion door. To increase versatility, the top bunk can be raised and the bottom bunk transformed into a second jackknife sofa, a wonderful decision I think we'll see more of. The area also gets its own TV setup, a 19-inch flatscreen (No. 3) and immediate access to the TV/DVD/CD/MP3 unit that

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SUNSEEKER 3170 DS

fuels the RV's entertainment. Each bunk has a light, curtains for privacy and a nifty mesh net-type storage pocket for odds and ends.

The lav also is a pleasant surprise, with a mirrored medicine cabinet, linen storage, a laundry cabinet and a porcelain toilet all located amidships. The shower/tub features a tri-fold sliding glass door, designed to maximize space in the shower. A curved skylight instead of the flat one would make for a bit more headroom for taller RVers.

The master bedroom actually feels like a suite, with plush carpeting and the fact that it's separated from the rest of the motorhome by a solid sliding door. A large mirrored wardrobe with two hanging-clothes cabinets and eight drawers pleasantly dominates the curbside wall, sharing the massive 11-foot, 4-inch slide with the bunkhouse down the hall. It's on that wardrobe that you'll find TV No. 4, a 21-incher mounted (\$455 with DVD player) to a cabinet door that can be swung open to reveal storage. Dual nightstands are a plus around the residential-type comfy bed upgrade (\$301), but I would have appreciated outlets for charging electronics below, especially in such a tech-savvy coach. Due to the rear pass-through storage, under-bed real estate is at a minimum, but the space is still perfect for linens, pillows and the like.

The Sunseeker 3170 DS doesn't exactly break new ground; it's part of a now-trending need for bunk-house type Class C's that can accommodate the whole family (and a couple friends). But what is unique about the 3170 DS is Forest River's attention to detail, and its foresight into how the intended audience will likely use the motorhome once the sun goes down. Because, for better or worse, the days of gin rummy, Sorry! and I Spy are likely long gone. Let's continue to welcome in the wired, tuned-in HDTV generation with open arms.

Special thanks to RV Outlet Mall in Georgetown, Texas, 800-275-6555, www.rvoutletmall.com ♦



Kristopher Bunker, the former editor of *Trailer Life* magazine, has been RVing for more than a decade and is currently a freelance writer and stay-at-home dad.

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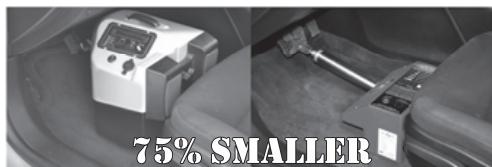


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2014 RV OOPS AWARDS

OUR ANNUAL COUNTDOWN OF THE TOP 10 MOTORHOME MISHAPS, FROM DUMB TO DUMBEST

by LARRY MACDONALD

Every year, adventurous folks like us go camping in our motorhomes and every year, we do some dumb things. Mostly, they are minor mistakes like running out of fuel or forgetting to unplug the power cord when leaving a campsite. But sometimes they are major blunders, like last year's winner who seriously scraped the side of his new motorhome on a pole at customs when he was asked to pull over for an inspection.

I've noted in previous RV Oops Awards that there is one thing certain about RVing blunders: the person responsible is not likely to make the same mistake twice. Well, this year's winner proved me wrong! With that confession out of the way, let's take a look at the following mishaps, which I rated on a 10-point scale from "Dumb" to "Dumbest." My hope is that this knowledge will help prevent fellow RVers from making the same mistakes.

DUMB THINGS NO. 10 RE-CAL-CU-LATING

The use of a GPS to find our way to campgrounds, gas stations and other locations has made life easier for RVers. Well, sometimes! My friend, Anne, was taking her first cross-country trip in her Class C and had purchased a GPS to make life easier. I suggested that she always use a map to confirm the route recommended by the GPS. She obviously ignored this advice when she tried to get to a campground and "Old Faithful" told her to

turn right at an intersection. A rural road with a slight upgrade soon became steep and winding with overhanging trees on the left and a cliff on the right, forcing Anne to ride the center. The 30-mile road dead-ended at a seldom-visited fort. OOPS! She then had to backtrack (a total of 60 nerve-wracking miles) to the intersection, where turning left would have taken her almost immediately to the campground.

Anne confessed that she didn't use a map to confirm her route, adding some words of wisdom: "Eating humble pie is low in calories ... but high in humility."

NO. 9 ROCKET MAN

The manager of the lot where Bruce stores his Class A called to inform Bruce that a rock thrown from a lawnmower had broken his door window. The window was replaced, courtesy of the manager. To prevent a recurrence, Bruce decided to drape a towel over the top of the door and down the outside, covering the window. To do this, he stood on the steps facing outward with the door open in front of him and the partially open screen door behind him. As he swung the towel over, he accidentally backed into the screen door and the steps retracted. The electric switch was positioned in the mode that retracted the steps if any door was closed. Here is Bruce's description of the event in his own words: "The steps were fast, really fast, clamping the back of

my running shoes and sending me flying out onto the driveway. My feet came out of the shoes and I ended up horizontal on the gravel with a twisted knee and ankle. Robin Williams would be proud of me.”

NO. 8 WINDY CITY

This incident is the first time we've had multiple winners for an RV Oops Award. Fortunately, I was there to take notes, but not names.

Near Palm Springs, a serious windstorm with blowing sand arrived in mid-afternoon, knocking down a few trees and generally causing havoc in the campground. As a precaution when the wind picked up, I closed my windows and hatches and pulled in the slides. After the wind subsided, I went outside to assess damages. Our doormat had blown onto the roadway. Other campers were less fortunate.

A fellow was inspecting one of his vinyl slide canopies, which had ripped away from the side of his coach and was merrily flapping in the breeze. Two other guys were searching downwind for a plastic roof vent, which had been left open, and a canvas wheel cover. A couple of satellite dishes were lying on their sides. A sewer hose had become dislodged from the drainpipe, resulting in gray water being spewed about the site (which the owner wasn't aware of until I told him). Later, I spoke with a couple who had gone away and left their windows and hatches open. A substantial layer of sand had settled on every horizontal surface throughout their motorhome. I can imagine: Even with our windows and hatches closed, we were finding sand in nooks and crannies for days afterward.

Helpful hint: Always keep an eye on the weather. If severe storms are forecast, secure everything outside, and close your windows, hatches and slides.

NO. 7 UFO

Mike was driving his coach on a busy freeway when a pickup truck loaded with various construction items passed and moved over in front of him. Within a mile or so, a large piece of plywood came flying out of the back of the truck and sailed up over the top of his motorhome. KABOOM! He pulled over at the first opportunity to in-

spect the damage. The wood had mangled his satellite dish to the point where it had to be replaced. While costly, this accident could have been worse — much worse — if that sheet of plywood had come through the windshield.

Helpful hint: Always be aware of vehicles in front of you carrying loads that appear to be unsecured. If you choose not to pass them, then slow down to allow sufficient stopping distance should something fall off or become airborne.

NO. 6 DIRTY LAUNDRY

Jay and Wendy purchased a new motorhome with a fancy Italian-made washer/dryer combo, which worked fine during their first winter in the South. After returning home, they stored their coach for six months. On their second trip south, the washer stopped working. A mobile RV technician diagnosed the problem as a faulty motor and replaced it under the warranty conditions, which did not cover the \$65 service call.

On their next trip south, the washer quit again. They called the same mobile technician who again replaced the motor, still under warranty, and again charged for the service call. This time, he recommended that the washer be used regularly while in storage to lubricate the motor bearings. Wendy remarked, “I used this opportunity to do a monthly load of wash.” They've had no further problems with the washer motor.

Helpful hint: Appliances, and motorhomes in general, have less mechanical issues when used on a regular basis.

DUMBER THINGS NO. 5 WHAT'S ON TV?

Not long ago, I was casually watching a couple packing up their motorhome, preparing to leave their pull-through site. Everything was going according to plan; hoses and cables were disconnected and stored. And then they departed. Left behind was their disconnected satellite dish, standing on a tripod about 20 feet away from the pad. The next morning, I informed the campground office and it was subsequently removed, hopefully claimed by its owner.

Nearly every RVer I know has left something behind when departing from a campsite — usually a small item like

a doormat, tablecloth, faucet fitting or leveling blocks. In almost all cases, they simply didn't inspect their site after they pulled out. But forgetting something as important as a satellite dish qualifies this anonymous couple for a Dumber Award.

NO. 4 IN THE HOT SEAT

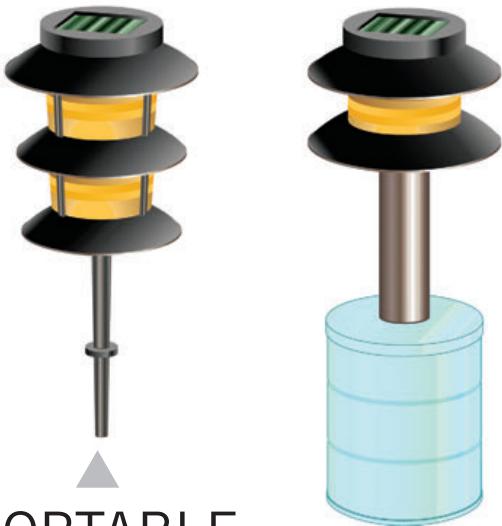
Barry and Joan's motorhome has a table lamp, which is plugged into a timer, programmed to turn on in the early evening. One day after arriving at a campground and plugging into electricity, Barry temporarily placed the lamp with the shade removed onto the driver's seat while he opened slides and hooked up hoses. Not too long after, Joan yelled frantically, “Our coach is filling with smoke!” Apparently, the timer decided it was time for the light to come on while the lamp was lying on the seat. OOPS! The heated bulb melted the leatherette and burned a large hole in the seat, which they covered with a blanket until a new seat could be installed at a cost of \$600. Barry confessed, “I was in the hot seat for some time after that one.”

NO. 3 I GO WHERE I'M TOWED TO ... USUALLY

Driving his motorhome on a side road, David noted a sign, “Uneven Railroad Crossing,” and slowed to 35 MPH — still too fast. A “severe jounce” prompted a quick check of the rear-view monitor ... their tow car appeared to be following along normally so they proceeded to their campground. Upon inspection, every hanger in the rear closet had jumped off the rod. Even worse, the hitch receiver was bent downward. The next day, being close to home, David decided to drive “as tenderly as possible.”

On the final stretch of freeway, David was driving under the posted limit in the right lane when they heard a disturbing CLUNK-A-CLUNK. His wife, Jane, looked at the rear-view monitor and yelled, “The Jeep isn't attached!” David immediately pulled over onto the right-hand shoulder and slowed to a stop. They watched in horror as their Jeep passed them and headed across two lanes of heavy traffic, onto a narrow strip of median and continued along the guardrail for about a quarter-mile before stopping. When the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 70



PORTABLE SOLAR LIGHT

Individual solar-lamp assemblies are available at many hardware stores and home centers, and they make nice light sources while camping. In order to place the solar light in the sun for charging, it needs to be portable. Cover or paint a 13- to 16-ounce coffee can or a 1-gallon paint can. Cut a hole in the cover for the diameter of the solar-light stem. Insert the light fixture through the hole into the empty can. Fill the can with sand, stones, plaster or cement to add weight. During the day, place the can in full sun, and at night move the light to show the way to your entrance door. Simply store in a compartment between uses.

ANNA VAN ETTEN | MAPLECREST, NEW YORK

HOLD TIGHT ▶



Outdoor tablecloths often fly up in the wind. Commercial hold-down springs are too small for the thick concrete or very thick wooden tables found in many parks. At the hardware store, I bought a couple feet of 6-inch PVC pipe and sliced the piping into 2-inch-wide circular sections. Then I made a cut across each circle to allow it to spring open. After the cutting, I sanded the edges smooth. These rings spring open to fit virtually any table thickness, and always hold tightly.

ROBERT WHITE | FRANKLIN, KENTUCKY

SHE'S HOOKED

On trips to the beach, we use the outside spray nozzle often. My wife complained about having to coil the hose back each time she used it. So she picked up a plastic hook, with adhesive backing, at a kitchen-supply store. Its color matches the outside of our RV and has stayed on securely for more than two years.

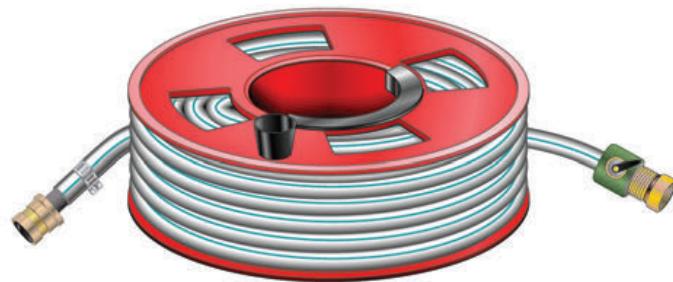
BILL COOK | DULUTH, GEORGIA

REEL GENIUS

I made a water-hose holder from a reel that's generally used

to wind up electric cords. The reels are sold at all types of stores, including Walmart. Mine holds 25 feet of hose. When I roll the hose, I start at the male (RV) end and leave about 2 feet unwound (or the length you need to reach the city water hookup from the ground), then I roll up the rest of the hose. At the campground, when we are ready to hook up, I take the 2-foot section and hook it to the RV. Then, with the reel on the ground, I unroll only as much hose as needed to reach the water spigot.

RICHARD CARTWRIGHT | ARLINGTON, NEBRASKA ♦



WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Quick Tips, *MotorHome's* monthly column of handy, simple tips by fellow RVers, is looking for submissions. Please send your favorite DIY ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com. Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings. If your tip is selected for publication, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.

hitch fell off, the triangular tow-bar assembly dropped to the ground and folded back under, acting as a rudder to keep the vehicle headed mostly straight ahead. The split-ring fastener on the breakaway switch had also failed so the brakes were not applied. Safety chains, attached to the hitch, went along for the ride.

Shortly afterward, the police arrived and stopped traffic while David drove the wayward Jeep over to the right-hand shoulder where he detached the tow bar. Considering the damages and injuries that might have resulted from their Jeep's first solo flight, this couple was lucky: A new hitch receiver, tow-bar assembly, and some structural and cosmetic body work came to only \$2,500.

Isn't it amazing that a hitch receiver rated at 10,000 pounds can fail after just one jounce? Driving, no matter how tenderly, with a bent hitch receiver or tow bar is not recommended, especially on a freeway!

NO. 2 BLUB, BLUB, BLUB

Gerry and Sally enjoy camping in their Class A diesel pusher and since they also enjoy fishing, they often tow a small boat on a trailer. One day, they decided to launch their boat near a lakeside campground. Gerry undid the straps holding the boat to the trailer and remained in the boat while Sally backed the motorhome down the launch ramp. When the boat was just floating off the trailer, Gerry yelled, "STOP!" but the motorhome just kept moving backward ... so far that water covered the engine causing it to stall. Neither Gerry nor Sally got wet, but their motorhome sure did — nearly up to the driver's seat.

What happened isn't exactly clear. Sally maintains that when she put the brakes on, the coach kept moving backward. Did she inadvertently push on the accelerator instead of the brake pedal? Did the brakes stop working? Or were the brakes ineffective because the ramp was slippery? What we do know is that they called for a very large tow truck to haul their motorhome and boat trailer out of the water. They also paid a very large bill to get their coach ready for their next camping trip. Gerry insisted, "Never again will we launch our boat with the motorhome; we'll fish from shore if we have to."

**DUMBEST THING
NO. 1 DOUBLE DUMB**

Grant and Doreen pulled their Class A motorhome into a fuel station to fill up before going to their campsite. When leaving, Grant moved ahead and while turning sharply heard a terrible grinding and ripping noise. Upon getting out and inspecting the damage, they saw that the dolly fender was crumbled and the tire torn to shreds, which was caused by colliding with the raised concrete island at the fuel pump. After backing the car off the dolly, Doreen drove behind the damaged dolly to the nearby campsite. Grant put their spare tire on the dolly to drive home, where they had everything repaired at a body shop.

Talk about learning from our experiences: The very next time they went to that campground, Grant decided to get fuel at the same station. When they were ready to leave, Doreen reminded him of the previous disaster. "I remember," he said, but as he pulled out, guess what? Again, the dolly hit the raised concrete island and caused the same damages. Now how dumb is that? Well, it's dumb enough to earn this year's No. 1 RV Oops Award. I asked Doreen if they planned to get fuel at that station in the future. She replied, "Yes, but only when the dolly is safely back at the campground."

Hopefully, with the possible exception of Grant, we can learn from the mistakes of other RVers so we don't repeat those blunders. And that's what these awards are all about.

If you've had a "misadventure" while RVing, please email me at CaptnMac@shaw.ca and describe the incident as well as how it might have been prevented. With any luck at all, you may qualify for an RV Oops Award next year. Names are changed so you needn't worry about being identified, unless of course you want bragging rights to impress your friends.

And finally, thanks to those who have so willingly shared your stories, providing me with an array of blunders from which to choose. ♦



Larry MacDonald is a Canadian free-lancer who sold his "sticks and bricks" home several years ago and now travels full time with his wife, dog and cat. He enjoys writing about life on the road.

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While every effort is made to maintain accuracy and completeness, last-minute changes may occasionally result in omissions or errors.

techsavvy

HANDS-ON | HOT LINE | COACH & POWERTRAIN

HANDS-ON | *by* KEVIN LIVINGSTON



CALMING FIDO

Anxious dogs (and cats) that become panicked with loud noises and inattention are easily comforted by wearing a ThunderShirt that surrounds their torso



Thunder and other loud noises can make a dog fidgety, scared and nervous enough to jump into your lap, looking for comfort. Small dogs are particularly prone to nervous behavior when subjected to strangers or left alone in a motorhome or in a pen on the patio. Almost everyone who spends time in campgrounds has a story to tell about yapping dogs. Calming down a dog that's frightened or anxious can be a tall order, requiring constant "baby-sitting." Few dog owners want to leave their best friend at home, so they put up with the barking and less-than-stellar behavior while on RV trips. The ThunderShirt is an innovative product that comforts a dog without constant coddling — or having an 80-pound animal parked on your lap.

The ThunderShirt is comprised of a blend of cotton, polyester, spandex and carefully located hook-and-loop strips that wrap around the dog and provide a truly unique effect once fitted correctly. This embracing effect is created by supplying gentle hugging and constant pressure on the dog's torso, thereby causing a calming sensation. Reaching this goal is easily accomplished thanks to just the right amount of elasticity from the combination of materials. This technique is based on the same principles as cattle-squeeze chutes and swaddling an infant, which have proven to be useful techniques for a long time.

Although the ThunderShirt may seem very straightforward and simplistic, there are a couple of steps that will greatly increase the success of use, all of which are conveniently printed on a user-friendly instruction sheet. Before proceeding to the fitting portion, take time to read the instructions and then follow the "Initial Fitting and Conditioning" section precisely. Most dogs will reject having the ThunderShirt on their torso at first, so there are suggestions on how to get the dog to accept something new. For example, to help acclimate your dog, it's suggested to use the ThunderShirt as a "plate" where a food treat can be placed. Dogs associate comfort and trust with food. From here it's on to the "Fitting Instructions," where part identifica-

tion is necessary before being able to perform the four steps required to achieve the right fit. Once familiar with everything, it's basically a matter of placing the ThunderShirt on the dog's back and connecting the short flap with the long flap under the torso, making sure to allow for a comfortable yet snug fit. Finish up by securing the chest straps and it's ready to comfort the dog.

So, does it really work? In one definitive word, yes! The test subject for this project was an anxiety-ridden 6½-pound Chihuahua that had fits when it came time to get in a vehicle. Once little Cy (short for Coyote) was introduced to the ThunderShirt and placed into the car or motorhome, he immediately showed signs of improvement and was far less shaky than ever before. After several hours of vehicle rides and wearing the ThunderShirt, Cy gladly gets into the dinghy and/or motorhome without any indication of shaking and has shown huge confidence improvements. In fact, quite often now he'll roam freely and looks forward to rides.

As conscientious owners, we were delighted that our dog could be calmed down without the use of drugs. The ThunderShirt is available in sizes to fit all dogs and retails for \$39.95. There are optional colors available for an additional \$5 and the shirt can even be custom-embroidered for \$10. It's backed by a 100 percent satisfaction guarantee, and these shirts are also available for cats.

Traveling without stress — for both dogs and owners — has never been possible (for us) before wearing the ThunderShirt. It's a simple solution to an age-old problem.

ThunderWorks, 866-892-2078, www.thundershirt.com ♦





Labor Dispute

WHEN A REPAIR SHOP FAILED TO CALL THE CLAIMS ADMINISTRATOR FOR PREAUTHORIZATION BEFORE BEGINNING WORK, A READER WAS LEFT HOLDING THE BILL. HE WROTE:

I purchased a used 2005 Winnebago Class A in March 2013. At that time, the dealer also sold me an extended warranty from USA Travel Care. Last June, I took a trip to New York. The second day on the road I lost reverse and broke down in Springfield, Missouri. Not knowing I had to call USA Travel Care first, I called Good Sam Club to find an RV repair shop.

The repair shop could not fix the problem and sent me to an authorized Allison Transmission repair shop. I gave the repair shop the USA Travel Care form to call before repairs were made, and apparently they did not call. I paid \$703.08 for the repairs by credit card so I could get back on the road.

When I returned home 26 days later, I wrote a letter to USA Travel Care explaining what had happened. After several phone calls, I received a check for \$201.24. The company's reason was that it felt the diagnostics were not necessary. I understand there is a \$100 deductible, but I feel I am still owed \$400. I am asking Hot Line's help in having these charges reimbursed to me.

JAMES MAUTE
ALBUQUERQUE, NEW MEXICO

As we have stated previously in this column, when dealing with claims administrators it's always better for the consumer to be directly involved, on a first-hand basis, when contacting the company for an approval or preauthorization. Allowing third-party agents to do this for you (such as the service staff at a repair facility) can, in many instances, present problems such as Maute encountered.

Hot Line sent a letter of inquiry to USA Travel Care (represented by American Guardian Warranty Services Inc.) on Maute's behalf. We received the following letter from American Guardian Warranty Services Inc. (AGWS). It read:

I am in receipt of your inquiry into a complaint made by James Maute. AGWS is the claims administrator and obligor for the USA Travel Care vehicle service contract. This contract provides coverage for specific named components, which includes the coach wiring harness.

Our records show that AGWS received a letter from Maute advising that repairs were performed in transit and did not receive prior authorization from AGWS. Under the terms of the service contract, Maute had breached his responsibilities. A review of the repair order found that the vehicle had a transmission shifting problem.

The repairer found a chaffed wire in the engine compartment and a poor wiring connection on the transmission wiring harness inside the transmission pan. Both conditions would be covered by the service contract, however there is no means by which to judge if all the labor the consumer was charged was necessary, or just gouging.

In order to provide Maute with some satisfaction for his purchase decision and to bring this matter to conclusion, I am offering him an additional \$335 toward labor charges for a release. AGWS will not pay for charges incurred that appear to go beyond the scope of the repair (transmission fluid testing and vehicle inspection) as those are not covered by the service contract.

I would like to thank Hot Line for allowing AGWS the opportunity to provide its explanation for Maute's concern with his service contract.

JOHN WENDT, CLAIMS DIRECTOR
AMERICAN GUARDIAN WARRANTY SERVICES INC.
WARRENVILLE, ILLINOIS

INCORRECT ITEM RECEIVED

Having ordered a replacement heat pump that turned out to be an air conditioner, a reader asked Hot Line to assist him with the exchange. He wrote:

The rear heat pump failed on my

2003 Country Coach Magna in June. I called Dometic with my model and serial number, but it no longer makes an exact replacement. The company provided me with the new model number and I was told I would need a new board and different-model drip pan.

In mid-June, I ordered a new pump, board and drip pan from www.rvpartwholesaler.com for \$1,365.50. The parts arrived promptly, but due to various circumstances I wasn't able to have the unit installed until two months later. I did, however, inspect the unit when it arrived to ensure there was no damage.

When I tried to register the new heat pump online, I discovered that it was an air conditioner, not a heat pump. I checked my paperwork and I had ordered the correct item but was shipped the wrong one.

RV Part Wholesaler refunded me the difference between the heat pump and A/C unit (\$310), but said that time had expired for any further assistance. After two weeks of phone calls and emails, the company offered to buy back the A/C for \$500 and sell me the correct unit for \$947. Plus, I'd have to pay for return shipping and \$275 for the new install.

I think RV Part Wholesaler should ship the correct part to my installer and have it installed at no expense to me.

JERRY KIRBY
HOMOSASSA, FLORIDA

Hot Line contacted RV Part Wholesaler on Kirby's behalf. The following is the company's response. It read:

In response to the complaint from Jerry Kirby, RV Part Wholesaler swapped out his A/C for the correct unit free of charge. Kirby has signed a document stating we have completed the work to his satisfaction, which takes care of any complaints that he may have had and releases us from further legal action.

LISA, CUSTOMER SERVICE AGENT
RV PART WHOLESALER
OAK RIDGE, TENNESSEE ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO HOT LINE, please refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 14.

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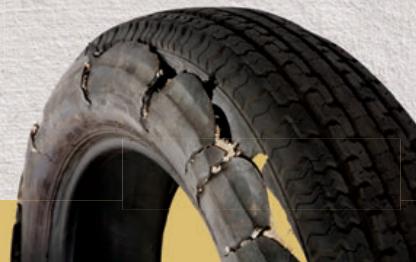
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Motorhome Handling

I have a question about improving the straight-line handling of my motorhome. I have a 2011 Jayco Greyhawk 31FS built on a Ford E-450 chassis. Since the motorhome was new, the steering has had an excessive amount of play, causing it to need constant correction when going down the road. This occurs whether or not I'm towing my Honda CR-V, but it is worse when I tow.

The motorhome is excessively prone to extreme swaying when hit by crosswinds, and when driving under an overpass, it feels like it wants to yank the wheel out of my hands toward the left. I also experience a lot of bouncing around in the Greyhawk when following in the wake of a larger vehicle, even five or six car lengths back. After a four- or five-hour drive, my arms are exhausted from the effort.

I know it will never handle like a car, but I'd like it to at least not scare the heck out of me on every trip. I've received a lot of advice on the subject. Some say to set the alignment caster as far positive as it will go, but I've heard that can cause rapid tire wear and some shaking from the front end. Some say to add a steering stabilizer. Some say to add front and rear sway bars. Some say to add rear air suspension. Some say to add a helper leaf spring in the rear. Is it worthwhile to pursue better handling? And, if so, what is the best way to go about doing that?

ROD HARRIS
MEDFORD, NEW JERSEY

These long Class C motorhomes have a lot of surface area on their sides that is affected by wind gusts. That, com-

bined with the long rear overhang and less than optimal suspension, is a recipe for swaying. I recommend you make these changes in the order I present them, if you don't have the budget to do them all at once. Supersteer makes a rear track bar No. SS450, which eliminates side-to-side play in the rear suspension, and is the first priority item to add. The track bar alone is worth the cost of admission and will make a significant difference in coach stability. Roadmaster offers a heavier rear anti-sway bar (No. 1139147), which will further improve handling. Roadmaster also has a heavier front bar (No. 1139176), which will help the front end. Installing top-quality

aftermarket shock absorbers, such as Bilsteins, can also help.

A steering stabilizer is a good thing, although it probably won't change the swaying condition appreciably. Rear air bags will mainly help if your suspension is sagging or bottoming out on bumps. Make sure the front end is aligned to factory specs and try to set caster near its maximum positive setting. Caster helps achieve the self-centering action of steering, which affects the vehicle's straight-line stability. This makes a vehicle easier to drive and improves its directional stability, reducing its tendency to wander.

LEANING SUN VOYAGER COMMENT

This is in reference to "Leaning Sun Voyager" in the May issue. Back in the late 1980s I had a 1977 Dodge chassis Class C that had about a 2-inch right lean on the front, similar to the Sun Voyager. The rear was level, as I had Air Lifts in back. My coach had leaf springs in the rear and coil springs in the front and also had a 4-kW genset and refrigerator on the right side. On the left side was the water tank and holding tanks, bathroom and dinette. The right side was heavier than the left; although water is heavy, the tanks are not always full. After about 10 years, the coach started its front lean, but the rear was kept level by increasing the pressure in the right air bag. I took the coach to a dedicated truck-spring garage. The service manager said my coach needed another leaf in the right rear spring. It took a few hours to add the leaf and once they finished, the front was level again.

Why was this? The Air Lift bag is a one-point lift having one point on the axle and another point on the chassis. Adding air to the right bag levels the motorhome over that axle, only keeping the rear level with no effect on the front. The rear leaf spring has a three-point lift. The first point is on the chassis, about 2 feet in front of the axle, the second point is the axle and the third point is on the chassis about 2 feet behind the axle. This three-point lift raises the whole side

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of the motorhome, not just one point, therefore leveling out the motorhome and removing the lean.

At the time, I belonged to a manufacturer's motorhome club. This was a common problem, and their fix was to add spacers to the front coil spring, which corrected the effect but not the cause.

ROBERT SYKES
RUSSELLVILLE, ARKANSAS

Thanks for writing, Robert. If weight is distributed unevenly, sometimes it is possible to shift some of it to balance the loading. Your solution is useful for chassis problems and should help some of our readers.

Another solution is to remove the low-point front coil spring and send it to a custom spring shop, such as Benz Spring Company in Portland, Oregon, and it can build a custom replacement with a somewhat higher load capacity and/or overall length as a means of raising that low point.

Before attempting to cure an apparent leaning condition, it's imperative to determine by careful measurements where the problem actually lies. Naturally, if the body was formed or mounted incorrectly and the chassis is straight and level, making suspension changes won't cure the actual problem.

PROPANE LOSS

I have a propane-tank leak. The tank has lost one-third of its volume in five to six weeks with the main valve at the tank turned off. No amount of testing with soapy water has detected any leaks. To drop the tank would be a really massive job. The tank is on a 1998 Leisure Travel wide-body Class B motorhome. Before this last loss I was watching the gauge both in the RV and the one on the tank, for several weeks, with no loss detected. I would appreciate any help.

PAUL K. SCHARF
HOUSTON, TEXAS

If the tank dial still shows that there is gas in the tank, put a dot on the needle point using a permanent marker. If it drops with the service valve off, take the motorhome to a qualified propane-service business. The technicians will have an electronic sniffer and know where to look for a leak. Make sure you give this high priority; you should not fool around with propane leaks.

HORTON FAN FIX

This is in response to Hot-Running Holiday Rambler in the May issue. I experienced this exact problem with my 400-hp Cummins equipped with a Horton viscous fan drive (fan clutch) in my Airstream motorhome. A small oil leak in the hous-

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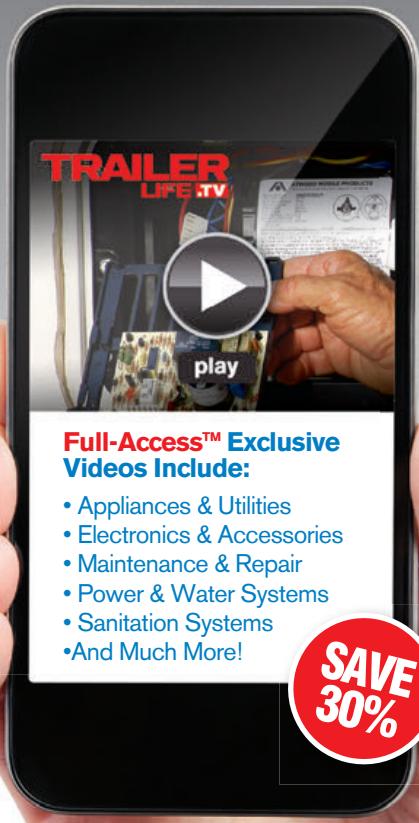
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COACH & POWERTRAIN

ing will reduce the oil available to engage the fan, which in turn results in the fan not being able to run at full speed and it gets worse with time. Over a two-year period I took the motorhome to four Cummins and Freightliner repair centers that flushed and cleaned the radiator, and replaced the thermostat, plus other things that did not solve the problem. After each visit, the problem got worse as the engine would start overheating without a grade and occasionally the fan would stop blowing altogether. I called the Freightliner help desk and the tech said to disconnect the wire that leads to the fan clutch and the fan would default into high speed. If it didn't, then the fan drive needed to be replaced, as they are not repairable.

After disconnecting the wire, the problem did not improve so I called Freightliner in San Antonio, Texas. They ordered a new clutch and scheduled a date to install it. After inspecting the fan, they said it would be at least a two-day job to remove the fan due to lack of access and I would have to reschedule a repair date. So I drove the motorhome 100 miles back to our ranch.

I called Freightliner and asked if there was a temporary fix to enable me to drive it to another repair facility. They didn't know of a temporary fix, but suggested I call Horton. Horton customer service connected me with a tech specialist who said that I could remove the fan and drill a hole through the fan drive and insert a small bolt that would lock the fan to the rotor in the drive, which would lock the fan in full speed. He also said I should notice a small amount of oil that leaked from the housing.

I then discovered that it was a one-hour job to remove the fan, not two days. I drilled four holes through the drive and inserted 1/4-inch bolts. This fixed the overheating problem, plus it saved me more than \$1,500 for a new viscous fan drive. I have since driven about 20,000 miles with no further problem.

**COLIN KANTOR
LOMETA, TEXAS**

Thanks for sharing your solution, Colin. These heavy-duty fan components certainly are expensive, and I can understand why you'd want to do this — however, I

consider this to be a temporary repair. Besides the additional noise of running the fan at full speed all the time, it can also result in slightly decreased fuel mileage and overcooling in cool weather. You might be able to find the part you need on eBay or other sources such as a salvage yard at a lower price.

OIL CONSUMPTION MYSTERY COMMENT

I am commenting on the "Oil Consumption Mystery" letter from Russ Whitcomb in the June issue. I also purchased a new Newmar Dutch Star in 2003. At that time, I learned that the oil-pressure gauge was not a gauge at all. Instead, it behaves like the usual oil-pressure light. It is used as a threshold-sensing arrangement where, if the pressure reaches a certain threshold, the gauge always jumps up to the same fixed reading. If the pressure fails to reach that threshold, it reads nothing, equivalent to being red. Knowledge can make a difference in how we manage our equipment.

**DELBERT ASHBY
SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA**

Thanks for writing, Delbert. Over the years, several manufacturers have done something like this with oil-pressure gauges, including Ford. One of the reasons they do this (besides saving a few dollars) is to reduce the number of customer complaints and warranty claims due to variances in oil pressure as the oil heats up, etc. However, this also reduces the value of the gauge as a diagnostic tool.

OIL CONSUMPTION MYSTERY TIP

The oil consumption mystery, written by Russ Whitcomb in the June issue, caught my attention. I had the same problem with my Duramax diesel. The injectors failed and fuel was mixed with the motor oil. A new set of injectors (under warranty) cured the problem. When the oil mixed with the fuel one could not see the problem because diesel fuel is oily. My oil pressure reacted the same way also because of the fuel mixing with the motor oil. I hope this information is helpful.

**WILLIAM SHUBECK
CALIMESA, CALIFORNIA**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 81

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Thanks for the tip, William. Faulty injectors can definitely cause excessive oil consumption and this is something to look for if the usual causes have been eliminated.

TOWING AN EDGE

Last October, we purchased a 2013 Ford Edge Limited V-6 to tow behind our motorhome. This vehicle has a push-button start. At the end of first day of flat towing, I had a dead battery. The car was towed to a Ford dealer and they changed the battery under warranty. I was told to be sure to turn the auto headlights off.

The next time we drove the car for about four hours and the following morning the battery was dead. I towed it to the nearest Ford dealer and paid \$118 to have a system check and the battery charged. The problem happened again the next time I flat-towed the Edge.

After numerous calls to Ford Customer Care, I finally got a call saying it's my problem and there is an aftermarket solution. I expressed my displeasure and Ford credited me for the \$118. I'm now faced with a \$200 aftermarket solution.

I received the following email from Ford. "If the vehicle is not in PARK, the solenoid in the ignition switch will always be energized. This solenoid prevents the key from being rotated to the OFF position and removed if the transmission is not shifted into PARK. With push-button start there is no ignition switch. The ignition will not go to the OFF position unless the vehicle is in PARK. In NEUTRAL, the ignition will toggle between accessory and run. The cluster 'eprindle' is always lit when not in PARK. Accessory position = 'accessory mode active' message on left side of cluster. Run position = 'shift to park' message on left side of cluster.

"The ignition is in ACCESSORY position during flat tow, because the transmission is in NEUTRAL. An electrical strategy starts shutting down noncritical items (normal load shed) after 45 minutes. Brake on/off (boo) switch input will wake the module and reset a 45-minute timer every time the brake is applied.

"Running the engine for five minutes at the beginning of each day and every six hours thereafter, per the owner's guide, is to lubricate the transmission and cool the transmission fluid. It is not to maintain

the battery state of charge.

"Odometer mileage increases while the vehicle is being flat-towed. The odometer mileage increases any time the wheels are spinning while the transmission is in NEUTRAL (ignition in accessory or run position). The ABS sensor sends the signal to the module, which sends the message to be stored in the cluster. The odometer will not increase with ignition 'off.' However, ignition strategy will not allow 'off' unless transmission is in PARK.

"The customer may want to consider an aftermarket remedy to maintain battery state of charge while flat towing. One popular unit with the RV community is the Toad-Charger by LSL Products (www.lslproducts.net/ToadChargePage.html). This device is not endorsed or approved by Ford Motor Co."

**CHUCK OLSON
LONE TREE, COLORADO**

The Ford representative provided an excellent explanation of the way its systems work in relation to towing. If you towed on a dolly, you could put the transmission in PARK and shut off all power. Unfortunately, when flat towing, this is not possible.

When towing a vehicle, you should have an auxiliary brake system to activate the brakes and reduce the overload on the coach's braking system. Most of these systems require a significant amount of electrical power and will therefore discharge the battery during a typical day of travel.

To prevent mileage from accumulating during towing, you can connect a constant-duty relay, which would interrupt the signal from the ABS sensor to the computer and speedometer when there is power from the charging line. All it takes is opening the circuit on one wire of the pair.

While it is unfortunate that a charging line is needed, when you consider the cost of the baseplate, tow bar, wiring and safety cables, auxiliary braking device, etc., this is a relatively small expenditure that should solve the problem and allow you many years of towing. ♦

TO CONTRIBUTE TO COACH & POWERTRAIN, refer to Contact MotorHome, on page 14.

Bite the Big Apple

WANT THE SKINNY ON THE **BEST EATS IN NEW YORK CITY?** FAMOUS FAT DAVE IS THE MAN TO SEE

by ALAN RIDER



After more than four decades, the one thing I know I can count on when I'm on the road is waking up every morning full of anticipation for what the coming day will bring.

While I've often puzzled over the source of this enthusiasm, I can tell you it

has much to do with the way motorhome travel seems to revive my senses. There is simply something about leaving familiar surroundings behind that brings a heightened awareness of things like the call of a loon echoing across the still waters of a lake in northern Minnesota or the intoxicating fragrance that fills the air when the orange groves begin to bloom in central Florida.

Ultimately though, it's my sense of taste that seems most stimulated in my wanderings. While I appreciate the ability to whip up favorite comfort foods in my rolling kitchen, I also sample the local cuisine every chance I get, from the legendary burnt ends at Kansas City's Arthur Bryant's Barbeque to the powdered-sugar-dusted beignets at Café Du Monde in New Orleans.

This gustatory inclination also helps explain why I'm frequently drawn to foodie-oriented tasting tours. And having taken a number of these palate-pleasing excursions over the years, I can tell you two things: First, that you will never find a place with a greater depth and breadth of good eats than New York City; and second, that no one knows their way around this toothsome terrain better than my friend, Famous Fat Dave.

You see, Dave Freedenberg spent years as a taxi driver in New York City and, liking a good nosh at least as much as the next cabbie, began asking his passengers for the skinny on the best restaurants in their neighborhood. After a few years of compiling — and rigorously taste-testing — these recommendations, Freedenberg got the bright idea to share this first-hand knowledge of the places real New Yorkers love to eat in an operation he calls Famous Fat Dave's Five Borough Eating Tour on the Wheels of Steel (www.famousfatdave.com). In short, he's the man to see if you're looking to take a hearty bite out of the Big Apple.

Best of all, with a little advance notice, Freedenberg can customize his tours to suit your, *ahem*, tastes. For our



PHOTO: CHRISTINA R. NEWTON

four-hour-long excursion, I asked Freedenberg to put together an itinerary dedicated to sampling the foodstuffs that I think of as quint-essentially New York.

As a result, we bounced from chewy bagels so fresh we could feel the warmth radiating from the

Manhattan shop's glass bins, to the surprisingly delicious combination of chicken and waffles in a storefront soul-food joint in Harlem, and on to sample more varieties of homemade pickles than I knew existed at an old-school Polish grocery in Brooklyn. We ducked in for fabulous sausage slices at an ordinary frame-house-turned-pizzeria in the Bronx and still managed to squeeze in a couple of hot dogs in Coney Island. A final stop for bonbons at the original retail location of renowned artisan chocolatier Jacques Torres wrapped up our tour with a to-die-for exclamation point.

Ultimately, I came away convinced that Famous Fat Dave's moveable feasts are about more than just gluttony. What's important is that we were out there literally tasting life's fullness, making unexpectedly enjoyable new discoveries and meeting interesting people along the way.

Which, when it comes right down to it, is what really feeds my hunger to see what other goodies are out there just waiting to be savored on The Road Ahead. ♦

Alan Rider has been wandering the backroads of America for more than four decades. Though he's never been big on traditional souvenirs, he's passionate about collecting memories of the remarkable people and unforgettable places he encounters along the way.

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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

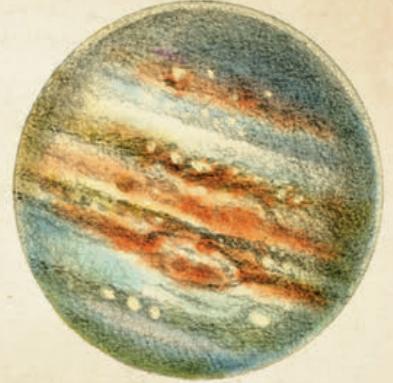


Fig. 7 Jupiter

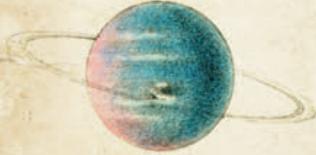


Fig. 2 Neptune

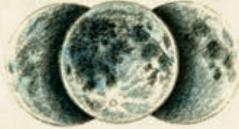


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon



Fig. 6 Mars

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