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Arizona's White Canyon Wilderness is filled with saguaros and cholla cactus.



A little TLC and a couple of cleaning/protectant products can help extend tire longevity.
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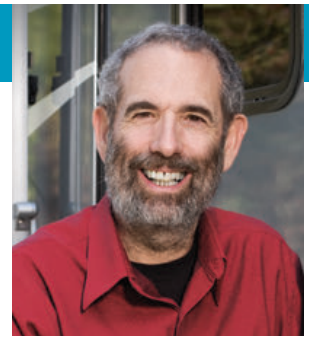
Sixteen racks and carriers designed to transport all types of outdoor gear, from mountain bikes to stand-up paddle boards and more

ON THE COVER

Winnebago's Vista 36Y (see test on page 44) parked at a campsite in the foothills south of Yosemite National Park in California, where the chicken was put in the smoker early in the morning to slow cook. Photo by Bob Livingston.



By Bob Livingston



The Cost of Convenience

I had an interesting conversation with a friend recently who was complaining about campground prices. He just returned from a weekend jaunt with his family and was incensed that he paid \$100 a day for the site. Mind you, this was a very nice RV resort with paved sites and an abundance of amenities. My reaction was pretty cavalier. As motorhome owners, we've forced the industry to build bigger rigs, with more convenience features that are energy-hungry, and of course, take up more real estate. RV park owners are simply responding to demand.

Now, my reaction did not meet with happy vibes, but the fact remains that we've allowed ourselves to become "fat cats" and now it's time to pay the piper.

My wife, Lynne, and I spent almost two weeks in the Vista 36Y featured in this issue (page 44). We traveled to an area where the temperatures were unseasonably high, hovering in the mid-90s every day. Nighttime cool down was very slow. We happened to be in a park with a metered, 50-amp electric hookup. We ran both air conditioners from midmorning to around 9 p.m. We also ran the refrigerator and hot-water tank on electric, used the microwave, TVs and other ancillary accessories on 120-volt AC power. At the current rate for the area, the Vista's electric consumption was \$6.11 a day.

To some, the cost may not

seem that high, but it was for only one resource consumed by the motorhome. We were also hooked to water, cable TV and used the sewer system. And we spent time in the clubhouse staying cool and consuming ice from the machine.

If you've looked at your home utility bills lately, you'll empathize with park owners who struggle to keep expenses in check. And that doesn't count maintaining a Wi-Fi system (which by the way, worked amazingly well), payments to the cable TV provider, swimming pool maintenance, staff and all the other operating costs.

I've talked to many park owners who tell war stories about the costs

of compliance with state and local laws and keeping the parks up to the standards expected of motorhome owners.

While the test Vista had only modest electrical needs compared to higher-line coaches, keep in mind that motorhome builders will continue to respond to our voracious appetites for more convenience and luxury items. Residential refrigerators, induction cooktops, fireplaces, washers and dryers, dishwashers, radiant heating, big TVs, powerful sound systems and a host of other electronic devices will continue to spin utility-box meters in campgrounds. I don't see motorhome buyers retracting their desire for luxury and comfort anytime soon.

Site costs will not go down as campground owners continue to make improvements to meet our demands. It's always possible to use onboard self-containment to temper campground costs, but as coaches grow in size, primitive camping becomes more challenging.

I like nice parks, and when trying to blame someone for higher prices, I simply look in the mirror. **M**

"I don't see motorhome buyers retracting their desire for luxury and comfort anytime soon."

Contributors | December



Arline Chandler is a freelance writer and speaker who lives in the Arkansas Ozarks. She travels with her husband, photographer Lee Smith, and their dog, Spot, in a Class A Mountain Aire motorhome.



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



Kevin Livingston grew up in RVs. He worked alongside his dad, Bob Livingston, since he was old enough to hold tools. He lives in Reno, Nevada, and enjoys the technical side of the RV lifestyle.



Ken Reid is a freelance writer and photographer who travels extensively with his wife, Gayle, in their Fleetwood Southwind motorhome. Ken is a frequent contributor to travel magazines.



E. Don Smith is a Tennessee-based freelance writer and photographer who has been a frequent contributor to *MotorHome* magazine since 2006. He is the proud owner of a Tiffin Phaeton coach.



Mary Zalmanek and her husband, Jim, 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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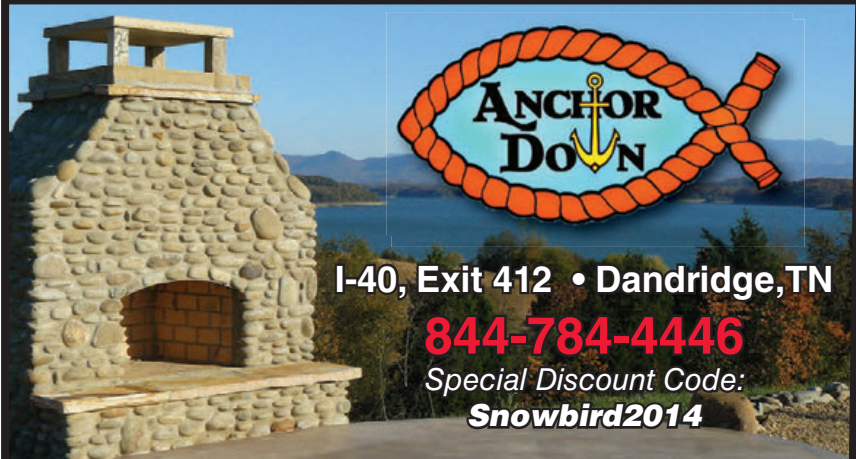
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Is it important to measure the costs versus benefits of owning a motorhome, or is it worth it at any price?

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



No Easy Answer

In response to September's question, yes, it is important to measure costs versus benefits of owning a motorhome, unless you are among the fortunate few having nearly unlimited financial resources at your disposal.

First, there is the initial cost of purchasing a motorhome, equipping it to tow an automobile and then furnishing it with accessories. There are constant costs whether you travel or not: insurance, registra-

tion, personal property taxes (in some states) and renting or constructing a suitable storage facility (even the best fabric covers don't last very long).

Operation costs include fuel, tolls, park fees, phone service, electricity and laundry (if your coach has no washer/dryer). There is a monthly fee if you have satellite TV/Internet service and some parks charge a fee for Wi-Fi. There are also costs for your dinghy vehicle, and many destination attractions charge fees.

Maintenance costs will add up over time. Routine tasks such as cleaning, oil changes and lubrication cost much more for a coach than a car. Batteries will require replacement and so will tires and brakes. "House" appliances and systems are not fail-proof and replacement or repairs can be expensive.

Many costs can be offset if your coach is used for business; however, 99 percent of owners I have met use them for recreation only. Sadly,

Featured Letter

The RV Life is Not for Everyone

MotorHome magazine has been a pleasure to read and an invaluable source of information, along with other research, that has helped us to decide not to buy an RV. My wife, Sandra, and I thought we would enjoy traveling this great and beautiful country of ours in an RV when she retires in January 2015. The romance of RV life is very seductive. I am already retired, so I decided to research this decision thoroughly for the past year plus.

We joined Good Sam Club and subscribed to *MotorHome*. I learned how complex and expensive RV maintenance is, and what expenses to expect annually after the initial purchase. My insurance agent, who has traveled in his own RV, explained his cost of owning an RV. We talked to salesmen, toured some RVs and reviewed Good Sam Insurance brochures.

A major consideration is what we would have to do physically, with back trouble and limited energy and mobility, during the next five years. The promise of increasing fuel cost sealed the deal.

Maintenance, repair, tires, insurance, tax, and fuel expenses for our roomy sedan are established and budgeted. Comparing hotel costs to campground costs makes the hotel reasonable, especially when we have a pool, get an unlimited great shower, sleep comfortably, watch cable TV for free, have no thought about leveling, sewer service or water supply, eat a free breakfast and leave the cleanup behind. If we have life events that prohibit travel, we don't have a depreciating investment sitting idle. Best of all, we can stop traveling at any time and do not have to sell a used RV. I've noticed a lot of those along the road lately.

The RV life is wonderful and worry-free for the wealthy and the indebted who love it. Although we are not wealthy, we could enjoy RV travel, but the reality is that we are better off not going for it.

Thanks for helping us to consider everything, without sales talk, and to not make a big mistake. By the way, we like the magazine so much we are continuing our subscription. We wish the best for all of you RVers on the road!

William Kelly | Martinez, Georgia

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I know a few who had to sell their rigs because of the travel expenses. Others have sold their homes so they could afford to travel full-time.

Also bear in mind that RVs depreciate at a rapid rate. Expect to get back only a small fraction of what you spent when the time comes to sell. You have to decide for yourself if the benefits outweigh the costs.

Edward Phillips | Greers Ferry, Arkansas

A More Convenient Way to Travel

One facet of the subject I have not seen addressed relates to health issues. Because of a stroke and broken hip, along with the gritty realities that go along with it, my wife would be unable to travel at all if it were not for our Roadtrek 190P. That fact cannot be precisely quantified under the "worth it" category, but it looms very large in our thinking!

We own no other vehicle now and willingly pay the price in fuel and maintenance of the motorhome, considering the alternatives. If we were in the private-jet bracket, we might choose a different approach, but as retirees with a modest retirement income, owning our Class B is a wonderful and affordable amenity, and affords us the freedom to travel.

Dan Wilderman | Via email

A Vacation Home on Wheels

We consider our coach our vacation home, and the big advantage is that our backyard is always changing. Sometimes we overlook the ocean and other times we're in the woods. The variety gives us different adventures as we travel to new locations. Our bedroom is the same no matter where we are and we usually eat at home. At the end of a two-week vacation, even though fuel prices have risen, our cost is much lower than hotels and eating out every night. After our vacation, we always have the motorhome ready for spur-of-the-moment trips, and many times our destination changes as we go down the highway. You can't do that with hotel reservations.

Alden and Chris Whitehead
East Northport, New York

The Experience is Hard to Measure in Terms of Cost

I think that we, the readers, are biased toward ownership at almost any cost. We have made significant investments in our rigs and the lifestyle options that they open up to us. We value the experience, the lifestyle and the connections with other owners as we travel. All of those are very hard to measure in terms of cost/benefit.

Let's assume that my annual cost of owning my rig is \$4,000 (insurance, taxes, registration, fuel and some maintenance — mine is paid off). If a hotel room is \$100/night and campground sites with full hookups are \$50, then I would have to be on the road a minimum of 80 nights per year just to break even. If I add in a monthly loan repayment of \$750, I would have to be on the road for 260 days/year.



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Not very sensible from a dollars-and-cents perspective. And for those of us who have a home, which we have to maintain while we are away from it in our rig, there are no cost savings at all.

Classic economic theory incorporates tangible costs and intangible factors in describing how we make decisions based on our personal evaluation of the tradeoffs between the positive and negative "utility" of alternative courses of action. The actual dollar cost is only one of many factors we assess based on some mysterious algorithm we maintain in our hearts and minds. This is why I don't get into discussions about fuel mileage — it's not a meaningful thing to discuss in isolation from the other factors.

Doug Poad | Via email

Canada is Not a Third-World Country

I read the comments about traveling to Canada with my mouth hanging open. We are Canadians not aliens, nor are we a Third-World country.

Your border agents can be just as intimidating, they ask the same questions and they take away our food as well. The U.S. has just as many restrictions about dog food as we do. We pay high prices to use our cellphones in your country. We do not carry traveler's checks anymore since we have trouble cashing them, and as for the comment about not being able to find places to use AmEx, that traveler didn't look very hard. No, we don't use pennies anymore. Prices reflect the penny, but the price is rounded up or down so sometimes you win and sometimes you lose — a penny.

As for the many who thought we are the kindest, friendliest people, what were they expecting? Armed vigilantes protecting our borders?

OK, now that I've vented I feel better. We travel to the U.S. twice a year for weeks at a time and we love it. If you follow the rules for both countries, it's no big deal.

Jan Higgins | Airdrie, Alberta, Canada

Front- or Mid-Entry Preference?

I have a question: For a diesel-pusher motorhome, which do your readers prefer, a front door or a mid door? I am thinking about buying a diesel pusher, but I don't like the door in the front — it restricts the view for the passenger. Plus, if there isn't an electric stepwell cover, it can be a pain. A few manufacturers make mid-door models, but they are mostly entry-level coaches.

Lorrin Walsh | Via email

Question of the Month

When it comes to diesel-pusher motorhomes, do you prefer a front- or mid-entry floorplan?

Send your comments to:

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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER



National Museum of World War II Aviation

An amazing display of World War II-era aircraft being restored in Colorado Springs

By Mary Zalmanek

The National Museum of World War II Aviation in Colorado Springs, Colorado, opened in 2012 to explore the role aviation played in winning the war. Our guide, Phil Heacock, explained America's isolationist policy prior to the war, the role of Rosie the Riveter women who built airplanes and the morale boost resulting from the successful first mission that launched bombers from an aircraft carrier.

WestPac Restorations, located in a hangar next to the museum, restores rusted-out shells to flying condition. Watching this remarkable transformation was

the highlight of our docent-led tour. Often, these relics are recovered from holes in the ground where they were deliberately buried after the war. Props for the planes can't simply be purchased; they must be recovered and repaired in the facility's propeller shop. The Lockheed P-38 Lightning currently being restored will require four years to complete.

Two museum tours per day are offered on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, year-round, and reservations are recommended.

For more information, go to www.worldwariiaviation.org.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Holiday Foodie Gifts

The holidays are just around the corner and, if you're like me, you've got plenty of stuff, probably more than you need. Instead of giving more stuff, how about offering a taste of the road?

Increasingly, small, artisan food companies are producing terrific products, everything from real maple syrup to fresh-roasted coffee to custom hot sauces. That's what I'm giving friends and family — artisan food that doesn't require dusting or taking care of later on!

Many artisan food companies will ship their products to your door or, better yet, right to your gift recipient. Here are some gift ideas for your food-loving friends and family members that won't break the bank.

Coffee Lovers: Who doesn't love the taste of great coffee? If your friends and family covet coffee, nothing makes a better gift. Check out Artis Coffee in Berkeley, California. The company vows to roast and ship coffee to your specifications and get it to you in the 10-day "freshness window." Or try Phil & Sebastian Coffee Roasters in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, for coffee that's not overly roasted.

Cookie/Baked Goods Aficionados: I didn't believe baked goods ordered off the Internet could be great until I discovered Harvard Sweet Boutique in Hudson, Massachusetts. These home-style cookies and brownies are as good (or better) than I can make at home. Gluten-free folks can enjoy wonderful organic, wheat-free, gluten-free, non-GMO cookies that are low in carbs, high in protein and actually taste wonderful from Soulfully Sweet.

Extra-Virgin Olive Oil Fans: Great oil is part of good cooking. Oregon Olive Mill in the verdant Willamette Valley produces a number



From left: Brien makes chunky and finely ground maple sugar. Oregon Olive Mill's Three Oil Stack lets you sample different oil flavors.

of fine virgin olive oils. Its Trio Stack, a set of three small bottles in a tower, lets you try them all. Or check out smoked olive oils from The Smoked Olive, including its Sonoma Smoked (great on bread) and Napa Smoked (super on salads or as a finishing oil).

Maple Syrup/Sugar Groupies: I love real maple syrup; fake maple tastes like chemicals and is full of stuff like high-fructose corn syrup. Real maple syrup is maple water cooked down. A great place to get the real stuff is Brien Fine Maple Products from Canada. It also offers chunky and finely ground maple sugars and delicious maple salad dressings.

Mustard Mavens: The right mustard can create a dip, accent a sandwich or be just the right glaze for meats. Try Beaverton Foods' Inglehoffer Honey Maple Mustard, super on pork chops or as a dip for pretzels. Saucy Mama makes tasty chipotle, apricot ginger, champagne/honey and other fine mustards. Or check out Monastery Mustard's offerings. These mustards, made by nuns at the Queen of Angels Monastery, are bold and flavorful.

Have a favorite foodie gift idea?

Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com (with Road Foodie in the subject line).



Sweet Treats

From far left, Brien's maple products includes a delectable maple dressing. Harvard Sweet Boutique bakes artisan brownies and coconut macadamia blondies.



ROAD FOODIE FAVORITES: Holiday Food Gifts

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Oils: Oregon Olive Mill, www.redridgefarms.com/oregon-olive-mill; The Smoked Olive, www.thesmokedolive.com

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Adventurous Launch

The new Touring Series (TS) Adventurous recently made its way into Roadtrek's lineup of luxury Class B motorhomes. Though the Sprinter-based motorhome is sleek and modern on the outside, it's the interior that the company is most proud of. Take a look around and you'll find true granite countertops, LED-strip lighting with dimming control, a heated floor, built-in work station, induction cooktop, optional drawer-style microwave, an 11,500-Btu air conditioner and more. Exclusive to the TS Adventurous are the charcoal interior cabinets with subtle hints of gray throughout and chrome accents that lend an upscale look. The motorhome's Coach-Connect system offers complete control over critical functions via a tablet interface, even when you're away. Prices start around \$122,000 for the U.S., \$131,00 for Canada.

Roadtrek Motorhomes, 888-762-3873, www.roadtrek.com



Softening the Flow

Stain-Less Water Filters provide a complete water filtering/softening system for potable water that also greatly minimizes water spotting and staining on all surfaces including chrome, fiberglass, metal, paint, glass and plastic, according to the company. Its softening properties help preserve the plumbing lines, water-heater elements, fixtures, ice machines, etc., and also make for a more pleasant showering experience. Stain-Less filters work with municipal or well water, providing a supply that's safe for washing or drinking. The filter will not reduce any pressure or volume of water flow and the standard size will accommodate up to 5,000 gallons of tap water, according to the company. Available in three sizes, prices range from \$250-\$700.

Stain-Less Water Filters, 609-296-2564, www.stainlesswaterfilters.com

Keeping Track

SPOT devices have long been used to track adventurers when they travel off the grid, providing emergency help and allowing loved ones to keep tabs on their location. Now, the company is using its satellite technology to help track stolen vehicles with its new SPOT Trace. When mounted in your RV, car or other valuable asset, SPOT Trace can provide theft-alert SMS texts or emails when movement is detected. Customized tracking intervals and notification features, such as power off and daily status messages, are included with Basic Service. SPOT Trace's battery lasts up to 18 months, and an available line-power option lets users confidently monitor assets on and off the grid, in near real time using Google Maps. MSRP: \$99.95 plus service plan. **SPOT, www.findmespot.com**



RV GPS

Redesigned inside and out, the new Rand McNally RVND 7730 LM RV GPS device provides fresh hardware, a faster processor and two new graphical user-interface options with improved map appearance. With robust navigation and new features such as Toll Cost estimates and Advanced Lane Guidance, the RVND delivers leading-edge technology and tools specifically designed for RVers. The device can be Wi-Fi-connected, allowing for up-to-the-moment information along a route such as current fuel prices, weather and traffic. The RVND 7730 LM features a 7-inch screen for easy viewing, includes Lifetime Map updates and can be switched over to car routing. Available for around \$350.

Rand McNally, www.randmcnally.com



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No. 1 in specialty RV insurance from 2013 Millward Brown national survey data.

Wireless Control System ⬇

Thor Motor Coach has introduced Rapid Camp — a wireless motorhome control system that allows owners to set up camp quickly at a distance of up to 50 feet away from the coach. With the Rapid Camp remote in hand, users can operate the leveling jacks, slideouts, generator, patio awning and patio light. Rapid Camp makes it possible for owners to keep an eye on the leveling jacks to make sure there are no obstructions or dips in the ground. With the auto-level button, it only takes 90 seconds to set the jacks. Owners can also operate their slideouts and monitor the process to safely avoid tree branches and other obstructions. Rapid Camp is available on 2015 Challenger, Miramar, Hurricane, Windsport and Outlaw Class A coaches, as well as Outlaw, Four Winds and Chateau F-550 Class C models.



2015 Camping World Expansion ➡

Camping World Inc. has announced additional markets for its 2015 supercenter expansion and future development, raising the number of Camping World supercenters to just shy of 120 nationwide. The company is also under contract with landowners and existing dealerships actively pursuing new markets and acquisitions. Plans are underway to expand in high-traffic, outdoor-centric areas within the following markets: Newnan, Georgia (south Atlanta area); Savannah, Georgia (relocation from Pooler); Idaho Falls, Idaho; Lexington, Kentucky; Jackson, Mississippi; Wentzville, Missouri (St. Louis area); Charlotte, North Carolina; Greensboro, North Carolina (relocation from Colfax); Erie, Pennsylvania; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Conroe, Texas; and Texas City, Texas.



Passing of Camping World Founder David Garvin

David Garvin, who founded the retail chain Camping World in 1966, passed away on Aug. 30 at age 71. Garvin was a pioneer in the RV industry. At the age of 23, he opened a small store and mail-order business that sold camping products and supplies. While visiting his father's Beech Bend Amusement Park in Bowling Green, Kentucky, he saw a market for RV accessories among campers. Today, Camping World has expanded to more than 100 RV supercenters across the United States. Garvin was inducted into the RV/MH Hall of Fame in Elkhart, Indiana, in 2009. His philosophy of "No unhappy customers — not even one" helped him change the face of the RV-accessory business. His headstone reads, "It's Been Fun."

NEWS BRIEFS

Dometic Secures Agreement to Acquire Atwood

▶ On Sept. 9, Dometic Group announced that it signed an exclusive purchase agreement with Elkhart, Indiana-based Atwood Mobile Products LLC, a global provider in designing, engineering and manufacturing appliances and hardware for the RV, on-/off-highway and marine industries for more than 50 years. According to Dometic, the acquisition will complement its existing product offerings and strengthen the company's global footprint. "The key rationale behind this important acquisition is that it will expand our product range offered to our North American and global customers," said Roger Johansson, president and CEO of Dometic Group. "With Atwood as part of our group, we will be able to offer high-quality water heaters, ventilation technology, windows and doors, innovative furnaces, and more — products which have not been included in our present North American offering."

An Online Forum for the Work-Camping Community

▶ A new website has been launched for work-campers and traveling volunteers to review and share their experiences. WorkcampingReviews.com is a free site that requires no registration, so users can post anonymously. Christian and Alayne Dunn, who are full-time RVers, launched the site to equip work-campers with information so they can determine which opportunities are best for them, and to provide a forum for positive and negative feedback about work-camping and volunteering.

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Washington, Arkansas



Photos: James Richardson

Driven by Innovation

From the industry's first side slide-out to the all new 7 passenger Touring Edition with dual sliding doors, the 2015 Free Spirit lineup is without a doubt the most innovative line of Class B vans in the industry. Thanks to new advanced safety features, it is now also one of the safest.

A 19th-Century Village in Southwest Arkansas

Arkansas' Historic Washington State Park is one of the state's hidden jewels, but as one of the interpreters said, "We don't want to be hidden." The state park shows the town of Washington as it was from 1800 to 1900. The town was an important stop on the Southwest Trail for Texas-bound pioneers. Notable men like James Bowie and Davy Crockett traveled through Washington, which from 1863 to 1865 became the Confederate Capital of Arkansas.

The many historic and restored buildings are open for tours — some with period-dressed interpreters. The 1874 Courthouse serves as the park's visitor center. There is also a Blacksmith Shop, Weapons Museum, Print Museum and several residences. Lunch featuring Southern cooking is served daily in the 1832 Williams Tavern Restaurant and a special Christmas and Candlelight event is held the first two Saturdays in December.

For more information, call 870-983-2684 or visit www.historicwashingtonstatepark.com — *James Richardson*

Chestnut Hill, Tennessee

The Bush Bean Visitor Center in Tennessee takes you back in time through bean history




Photo: A.M. Murphy

A picturesque country road winds quietly through the farm fields of east Tennessee. Blending easily into the surrounding landscape is a quintessential white farmhouse, an old Chevy truck and the brick facade of the A.J. Bush & Company General Store. This demure country building is actually the modern, interactive and fun welcome center of Bush's Beans.

Everyone who owns a TV is familiar with the now-famous canine "Duke" and his efforts to reveal the "secret family recipe." But, did you know that Bush's Beans has been a family-run vegetable canning business for more than 100 years? The self-guided museum takes visitors on a trip through the Bush family vegetable business, the history of canning and the impacts of war and modernization on the food industry. Visitors have the opportunity to take a virtual photo with Duke or hop on a scale and learn their weight in beans.

Attached to the museum is an old-fashioned general store and a cheery country lunch café where every meal includes a sampling of the bean of the day. Admission to the center is free and parking is plentiful. Campgrounds are available in nearby Great Smoky Mountains and surrounding foothill towns. So enjoy a visit and don't forget to take some beans back to the campfire.

For more information, call 865-509-3077 or go to www.bushbeans.com — *A.M. Murphy* 

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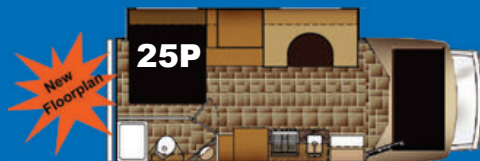
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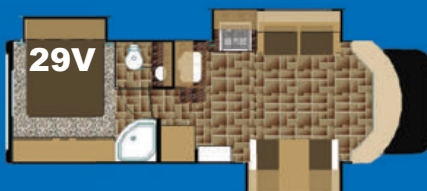
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A Winter Escape to Phoenix

Find plenty of sunshine, outdoor adventures and fascinating attractions in the heart of Arizona's Sonoran Desert

By Mary Zalmanek

While the rest of North America was enduring the brutal 2014 winter, my husband, Jim, and I spent two glorious weeks in Phoenix, Arizona, where weathermen were reporting record-breaking temperatures in the mid-80s. Warm temperatures and ample outdoor activities are just two of the reasons the nation's sixth-largest city swells by 300,000 visitors in the winter.

The first few days, we parked our coach at the home of our friends, Judy and Michael White, near Queen Creek, southeast of Phoenix. Three days of driving to get to Arizona made us eager to get out and stretch our legs. As members of a local hiking club, the

Whites always have a new hike to show us during our annual visits. This year's hike was the best yet. White Canyon Wilderness is southeast of Phoenix on Highway 177 between Superior and Kearny. From Highway 177, we drove Battle Axe Road, a dirt road best suited to four-wheel-drive vehicles, to a dead end where the trail into the wilderness starts. We hiked into the canyon on a sometimes smooth, sometimes rocky trail. The canyon walls rose dramatically, with saguaros and cholla cactus seeming to stand sentinel over the valley below. We enjoyed a picnic by a stream where the trail ended before heading back.

If you'd rather admire desert flora in more civilized terrain, the Desert Botanical Garden in Phoenix has more than 4,000 species and approximately 17,000 individual plants. It's a lovely facility

Fast Facts ➔ The Greater Phoenix area encompasses 2,000 square miles and more than 20 incorporated cities, including Glendale, Scottsdale and Mesa. The average annual rainfall is 7.66 inches, and the average annual temperature is 72.6 degrees. Summertime high temperatures can reach triple digits.



GETAWAY

A WINTER ESCAPE TO PHOENIX

that we've visited several times, but during this visit it was especially appealing due to the "Chihuly in the Garden" exhibit, which ran through May 18. As longtime fans of Dale Chihuly's blown-glass sculptures, we seek his exhibits whenever we travel. He's well-known for his colorful large-scale installations, which are included in more than 200 museums and garden collections around the world. At the entrance to the Desert Botanical Garden nestled among native cacti, three tall yucca-like sculptures titled "Desert Towers" are part of the garden's permanent collection. As we wandered the 140-acre grounds, we encountered 20 other pieces including "Sapphire Star" made from hundreds of long blue-and-clear icicle-shaped pieces, "Sonoran Boat," an old boat filled with colorful glass squiggles and balloon-like shapes, and "Polyvitro Chandelier," a large sculpture of multicolored globes hanging in the cactus and succulent galleries. My only regret was that we were not there at night to see the sculptures lit up, especially the "White Tower," a tall tree-like sculpture with individual branches and the surrounding "Erbium Pink Fiori." I wondered what it took to assemble this exhibit — 12 artists on the installation team arrived 18 days prior to opening day. The glass, tools and other materials were transported in six semitrucks with 53-foot trailers.

One of the many reasons the Whites chose the Phoenix area for a winter home was its close proximity to Rio Salado Sportsman's Club. After Judy retired, she learned to handle a shotgun. She and Michael are now quite talented at sporting clays and skeet. In addition to numerous pistol and rifle ranges, Rio Salado has a trap facility and a sporting clay course with 12 stations. At the sporting clay stations, shooters can choose between "mild" and "spicy" target presentation. While the rest of my group shattered fast-flying "spicy" clay pigeons, I was able to get a few "mild" ones with



Above left: The "Chihuly in the Garden" exhibit at the Desert Botanical Garden featured 21 colorful large-scale glass installations including "Sapphire Star," which is made from hundreds of long blue-and-clear icicle-shaped pieces. Above right: At the entrance to the Desert Botanical Garden nestled among native cacti, three tall yucca-like glass sculptures titled "Desert Towers" are part of the permanent collection.

patient coaching from Judy.

Whenever we visit the Phoenix area, we head to the San Tan Flat Grill & Saloon in Queen Creek for some delicious food — spicy and mild, savory and sweet. The restaurant, which has indoor and outdoor seating, claims to offer "All the fun of camping ... without having to sleep on the ground." While that may sound like RVing to you and me, at San Tan Flat it means having a campfire by your picnic table in the outdoor dining area. You can order a s'mores kit or bag of marshmallows to complete the experience. Live music tops off the night, with scores of people, young and old, taking to the dance floor.

We spent the rest of our time in the area at Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort in Casa Grande. It's conveniently located 40 minutes south of Phoenix, and an hour north of Tucson. Residents describe this luxury RV resort as "Disneyland for Adults." There's plenty to keep you busy whether you prefer outdoor activities like pickleball or lawn bowling, or indoor

“ Residents describe this luxury RV resort as ‘Disneyland for Adults.’ ”



Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort is the perfect place to play golf, admire the beautifully landscaped grounds and turn strangers into friends.



activities like quilting, woodcarving or card games. Jim was quite impressed with the wood shop, which is well-equipped with a variety of saws, drills and lathes.

With so many things to choose from in our limited time at Palm Creek, we stuck with an old favorite. We played several rounds of golf at the 18-hole, par-3 course. It was the perfect place to enjoy the game, admire the beautifully landscaped grounds and turn strangers into friends.

Even though Palm Creek had enough going on to keep us entertained for our entire stay, we pulled ourselves away to check out attractions in Casa Grande and Phoenix. We visited the Casa Grande Ruins National Monument, an ancient Sonoran Desert people's farming community. Archaeologists have discovered evidence that these people also developed wide-scale irrigation and extensive trade connections that lasted over a thousand years. Hundreds of miles of canals were dug by hand. Casa Grande (Spanish for "big house") is named for the largest structure on the site, a four-story building that may have

been abandoned by 1450. The purpose of this structure, the largest prehistoric structure ever built in North America, remains a mystery, but certain features give clues about its use. Windows and doorways align with the sun or moon at significant times of the year, such as a major lunar standstill, which occurs every 18.6 years. Casa Grande may have served as an astronomical observatory and calendar, much like Stonehenge in England. In 1932, a steel roof was built over Casa Grande to preserve and protect it. In 2006, two new residents, a pair of nesting great horned owls, moved into the big house and have called it home to this day. Their movements were the only things that could have distracted us from our guide's fascinating talk about Casa Grande.

From Casa Grande's ancient mysteries, we went to Casa Grande Mountain Park, which, according to MTBikeAZ.com, is "the best-kept secret outside of Phoenix." Saguars, prickly pear cacti and creosote bushes dot the hillside in the 1,025-acre park in the Sonoran Desert scrub region. A network of hiking and biking trails can



From top: The walls in White Canyon Wilderness rise dramatically, with saguaros and cholla cactus seeming to stand sentinel over the valley below. Casa Grande Ruins are the remnants of a farming community with wide-scale irrigation and extensive trade connections that lasted for more than a thousand years. Casa Grande Mountain Park has a network of hiking and biking trails that can be accessed from two trailheads.

GETAWAY

A WINTER ESCAPE TO PHOENIX

be accessed from two trailheads. On this day, it appeared the mountain had kept its secret. We saw only a handful of other mountain bikers and hikers. The trail we followed was moderately difficult, which means Jim rode all of it and I walked my bike a few times.

There's nothing secret about the Musical Instrument Museum. We decided to visit after seeing it was Phoenix's No. 1 attraction on Trip-Advisor. My expectations were low, not in the facility, but in my ability to appreciate it. I like music, but I don't sing or play an instrument. This is a museum even the least musically inclined people can enjoy. There are huge rooms devoted to each continent. Each country's display has a flat-screen TV, surrounded by instruments and sometimes costumes. When you stand in front of the screen, audio automatically comes through wireless headsets. The presentations varied from musicians playing the instruments to dancers performing



From left: Rio Salado Sportsman's Club has a trap facility and a sporting clay course with 12 stations. At San Tan Flat restaurant in Queen Creek you can have a campfire by your picnic table, finish your meal with s'mores or marshmallows and dance to live music.

native dances to skilled craftsmen making instruments. I appreciated the ingenuity of the visionary founder of the Recycled Orchestra in Paraguay who made instruments from recycled trash and of the Filipinos who made tubas, trombones, and other "brass" instruments from bamboo and rattan. Beyond the Geographical Galleries, the permanent displays in the Artist Gallery include one of the 2,008 drums

used in the opening ceremonies of the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing and a colorful Steinway piano designed by Chihuly for the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. In the Experience Gallery, guests are encouraged to strum a harp, bang a gong and create eerie music on a theremin. A theremin is an electronic musical instrument with two metal antennas that sense the position of the thereminist's hands. We

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waved our hands over the theremin — no touching required — to generate a sound sure to invoke a ghost in a haunted house. The five hours we spent there flew by. We wished we'd allotted more time to it. It's my new favorite museum. If you are a true music fan, get a two-day pass, and be sure to wear comfortable shoes.

Think floral if you want to dress to please the residents of Butterfly Wonderland in Scottsdale. We started our visit to the largest butterfly pavilion in North America at the 3-D Theater where we learned about the migration of the monarch butterfly from Canada, across the U.S., to their winter sanctuaries in Mexico. Our next stop was the Butterfly Emergence Gallery where we saw butterflies freeing themselves from their chrysalises and testing their wings to take flight. When we entered the Conservatory — a 10,000-square-foot atrium — thousands of butterflies fluttered about. These graceful creatures seem equally content to

land on colorful flowers, orange slices or gentle people. Much to 6-year-old Nancy Elbayoumi's delight, a butterfly fed on the flowers in her hair for a good portion of her visit. Jim stood still when a blue morpho, a beautiful iridescent blue butterfly native to South America, landed on his shoulder. Soon three others, all different species, clustered near the first. Outside the Conservatory, there's a Live Ant Colony, a Honey Bee Extravaganza, and a Rivers of the Amazon Aquatic Life exhibit with several aquariums and a Touch Tank where you can touch spotted stingrays.

After spending two weeks in Phoenix and Casa Grande, we had only scratched the surface of the area's attractions. There are so many other great things to see and do, and we haven't yet caught spring training for the 15 Major League Baseball teams in the Cactus League. The sights and sounds of Phoenix offer plenty of reasons for us to go back. **M**

☎ FOR MORE INFORMATION

Butterfly Wonderland

480-800-3000,
www.butterflywonderland.com

Casa Grande Ruins National Monument

www.nps.gov/cagr

Casa Grande Mountain

www.casagrandeaz.gov/rec/parks/cgmountain

Desert Botanical Garden

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480-478-6000, www.mim.org

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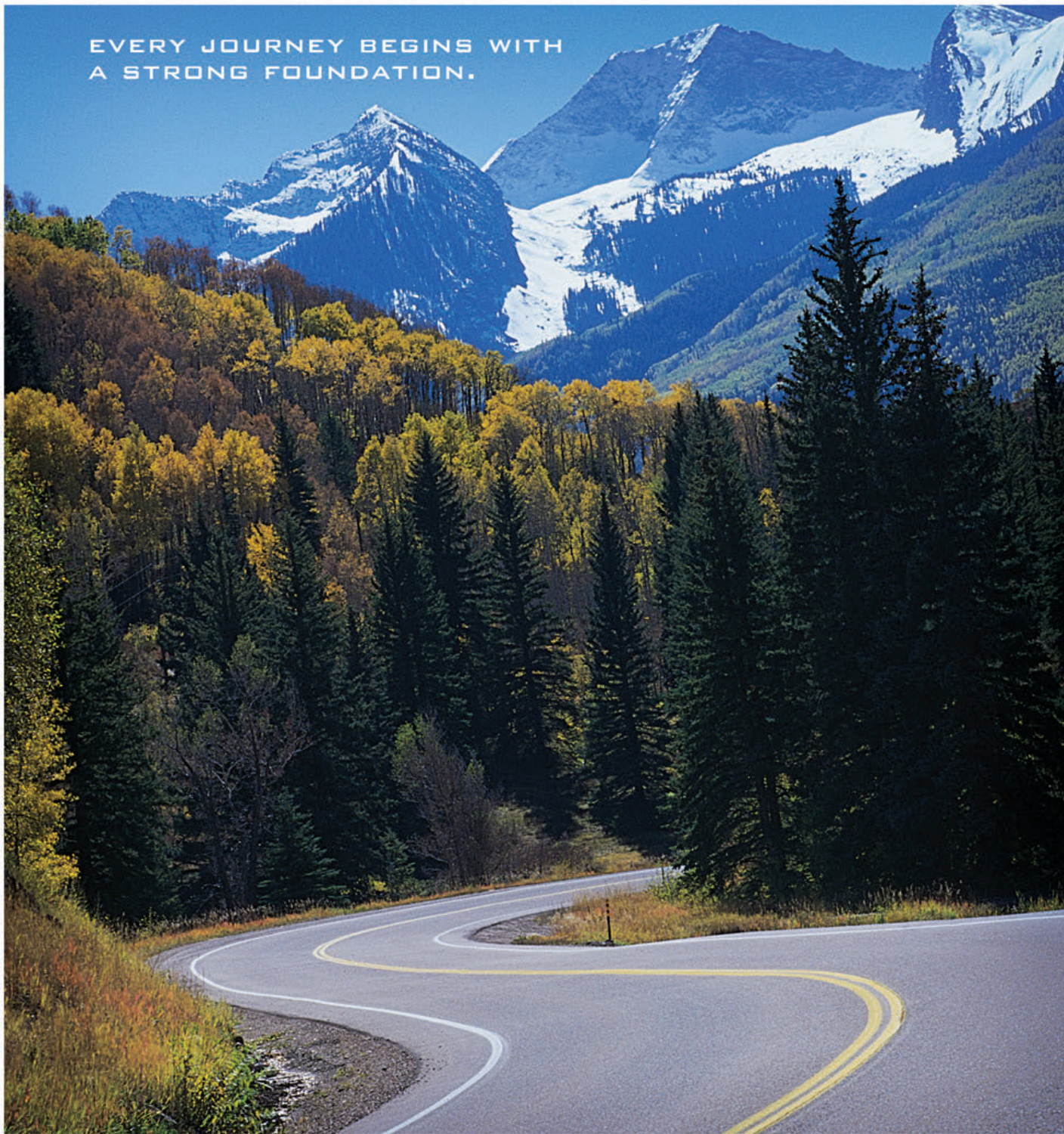
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GOING SOLO

Meet Three Women RVers Who Call the Road Their Home



A few years ago, a single woman living full time on the road in a motorhome was rare, yet today solo RVers are common. They choose to make an RVing lifestyle for various reasons: retirement, divorce, empty nests, fulfillment of a dream — or a calling to adventure.

Once RVing got into Linda Clayton's blood, nothing could stop her. Traveling first with her husband, she met RVers who introduced Linda to the concept of combining RV travel with work. Despite holding her dream job as an optician for a children's clinic, Linda and her husband sold their house and most of its contents and started their adventure. Unfortunately, the marriage ended in less than a year. But it was too late for Linda to turn back.

"I decided to buy my own motorhome and named it 'Myrtle,' after my grandmother," she says. "I traded my vehicle for one I could tow 'four down.' I knew I could never make the kind of money I had earned as an optician, but I wanted to try work-camping."

Linda and Myrtle have full-timed ever since. Linda first worked at Iowa's Saylorville Lake as a custodian in a day-use area for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). Later, she volunteered for the USACE in Alabama.

For two winters, Linda lived at a mobile home park in Apache Junction,



Arizona, and worked in the office and as a gate attendant. On weekends, she sold items for a vendor at the Mesa Marketplace Swap Meet.

In between winter and summer jobs, Linda worked two peak seasons for Amazon.com in Campbellsville, Kentucky. She recently trained as part of the Amazon CamperForce Away Program, teaching the receiving (products) job to new associates. Her trainer job ended in time for her to return to Amazon.com in Campbellsville — likely as a picker of products for orders in the company's fulfillment center.

When she worked summers at an RV park in Michigan, her oldest granddaughter joined her for one season.

"I taught her how to run the honey-wagon pumper," Linda says. "People felt sorry for her and gave her tips. Funny, I never got tips!"

Linda keeps company with her two "boys," dogs Rags and Brutus. Rags is Linda's kayaking buddy. She owns two kayaks and enjoys time on waterways wherever she travels. She also likes to hike and hunt for mushrooms. "I

"I think most women are better than men at driving and parking RVs. Seriously!"

love most of this beautiful country," she adds. "But for me, the best part of RVing is the great friends I meet along the way! I call them my RVing family."

Linda's advice for solo women who want to RV: "If I can do it, you can do it! Don't be intimidated by driving, towing, or anything related to the RV. I think most women are better than men at driving and parking RVs. Seriously!"

"As for work-camping, if you are a hard worker, some employers who



Right: Linda Clayton named her motorhome "Myrtle," after her grandmother.

advertise for couples will give you a chance to prove yourself. However, it is definitely harder to earn a living for those of us who aren't yet receiving retirement income.

"I love the RVing lifestyle, even though I'm so poor right now I can't pay attention," she sums up. "Yet, I can't make myself get off the road and go back to a 'normal' job — such as an optician."

Mary Ann Brazee, another full-time solo RVer, also supports her lifestyle by working. She views each of her jobs with a "Star Trek" mentality — stepping out into the unknown and going with it. Some jobs are a bit more "Trekish" than others, she admits.

Making her home in Michigan for 35 years and raising two sons, Mary Ann visited a friend who worked in Yellowstone National Park. "That's all it



"I set a goal to work as many national parks as possible and I checked off Yellowstone, Death Valley, Bryce Canyon and the Everglades."

took to get that itch," she says. "I had been divorced for several years and had reached my highest level working in a shoe store. I love to travel, and jobs in national parks appealed to me."

However, without retirement income, Mary Ann needed steady employment. She applied to the park's concessioner, Xanterra Parks & Resorts, and took her first position in Bryce Canyon, working retail in the camper store. When winter snow fell, Xanterra transferred her to Death Valley National Park. During those first years, she lived in company dormitory housing and traveled in a conversion van.

"After my stint in Death Valley, I knew this lifestyle was for me, so I sold my house in Michigan," she says, laughing about becoming "homeless."

"Since I was not yet on Social Security, money got pretty tight," she says. She ultimately wanted to work in Everglades National Park. Xanterra had openings, but no housing for those without an RV. (Later, Xanterra provided housing and Mary Ann worked two seasons in the Everglades.)

However, in Florida, she discovered jobs at the Fort Myers International Airport with Delta Air Lines and Continental Airlines. Mary Ann handled baggage, rode on the cabin service

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truck that lifts workers up to restock and clean up the airplane, and waved flags to guide planes into position on the tarmac. "Isn't that cool?" she asks, her brown eyes sparkling. "My airport jobs!"

The airlines gave a bonus to employees who completed their contract. "That was about \$1,000 extra — enough to buy gas to get me back to Death Valley to work again for Xanterra. I set a goal to work as many national parks as possible and I checked off Yellowstone, Death Valley, Bryce Canyon and the Everglades. Later, I added Shenandoah during the fall shoulder season for concessioner Aramark."

When Mary Ann reached official retirement age, she purchased her Class B Rialta motorhome. "Everything I own — my whole life — is in that motorhome," she says.

While at Death Valley, a co-worker told Mary Ann about jobs at Amazon.com. She applied to the fulfillment center in Coffeyville, Kansas, working the months prior to Christmas. At the end, she visited her son, who was stationed at the Army base at Fort Leavenworth. "The opportunity to visit family and friends is a perk to my lifestyle," she says. "Sightseeing is another bonus."

A friend she had met in Death Valley invited Mary Ann to make her home base at her house in Orange Park, Florida. Again, Mary Ann set out to find a job for the winter months. "An ad on Craigslist told about a job at a marina in the Everglades. I rented kayaks and canoes and oversaw the sale of fuel for the few houseboats left there after a major hurricane. It was a lucky find!"

All the while Mary Ann transitioned to full-time RVing, figuring out her residency, mail forwarding and how to pay bills online. However, when her job at the Everglades marina ended, she still needed to work for a month until her next job started. "Another lucky find," Mary Ann says. "I worked through May taking the 2010 census."

Now, five years into her work-camping career, Mary Ann considers

Amazon.com her major employer.

"I keep pushing for earlier seasons with the company, working recently at Campbellsville," she says.

Mary Ann prepared herself with experience in national parks and by heeding the advice of her work-camper friend. However, her "Star Trek" mindset finds various jobs throughout the year. One fall, she tried the sugar beet harvest in North Dakota. The beet

harvest did not work out well; still, she counts it as an adventure. With her grit, experience and willingness to step into the unknown, another lucky find always turns up.

Life handed Joy Ethridge a bag of lemons — the end of a 31-year marriage and the "loose ends" that followed. She could have pulled herself inside a warm hoodie while life passed



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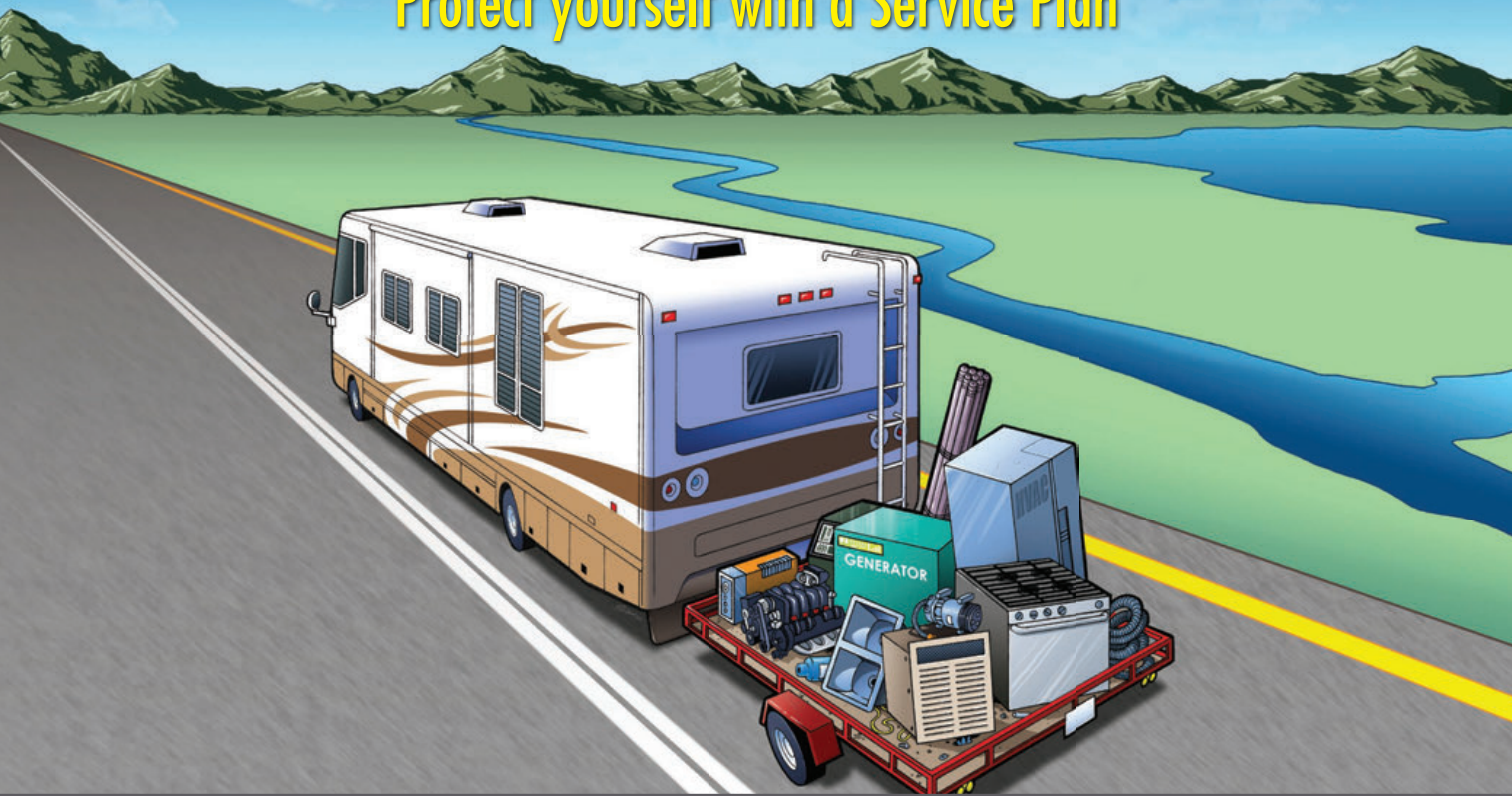
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by, but Joy's name signifies her personality. Despite her heartache, she dispersed more than three decades of "stuff" and sold her house. With no experience, she bought an RV and looked for jobs on the road. After answering an ad for a waitress outside Big Bend National Park, and landing a summertime job at Adventureland Amusement Park in Altoona, Iowa, Joy set out for a new life that now spans a decade and many states.

"I remember like yesterday pulling into my first job," she says. "The ad described a resort, but it looked like a convenience store. I had to give myself a big pep talk before going inside." However, the job turned into a good experience. Joy found that as a waitress — a job she had never done — she enjoyed interacting with locals who resembled characters out of a Western movie.

After Big Bend, Joy headed for Adventureland to oversee games. "That first summer on the road I met work-camper friends who became my extended family," she says.

Before Joy left the amusement park in September, co-workers offered her a job on their team for See's Candies in Fort Worth, Texas, prior to Christmas. See's is a California-based company with kiosks in malls. "I was not thrilled with my uniform — an old-fashioned white dress with a big black bow," she says, "but giving out candy samples all day is fun."

Joy later traveled to Yellowstone National Park to work at Grant Village



"The combination of working and RVing has allowed me to go to different places and do things I would have never been able to do otherwise."

General Store where elk roamed in the employee campground. "It was not my dream job, but living in Yellowstone for a summer made up for the hectic pace," she says.

Joy took several jobs in KOA Campgrounds traveling from Niagara Falls, New York, to Bozeman, Montana, to Lake Conroe, Texas, to Boston/Cape Cod. In addition to her office duties at Bozeman, she supervised tie-dyeing of T-shirts with guests each Saturday morning. She often heads back to her home turf in Texas for winters. Once traveling Interstate 10, she stopped at Fort Stockton RV Park. "The owner offered me a job and I ended up spending the winter there," Joy says.

In her off time at Lake Conroe, she took square-dance lessons and attended a big "Go Texan" event in one of the park's ballrooms. New experiences and challenges are some of the pluses in her lifestyle.

Like Linda and Mary Ann, Joy has worked three seasons at Amazon.com in Campbellsville and Coffeyville. Currently, she works at her "dream job" in the bookstore at Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Although Joy, Linda and Mary Ann are not acquainted, each of them ended one life and began a totally new one. "The combination of working and RVing has allowed me to go to different places and do things I would have never been able to do otherwise," Joy says. "The people I've met along this journey have so enriched my life."

Enrichment goes two ways. Joy, Linda and Mary Ann give back to those they serve and work beside. If solo RVing had a poster to encourage others to take a leap onto the road, the smiling faces of these three women who found their niches would be front and center. **M**

Joy Ethridge at her dream job — working at the Mount Rushmore bookstore.



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DIMENSIONS OF DENALI

A journey to this majestic national park includes side trips that are quintessentially Alaskan

Denali. For those familiar with the great Alaskan mountain, the tallest peak in North America, Denali (aka Mount McKinley) brings up images of a massive, snowy peak towering over the landscape like a giant warlord. Denali, which means “great one” or “high one” in Native Alaskan Athabaskan, rises 20,320 feet and is the largest mountain entirely above sea level in the world. Yet, this is also a ghost mountain, often shrouded in clouds. In fact, only about 1 in 3 of the 400,000 people who visit annually have the privilege of seeing Denali’s magnificence. On a recent motorhome trip to interior Alaska, we were determined to explore the many dimensions of Denali.

North From Anchorage

We begin our Denali adventure in Anchorage, Alaska. We opt for a rental from Alaska Motorhome Rentals instead of driving our coach from Oregon. It’s a good decision. The Class C is fully outfitted and ready when we arrive in Anchorage.

A spectacular way to experience the great mountain is a glacier flight and we’d booked a flight through Rust’s Flying Service in Anchorage. Alas, misty weather and low clouds prevent us from taking off. My friend, Dee Bouchon, who works for one of the native corporations in Alaska, had advised, “Decide what you want to see in Alaska — the mountain, bears, whales — before you go. Plan to do it first. If the weather gets in the way, you still have a chance to do it later.”

We call K2 Aviation, a sister company of Rust’s, cross our fingers, and head north on Highway 1, a 65-mph divided highway. Aspens, electric green as they leaf out, border the road and, to the north, we see the craggy Talkeetna Mountains. We pass over Knik River, so broad it looks like a lake; then the Matanuska River; and into the broad plain of Matanuska Valley, Alaska’s breadbasket.

We join Highway 3, the George Parks Highway (“the Parks”). The stretch between Wasilla, the town politico Sarah Palin made famous, and Willow, is a wasteland of traffic, minimalls, and fast-food chains and we’re grateful when we leave it behind and rejoin the aspens and spruce.

The terrain of interior Alaska is different from the coast. The air feels dryer and warmer and, at 69 degrees, it’s perfect driving weather. We spot a sign along the highway for Martin Buser’s Happy Trails Kennels tour and

Captain Stan lands the de Havilland Otter on Pika Glacier.



turn onto Big Lake Road to check it out. Dog sledding is popular in Alaska and many mushers, like four-time Iditarod champion Buser, make extra money by giving visitors an up-close-and-personal look at the sport.

When we pull into the ample parking area, we're greeted by a cacophony of barking as well as DeeDee Jonrowe, one of Buser's neighbors and the foremost female dog musher in the world. While some kennels give visitors rides, Buser's offers an in-depth tour, a 20-minute video, information about the care of these marathon athletes, and a fast and furious demonstration of dogs pulling a wheeled cart. It's all entertaining and enlightening and, as we snuggle furry puppies, we're sorry the 90-minute tour is over.

Back on Parks Highway, we're making good time until, at milepost 83, we're slowed by road construction (a summer constant in Alaska). We follow a pilot car for several miles and pass over the Kashwitna River, the source of the washout.

We turn off at Talkeetna Spur Road to Kahiltna Birchworks, a family-owned company specializing in birch syrup products. Like maple trees, birch trees can be tapped for their sweet water that's condensed into birch syrup. The syrup is less sweet than maple syrup and delicious on pancakes or as a baste for salmon. We buy a few bottles of this northern treat and some

birch-cream caramels and birch-almond brittle for snacking.

Sky-High Denali

Nine miles farther, we get our first glimpse of Denali, her massive hulk peeking from behind the clouds. She's stunning and, with her two sisters, Mount Foraker (17,402 feet) and Mount Hunter (14,573 feet), these giants make the rest of the massive Alaska Range look small. The mountain continues to play hide and seek with the forest. However, just past Talkeetna Alaskan Lodge at milepost 29, we pull in at a wide turnout for a sweeping view of the mountain and join others snapping photos.

We head to Talkeetna Lodge, a native-owned property and one of the nicest in the area. The lodge takes advantage of its mountain views with floor-to-ceiling windows in Foraker Restaurant and a large outdoor deck with a graphic map that sorts out the many peaks. We meet our friend, Dee, and enjoy a delicious dinner of Copper River salmon and risotto, and for dessert, Baked Alaska with house-made huckleberry ice cream. Over coffee we watch the colossal mountain's face change with the light.

We tuck the rig into Talkeetna Camper Park, a full-service RV park



Getting Here by RV

There is only one road entrance to Denali. The entrance is along Alaska Highway 3 (the George Parks Highway) about 240 miles north of Anchorage.

centrally located to town. The park offers level, gravel-topped sites, a scattering of trees, 30/50-amp service and water and electric or full hookups. Then we explore the quaint village of Talkeetna, including Nagley's General Store and Grizzly Gold's panning tent.

We're up early the next morning because the sky is clear and K2 Aviation is flying to Denali. We board a 10-passenger de Havilland Otter for the two-hour Denali Grand Tour with a glacier landing. As we fly low over Highway 3 and Matanuska Valley with its silty glacial rivers braided with gravel and sandbars, our pilot tells us the vast Alaskan and Aleutian mountain ranges, including Denali, were formed when Pacific and North American tectonic plates deep in the earth collided, pushing up the land.

Below from left: Nagley's General Store in Talkeetna is a gathering place even at 10:30 p.m. on a long summer day. Glaciers flow for miles in the Alaska Range.



photo: Bobbie Hasselbring



From above left: A few miles into Denali National Park, RVs and other non-park vehicles have limited access; these motorhomes are lined up to leave the park. Martin Buser greets visitors at his Happy Trails Kennels while DeeDee Jonrow works on harnessing a sled dog for a demonstration run. Panning at Grizzly Gold in downtown Talkeetna with real “diggings” from a nearby mine.

We climb to 11,000 feet and into the heart of the Alaska Range — over Tokositna Glacier’s black ribbons of rock, up to Wickersham Wall’s 14,000 feet of rock and ice, next to Mount Foraker and past 45-mile-long Kahiltna Glacier, the longest in the Alaska Range. It’s the 100th anniversary of the first climb of Denali and friends and family are re-enacting the trek. As we fly over the colorful tents of the climbers’ base camp, I look down and wonder if this is the centennial climbing party.

It is absolutely breathtaking — hundreds of square miles of snow, ice and granite rising to impossible heights. To the west, wrinkled mountains, brown and barren, stretch to the ocean for more than 600 miles. It’s landscape on such an immense scale it’s beyond comprehension.

We circle and suddenly drop down, the little plane skiing on the face of Pika Glacier. Captain Stan brings the Otter to a neat stop and we pile onto the ice. We’re in a bowl surrounded by jagged peaks and walls of ice under a bluer-than-blue sky. And it is quiet. The deep, soul-touching silence has us all staring wide-eyed. High up, a small avalanche of snow cascades off the rock face, showering ice and snow and breaking the hushed spell. We laugh self-consciously and take pictures of one another.

Back in the plane, we effortlessly lift off and enjoy more of the same — massive rivers of ice and rock, pools and crevasses of aqua-blue ice, peaks that touch the sky, and, of course, Denali, the great one, lording above the rest.

Ghost Mountain

Before we leave Talkeetna, we stop at Flying Squirrel Bakery Cafe for a few cookies and at Crowley’s (credit card only) for gas. On the Parks Highway, it’s three hours (150 miles) to Denali National Park & Preserve. The speed limit is 65 mph, but frost heaves — great waves and breaks in the pavement — prevent us from speeding.

We see the great mountain from the highway — and the clouds gathering at its base. We begin climbing, passing stands of skinny spruce, half-frozen lakes and streams still laced with snow. Then it’s over the east fork of the Chitina River; a little farther on, the middle fork. We’ve climbed to 2,500 feet and the land stretches out into a broad plain surrounded on three sides by mountain ranges. At milepost 201, we’ve reached the summit and its amazing top-of-the-world feeling.

A few miles farther is Denali National Park & Preserve, 6 million acres of wildness bisected by a single gravel road. Three park campgrounds accommodate RVs (max 40 feet in length): Riley Creek (147 sites) near the entrance of the park; Savage River (33 sites) at mile 13; and Teklanika (Tek) River (53 sites) at mile 29. None of them have hookups, but Riley, where we’re staying, offers flush toilets, potable water, and close proximity to the mercantile center with showers and laundry and a park bus stop.

Denali is a wilderness park with few vehicles allowed. Private tour buses and park tour buses visit the park on various schedules. In the morning, we hop a shuttle bus (it’s a good idea to reserve your space). These are converted school buses and our driver, Ken Harlan, a retiree from Kentucky, provides an informative and colorful narration.

The day is cool and gray and the great Denali and the entire Alaska Range is swallowed up in clouds. We’ve opted for the eight-hour round trip to Eielson Visitor Center at



Glaciers in the Alaska Range on the way to Denali.

milepost 66 on the Park Road.

As we motor along, driver Ken tells us we're passing through taiga — areas with slim trees — and tundra — vast open plains of dwarf shrubs, sedges and grasses, mosses and lichens. Here, winter temperatures range from minus 30 to minus 70 degrees and winds routinely howl at 100 mph. We pass gray rivers, braided with gravel bars and, 45 minutes into our tour, spot our first bears, a big grizzly mother and her cub. The bus stops and we crowd the windows for photos.

As we bump along, the road narrows. Occasionally, we come upon another bus from the opposite direction and we hold our collective breath as the vehicles pass within inches of one another. It makes me glad we chose Riley Creek Campground rather than one deeper in the park.

Purple and yellow wildflowers climb the slopes, including yellow cinquefoils, the tundra rose. We spot a herd of caribou running through the tundra's greens, rusts and golds. At another point, a huge female moose rumbles down the hill and onto the road, passing right by our bus.

Eielson Visitor Center is our turnaround and we gratefully pile out and explore the center's fascinating exhibits of the park's Alpine tundra,



Dall sheep ewes with their young lambs rest on a hillside in Denali.

wildlife and geology. While we're there, a park ranger awards a boy his Junior Ranger badge and everyone applauds.

By the time we return to Riley Creek Campground, we've seen five bears, one moose, a marmot, countless caribou and untold mosquitoes. But Denali remains a ghost.

A few days later, when we board our flight home, we're certain we've seen all the faces of Denali. The pilot announces, "Folks, it's a beautiful day and the airspace is clear, so we're going to go around Denali a few times." And here we are, in a Boeing 737, cruising around the Great One. We're flying above the big mountain, cruising over its ice-white snow, ice sheds,

glaciers and its 20,000-plus-foot summit. It's absolutely spectacular. Now, we really have seen the many dimensions of Denali. **M**

For More Information

Alaska Motorhome Rentals

800-323-5757, www.bestofalaskatravel.com

Denali National Park & Preserve

907-683-9532, www.nps.gov/dena

Kahiltna Birchworks

www.alaskabirchsyrop.com

Talkeetna Camper Park

907-733-2693, www.talkeetnacamper.com

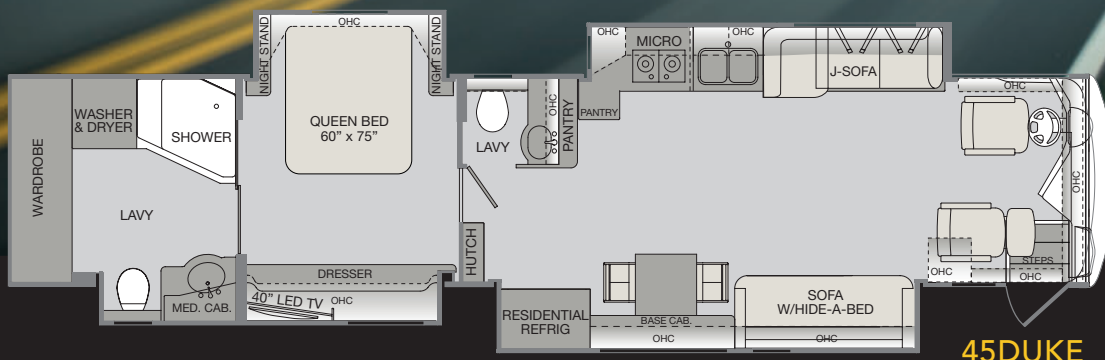
Travel Alaska

www.travelalaska.com

A "braided river" in Denali National Park is filled with glacial sand and gravel.



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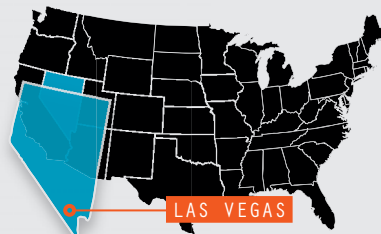


Monaco, Circle 104 on Reader Service Card

By Ken Reid

VEGAS ON A BUDGET

Enjoying the fun of Sin City without breaking the bank



LAS VEGAS

RV Park Bargains

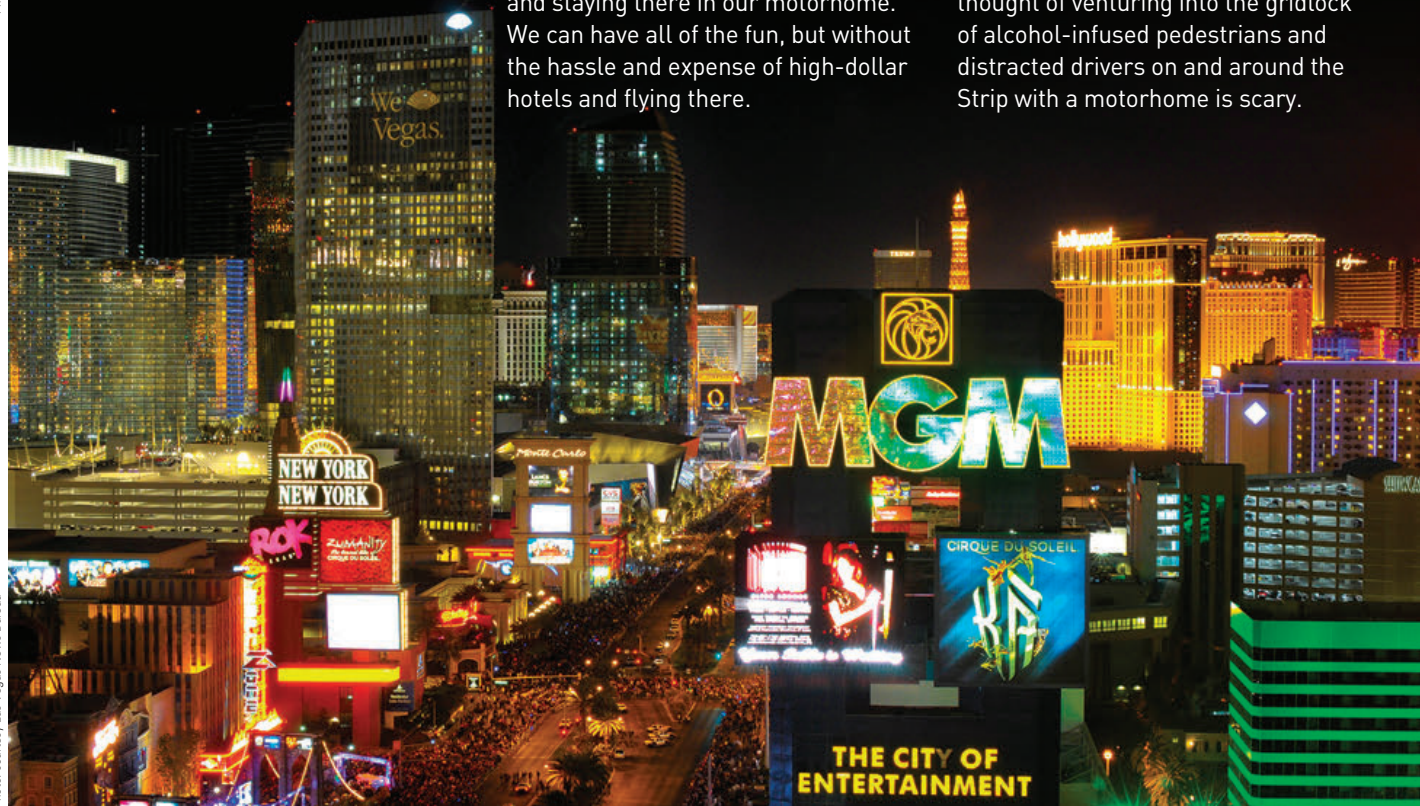
To save money on site fees while staying in Vegas, choose one of the six campgrounds on Boulder Highway. Rates range from \$20 to \$32 per night.

Though my wife, Gayle, and I have visited Las Vegas, Nevada, by motorhome once before, it was more than two decades ago. That was back in the day when many casinos would allow RVers to dry camp on the outskirts of their huge lots while visiting the casinos to gamble. It was a heck of a deal, made even better by the offer of \$1.99 breakfasts, lunches for \$3.99 and full buffet dinners for \$5.99. We had heard that those days were long gone, especially after the economic downturn, but we decided to check things out for ourselves.

What we found is that the economy in Vegas is rapidly improving, and so are the deals being offered to lure more people there. Furthermore, it seems the light bulb came on at some point, and revealed the huge potential that RVers represent to the local

economy. RV parks and supporting businesses have sprung up all over, many adjacent to casinos — no surprise there. Perhaps more than ever before, we can now enjoy all that Vegas has to offer, while still reaping the many advantages of traveling to and staying there in our motorhome. We can have all of the fun, but without the hassle and expense of high-dollar hotels and flying there.

We visited Las Vegas for 11 nights in our motorhome, for little more than the cost of fuel to get there (we live in Northern California). We had a dynamite time, enjoyed several days and evenings of unique experiences on the Strip, and discovered several fun options in that part of the city. We didn't even have to take our motorhome anywhere near the downtown area to do it. From my perspective, as the principal driver, that alone reduced the stress factor substantially. I'm very comfortable driving our 35-foot motorhome, even with a four-wheels-down dinghy in tow (that precludes backing up), but just the thought of venturing into the gridlock of alcohol-infused pedestrians and distracted drivers on and around the Strip with a motorhome is scary.



Photos: Ken Reid

Photo: courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

We did learn that some casinos off the Strip allow RV parking, but, in most cases, the owner has to check in with security first and register to stay in the hotel for the entire period the motorhome is parked there.

The first thing we did while planning the trip was to check for RV parks in Vegas that were included in one of our camping memberships. Next came some online research pertaining to comments made by others about stays at those we might be interested in. Then consideration was given to proximity of attractions. We found the Thousand Trails Las Vegas RV Resort on Boulder Highway, within a short drive of the Strip. Since we could stay at the park for free, it quickly became our first choice.

As retirees, we have plenty of time to travel. But like many others living on a fixed income, we try to find bargains wherever we can. We also try to consistently watch for things that might be of interest to others — especially since our kids and grandkids, plus many friends — are RV enthusiasts, too. This trip to Vegas was no exception.

Upon arrival in the southeast part of Las Vegas, there was no fighting traffic congestion or traveling on narrow city streets. From Interstate 515 (which is also highway 93 and 95), it was easy to locate the Boulder Highway off-ramp. About a mile south on Boulder was the RV park. There was a nice, wide, flat staging area at the front gate for disconnecting the dinghy.

After setting up camp, I did some reconnoitering on bicycle. Within a 10- to 15-minute ride along Boulder (which is quite wide, not gridlocked, and has clearly designated bicycle lanes), there are several other nice RV parks. For those who don't have a camping membership as an option, there were advertised rates from \$16 to \$23 per night, with



Photo: courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

Admission is free for the Fall of Atlantis animatronic show, which runs daily and is part of the fun inside the Forum Shops at Caesars Palace.

full hookups. Most of them also offered weekly and monthly rates that seemed quite reasonable.

Within the same stretch were seven hotel/casinos, and all advertised special deals on gaming (some including free play) for new members as well as dining specials. I also found lots of pamphlets advertising meal deals. One of those was Tix4Tonight (www.tix4tonight.com/las-vegas-restaurant-coupons.html), offering discount dining to more than 40 restaurants and buffets. Online dining deals can be found at Groupon (www.groupon.com/local/las-vegas/restaurants) and Vegas.com (www.vegas.com/restaurant/specials-and-deals).

There are bus stops all along both sides of Boulder. The closest is within easy walking distance (about three blocks) of where we stayed — it's just north of Lamb, on the east side of Boulder. For those who don't have a dinghy,

A view of the hotel-casino New York-New York looking north along the Las Vegas Strip.





The closest casino to the Thousand Trails Las Vegas RV Resort is Boulder Station. It's only a 10-minute walk from the campground and offers gaming, entertainment and dining promotions.

or just don't want to drive downtown, it's an easy and inexpensive option for getting to not only the Strip, but many other attractions as well.

Another thing we did early on was check out the nearby casinos. The closest of those is Boulder Station. One of several Station Casino properties in the Las Vegas area, it's only a 10-minute walk from the Thousand Trails Las Vegas RV Resort. With a visit to the Rewards Center, we got free play and 3-times points for joining its players club. Other promotions included one free entry for each of us to the slot tournament on Wednesdays (because we are seniors), another \$3 free play each for going to the cinema on Wednesday, and the option to swipe our players cards once each day on Friday, Saturday and Sunday, with a guarantee to win something each time. The first day we tried it, Gayle got \$5 additional free play and I got 500 points. Among the other potential winnings were \$10,000 and free airfare to Hawaii for two.

Before venturing downtown, I was able to get a list detailing most of the major casino attractions that are free. It provided the description, times and days of the week. Some of those free attractions include the fountains and conservatory at Bellagio; the Fall of Atlantis and aquarium in the Forum

Shops at Caesars; live circus acts at Circus Circus; the Wildlife Habitat at the Flamingo; live music and the Flair Bartenders at Harrah's Carnival Court; the volcano and aquarium at the Mirage; the rainstorm and fountain at Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood; the Sunset Stampede Laser Light Show in Mystic Falls Park at Sam's Town on Boulder Highway; interactive fish feeding at the aquarium at the Silverton Hotel; and the Lake of Dreams at Wynn Las Vegas. On Fremont Street, the Viva Vision light and sound show at the Fremont Street Experience is spectacular.

During our first soiree to the Strip, we lucked out in several ways. First, the GPS in our dinghy finally did something right, and found us a rapid route by freeway. It consistently took only 15 to 20 minutes from the RV park to the intersection of Tropicana Avenue and Las Vegas Boulevard (where New York-New York, MGM Grand, Tropicana and Excalibur are located). That route is longer, but except for less than a mile on Boulder Highway, it is all freeway.

Second, and perhaps most importantly, we discovered an easy and comparatively inexpensive place to park that was only a 10-minute walk from several major casinos. We were actually looking for United Artists



“On Fremont Street, the Viva Vision light and sound show at the Fremont Street Experience is spectacular”



Photo: courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau

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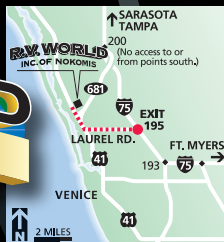
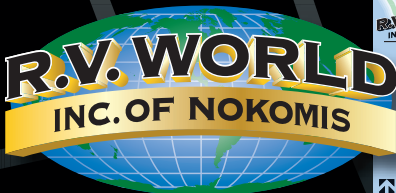
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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

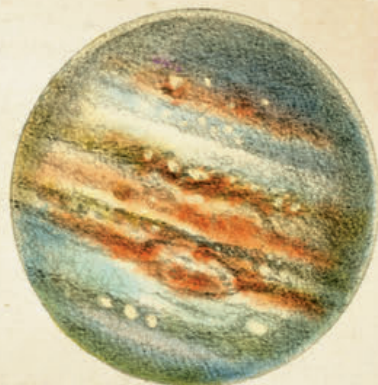


Fig. 7 Jupiter



Fig. 2 Neptune

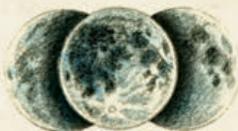


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon

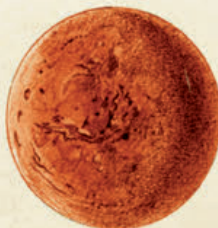


Fig. 6 Mars

Go Affordably. Go RVing. Save your money for a rainy day while still enjoying a few star-filled nights. See how RVing stacks up to other modes of travel with our Vacation Cost Comparison at GoRVing.com. **WHAT WILL YOU DISCOVER?**

Go RVing.



Photo: courtesy Las Vegas News Bureau



Showcase Theatre 8, located on Las Vegas Boulevard, to watch a show that just came out. Finding the theater turned out to be quite a challenge while driving, but well worth the effort. Now we can save others the same hassle. After coming off the freeway onto Tropicana Avenue, turn north and quickly get in the right lane. Just past the Hard Rock Café, there is a large blue-and-white sign advertising a Ross Dress For Less store. Just under that is an entry to the parking garage for the cinemas. The fee is only \$3 for an unlimited amount of time — except no overnights. There is no requirement that you attend a show, and there are no strings attached. We used it several times during our stay. Other parking options in the area begin at \$5. From the parking garage, it is only a matter of minutes to the MGM Grand, New York-New York, Tropicana, Excalibur and many others. The garage, pedestrian bridges and casinos, all have elevators to assist the physically challenged, too.

Hanging down one side of the Tropicana was a banner indicating that the casino would cover up to the first \$200 in losses for new members who joined its players club. We had to check that out. Naturally there were strings attached, but nothing we couldn't live with. In order to take maximum advantage of the offer, you have to come back during three consecutive 24-hour periods. The day after the first day of play, swipe your card and get 25 percent of your losses from the

previous day in free play (unless, of course, winnings were greater than losses). The next day you can receive another 25 percent in free play, and the day after that, 50 percent of losses from the previous day. We were planning on spending several days on the Strip anyway, so it was no big deal to keep coming back. While playing slots there, Gayle was approached by an employee with a random offer. She received a voucher for \$50 off the cost of dinner at Bacio, which is one of the finest restaurants in the Tropicana. Naturally, we used it that same night. And those were just some examples of deals we encountered during our trip.

We spent several days walking the Strip, especially the 1.6-mile area between the Tropicana and the Venetian. That's because there is so much to experience along the way. For example, there are street performers all along the Strip, and people-watching is so much fun. But by walking through some of the megaresorts, it is easy to imagine actually being in New York, Paris, or Venice or traveling back in time to ancient Rome. Not only that, but many of the most spectacular free shows — like the dancing waters at the Bellagio, the volcano at the Mirage and the pirate ship battle at Treasure Island — are perhaps best viewed from the Boulevard. We only got as far north as Circus Circus once, but that area is just as entertaining. One thing we didn't see as much of on the Strip is cheap meal deals.

Casinos certainly aren't the only

From top left: The Conservatory & Botanical Gardens at the Bellagio has exhibits that change with the seasons. Thousand Trails Las Vegas RV Resort is located just 6 miles from the Strip and has 205 campsites.

attractions that Las Vegas has to offer — though the wide variety of gambling, shows, gourmet restaurants and people-watching opportunities are a big draw. Golf, skydiving (outdoors and indoors), tours to places like Grand Canyon, Hoover Dam and Lake Mead, shooting machine guns, riding in a gondola while the gondolier croons romantic songs, checking out exclusive shops and enjoying a variety of spas, are among other activities.

Las Vegas is an all-season playground for adults, but there are plenty of fun things for the kids to do, too. Those include the Wet 'n' Wild water park, many arcades and dozens of thrill rides. Many casinos have kid-friendly options too, like supervised play areas and arcades.

Based on our experiences during the 11-night trip in our motorhome, Vegas is still an awesome place to go, and using a motorhome for the stay can still be a great bargain. **M**

For More Information

Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority
877-847-4858, www.lasvegas.com

Thousand Trails Las Vegas RV Resort
877-570-2267, www.thousandtrails.com/nvada/las-vegas-rv-resort



Vista 36Y

Belly up to the bar — kitchen bar that is — and Winnebago's entry-level Class A gasser will serve up easy living

By Bob Livingston

A favorite place to congregate in a home is the kitchen. If there's an island counter, it's hard to get anyone to leave, especially if there's room for a few stools. You know the scenario: Watch the cook prepare the meal (and offer friendly advice) while snacking on munchies before finally migrating to the dining area or outside.

It's hard to do that in a motorhome, or at least it was until Winnebago introduced the Vista 36Y. In this plan, the focal point is a large kitchen-bar-type counter that's the major section of a C-shaped structure that starts in the streetside slideout and ends up in

the space shared with the entryway. Entering the coach immediately attracts your attention, usually with an expression of surprise. Part of the visual appeal and positive response is due to the huge picture window across from the counter, but overall, the galley and the adjacent spacious living area make the entire front section welcoming to anyone who enters the coach. First impressions from most people, "This is a great place to hang out."

Standing in the galley, the cook is surrounded by all the amenities necessary to prepare big meals, with plenty of space to spread out. The kitchen bar portion of the counter,

which is made of Corian, houses the double stainless sinks serviced by a long-neck faucet. In itself, the counter is plenty big to do just about anything, and the second-level shelf on the outer edge provides a great place to add serving dishes filled with snacks. Integrated into this structure are plenty of cabinets and a trash chute with an easy-to-access container — a little touch with great impact.

A smaller connecting shelf leads to the backside of the galley, where the three-burner stove and oven, microwave, pantry and four-door refrigerator reside. Above this shelf are shallow cabinets with decorative glass doors, suitable for smaller foodstuffs, glasses and spices.

ABOVE: The two slideouts on the passenger side have limited impact on the space for patio furniture and other outdoor-living accessories.

The galley is certainly a happy place, with lots of natural light compliments of the aforementioned picture window. No doubt Winnebago designers knew that anyone working in the galley would enjoy peering out this window, which provides a clear view to the patio area and keeps the cook engaged with what's going on outside. The space between the wall and counter doubles as the aisle to the bathroom and bedroom, and can handle small, bar-type stools without impeding traffic.

When the opposing slides are deployed, the galley and living room, which occupy more than half of the coach's 37-foot overall length, open to an area that epitomizes easy living. Once the cockpit chairs are turned around and the two additional chairs are added to the expanding dining table, the living area can comfortably seat nine people. And there's plenty of floor space to add a couple additional chairs, if necessary. But as a coach for two people, the living area is a splendid place to relax, with a few caveats.

The Ultraleather-covered couch is very comfortable — for sitting upright. A footrest pops out of one side and there's a sleeper with a 52-by-70-inch mattress in the other. Without the ability to recline the back of the couch, the footrest is awkward to use and the bed is on the small side for a couple. Theater seating would work better here, especially since there's a clear shot to the retractable TV that's stored in the opposing buffet. Viewing this 39-inch TV is also possible from the driver's seat, but a little close for those seated at the dining table. Nevertheless, retracting the TV is a good feature for those who prefer not to look at it when it's off — and, of course, the extra counterspace comes in handy while dining.

An optional power StudioLoft, 32-by-89-inch bed makes an ideal place for one person, which can help justify substituting the sofa bed for theater seating, if a guest stays over on occasion. When the loft bed is retracted, it fits snugly against the ceiling so as not to impede headroom, but it does restrict access to the cabinets directly over the dash. Normally, that wouldn't

BELOW: The large bar-style galley counter is the focal point of the coach and makes a nice place to hang out. A powered StudioLoft bed snugs up to the ceiling so the cockpit headroom is not affected. When in the down position, the bed freely exposes the overhead cabinets.



be too much of a problem, but the hookups for the satellite dish receiver and controls for the antenna/cable TV are in these cabinets. After discussions with a Winnebago audiovisual engineer, the location for the components will likely be moved when the loft bed is ordered.

The audiovisual system could work as is, since a remote IR system is provided, but some modifications would still be required to make the TVs in the bedroom and outside compartment work in concert with a satellite dish. For those who prefer to activate only one receiver, it will have to be physically moved and hooked up to use with the other TVs, but only if it has an HDMI connection port. While there are inputs for an optional rooftop and portable dishes, there's no way to hook up a portable dish to the bedroom and outside compartment TVs unless you're

willing to do some cable maneuvering and use routing switches. Creative use of a receiver with a radio-frequency (RF) remote can make it work, or simply opt for multiple receivers and use a rooftop dish. If you're using campground cable and/or over-the-air broadcasting, all three TVs are ready to go.

The back section of the coach relies on a configuration that Winnebago has employed for a while, and frankly, it works well. A side aisle leads to a completely enclosed bathroom and bedroom, which is in the very rear of the coach. There is just the right amount of space allocated for the bathroom. Users can move about freely and there's little wasted space. The corner shower with rounded glass doors is roomy and the shelf for the soap and shampoo is big enough to hold (and secure) large bottles; a seat adds convenience. The shower wand is on the cheesy side, but

good water pressure makes it workable until a better unit can be retrofitted.

Storage in the bathroom is fantastic and even better if the combination washer/dryer is not ordered. The shelf created by the cabinet that's configured to accommodate the washer/dryer makes an excellent place to spread out toiletries, supplementing the limited space surrounding the lavatory sink. Still, the cabinets above and below the sink can handle a decent amount of toiletries and bathroom supplies.

Access to the bathroom is via a hinged door in the aisle or a pocket door from the bedroom. A third door closes off the aisle from the bedroom. This seems like a lot of doors, but they provide exceptional privacy and allow guests to linger in the front without feeling squeamish. We liked opening up the cockpit curtain and MCD blackout/solar shades early in the morning to enjoy the scenery without making the other person taking a shower and primping for the day run for cover. Although they wrap around the windshield and side windows completely, the curtains in the cockpit could be a little thicker and placed on more substantial hardware.

Winnebago offers a king bed option and in many cases, the mattress can overwhelm the available space, but not here. There is plenty of space to walk around the mattress, which is quite comfortable. Large nightstands are built into both sides, and the tops hinge open, exposing deep cabinets, which are perfect for storing personal items.

Space utilization in the bedroom is excellent. The entire wardrobe at the foot of the bed moves out in a dedicated slideout. Once open, there's access to a bank of drawers below a gigantic closet. Since the TV is concealed in a drop-down shelf mounted to the ceiling, the entire closet is available for clothing and other bulky items. A second pair of dining chairs is housed under the bed platform, which has some room for more stuff. The TV, by the way, is in perfect eyeshot while lying in bed, and can even be heard when the rear air conditioner is running.

Overall, the interior is very livable for those who like a kitchen-centric plan and slideouts are placed perfectly to enhance spaciousness. Beyond that, the curbside slideouts are not that deep so they don't infringe on the patio real estate. That makes setting up chairs and tables less cumbersome while still allowing access to the storage bays.

All the compartments have slam-latch hardware with the emphasis on "slam." Latch quality is so-so, and requires a lot of knee work to close completely. That also impacts the seals, which allow some dust to enter the compartments. That was most evident when pulling out the TV that's mounted in a clever bracket inside one of the patio-side compartments. The TV was pretty dusty when we pulled it out for viewing one morning. Those who enjoy watching TV outside will like the pullout arrangement, which could be even better if the bracket was made to swivel from side to side.

WHAT'S HOT

Bar-type galley counter, StudioLoft bed, roomy bathroom, king bed with walkaround space and nightstands, new exterior look

WHAT'S NOT

Cockpit seat armrests, stereo/backup camera, audiovisual system, exterior compartment door hardware, sofa bed

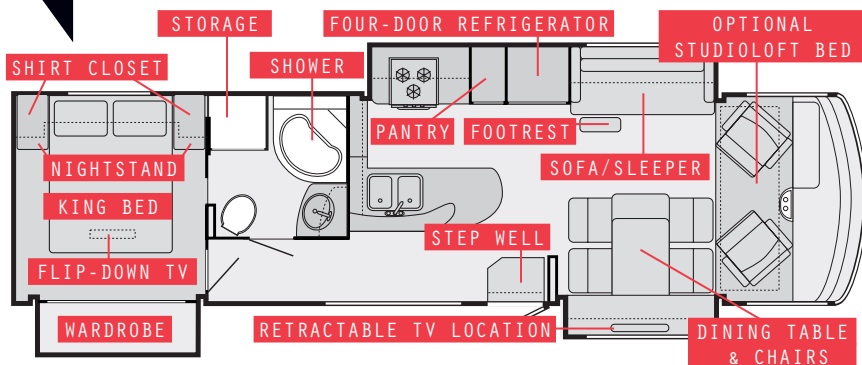


Overall storage is robust for the size of the coach, and there are shallow pass-through shelves that handle chairs and tables nicely. The utility bay is well organized, but the opening in the floor that provides a pathway for the sewer hose is too small for some hoses with integrated fittings. Generally, once the compartment doors are adjusted, owners will have little complaint about the exterior facilities.

Visually, the Vista has moved on from just entry-level status to a coach that looks like it could stand with higher-priced models. Winnebago redesigned the front this year and added just enough pizzazz to create smoother-flowing lines. Of course, the optional full-body paint and standard aluminum wheels really help.

The coach is built on the Ford chassis and handles predictably. Loading the motorhome heavily results in a more top-heavy feel, but overall, road manners are good once the pilot gets over the engine screaming at high rpm. Of course, the V-10 has no problem turning at a higher speed when downshifting, but it can be disconcerting to the uninitiated. We have also seen a notable increase in transmission efficiency. In Tow/Haul mode, the transmission knows exactly what to do, whether climbing or descending grades. We let it do its thing and were able to crest the infamous Grapevine grade on California's Interstate 5 at 50 MPH. Holdback downhill was almost too good, slowing us down more than necessary at times, without riding the brakes.

WINNEBAGO VISTA 36Y FLOORPLAN





A multipurpose hutch houses the retractable TV and pull-out table; the table extension and two more chairs store under the bed. The bathroom's roomy shower fits between the lavatory and cabinet for the optional washer/dryer combo. The bedroom TV flips down for easy viewing.

Generally, it's easy to spend long stints behind the wheel, but that's dependent on how you process noise. Normally, Winnebago's strong building techniques have resulted in rather quiet environments while on the road. The use of a steel cage up front and the aluminum/laminated wall structure has proven to be durable and reliable. But this coach blared out a cacophony of noises that could be annoying at times. No rattles here; fit and finish are good and everything inside was tight. We suspected the creaking and groaning were coming from the slideout mechanisms, which made almost identical sounds during deployment. The overhead bed also seemed to contribute to the noise.

It's a mixed bag, as far as the cab goes. The seats are super comfortable, but we really missed the adjustable arm rests. There's no such thing as a one size fits all here. We found the arm rests to be too high for our comfort. The old-style sun visors require gorilla-length arms to reach, but the defroster fans are a nice touch. Ergonomically, the instrumentation and controls work fine, except for the stereo/backup monitor.

The irony here is that the Pioneer



combination stereo/backup monitor/ Sirius radio is good quality equipment, but the placement in the center of the dash made the unit unusable for the driver. First off, the screen can't be seen without neck stretching and taking one's eyes off the road. I didn't even discover the side-view camera images until the last day of the trip when I saw a view from the corner of my eye.

Also, the controls are frustrating and difficult to use, albeit the remote control helps. Admittedly, I couldn't consume enough caffeine to get through hundreds of pages of tiny type in the owner's manual. When I got stuck (immediately) I ran out of patience waiting for the Pioneer tech people to answer the phone.

It's really hard to call the Winnebago Vista, "entry level." The 36Y looks, feels and lives like a much more expensive motorhome, and the floorplan exudes a lovable persona. Throw in a few modifications to neutralize the minor idiosyncrasies and this coach will make a wonderful home away from home. **M**

Winnebago Industries

641-585-3535, www.winnebagoind.com

Specifications

Chassis

Model	Ford
Engine	6.8-liter V-10
SAE Hp	362 @ 4,750 rpm
Torque	457 lb-ft @ 3,250 rpm
Transmission	five-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	4.30:1
Front Tires	235/80R22.5
Rear Tires	235/80R22.5
Wheelbase	242"
Brakes	disc
Suspension	front: I-beam/leaf spring rear: leaf spring
Fuel Capacity	80 gal
Fuel Economy	8.07 mpg
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles bumper-to-bumper; 5 years/60,000 miles powertrain

Coach

Exterior Length	37'
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	12' 6" with A/C
Interior Width	8' 0.5"
Interior Height	6' 8"
Construction	aluminum/steel frame with interlocking joints, laminated side walls with block foam and fiberglass insulation, fiberglass roof
Freshwater Capacity	76 gal
Black-Water Capacity	48 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	60 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	10 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	18 gal
Air Conditioner (2)	15,000 Btu
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Refrigerator	12 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	2,000 watts/55 amps
Battery	(4) 12-volt chassis, (1) 12-volt coach
AC Generator	5.5 kW
MSRP	\$127,774
MSRP as Tested	\$146,876
Warranty	1 year/15,000 miles basic; 3 years/36,000 miles structure; 10 years roof skin

Wet Weight

(Water and heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle	6,300 lbs
Rear Axle	12,440 lbs
Total	18,740 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	8,000/15,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	22,000/26,000 lbs
ROCCC	3,260 lbs (deduct weight of passengers for net cargo capacity)
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant And Cargo Carrying Capacity (Full Water, No Passengers)

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By Chris Hemer

A LONG WINTER'S NAP

Knowing what steps to take before and during storage will ensure your coach is ready for the next travel season



As the days get shorter and the leaves begin to fall, we come to the melancholy realization that it's time for many of us to put the motorhome away for the coming winter. It's not something that many of us like to think about, but the fact of the matter is, taking the proper steps to put your coach in hibernation — and checking on it once in a while during the colder months — is the best way to ensure it will be ready for fun come spring. With that in mind, we've compiled some handy information to help you take the right steps, both before and during storage. Keep in mind that proper preparation can take a lot of time, so don't expect to get everything done in one day, or even in one weekend.

BEFORE STORAGE INSIDE

A clean coach is a happy coach, so one of the first steps should be to clean the coach interior thoroughly. Insects and rodents are drawn to food odors, so empty all cabinets of stored food, vacuum the floors and cabinets, and wipe everything down with suitable cleaners. If the carpet or runner looks dirty, now is the time to clean it; carpet cleaners are available for rent and do a pretty impressive job of removing ground-in dirt. The soap's perfume can have the added benefit of masking food odors, making your coach less attractive to would-be scavengers.

Once you're done cleaning the interior, it's time to decide how you want to protect it. If you live in a damp climate, whether it's the Pacific Northwest or the Southeast, you should definitely keep the interior dehumidified. One of the easiest and least expensive ways to do this is with a product like Dri-Z-Air, which uses desiccant crystals to draw moisture out of the air, then collect it in a container that is emptied periodically. Place at least three inside the coach — one in the front, one in the living/kitchen area and one in the bedroom. You will be amazed at how much water is collected after just a few weeks. Keeping the



An open container of Kanberra Gel evaporates into the coach's interior, providing a fresh, clean scent. It then settles on interior surfaces, preventing the growth of mold and mildew. It is 100 percent natural and nontoxic.

air inside the coach dry will not only prevent mold and mildew, it will prevent wood cabinets and drawers from swelling and warping. A natural product called Kanberra Gel can also help neutralize and eliminate the mold and mildew commonly associated with damp environments.

If you'll be storing in a hot, dry area like the Southwest, you'll want to protect the interior from UV light. There are a variety of manufacturers on the market that offer shades that can deflect light from the windshield and side windows — you can even fashion your own covers for smaller windows with cardboard and aluminum foil. Taking a little extra time to block the windows and close the shades will keep



Dri-Z-Air is a simple, inexpensive way to prevent moisture damage and musty odors in your motorhome while it is stored. Desiccant crystals draw moisture out of the air and deposit it in the container below. It is reusable and odorless, and comes with a 13-ounce bag of refill crystals.



One way to promote air circulation inside the coach is with a roof vent cover like this one from Maxxair. It allows you to keep roof vents open without the threat of water intrusion.

the furniture and carpet protected from fading and sun damage.

And before you walk out and lock the door, don't forget to put a little nontoxic antifreeze in the sinks and toilet(s) to protect from freezing, turn off the water pump and switch off the coach power.

OUTSIDE

Of course, the first thing to do here — if you haven't done it already — is to dump the holding tanks and flush them thoroughly. Once the black tank is dumped, add some water and holding-tank chemical to keep odors at bay. If you live in a cold climate, you should also winterize the motorhome or have it winterized at a qualified RV dealer or repair center. Regardless of the climate in your area, drain the hot-water tank and freshwater tanks, and run the water pump until all water is out of the lines. This will help prevent bacteria

[1] In hot, sunny climates, a reflective sunshade like this one is a good way to prevent damage from UV rays. Windshield covers are readily available from a number of manufacturers, and you can create your own for smaller windows with cardboard and aluminum foil. [2] If you live in a colder area, winterize the coach or arrange to have it winterized at a qualified RV center. Then, pour a small amount of nontoxic antifreeze down the sink and into the toilet(s) to protect them from freezing as well. [3, 4] Regardless of the local climate, it's a good idea to drain the hot-water tank. Locate the drain plug (on this Atwood, it's a 1 15/16-inch plastic plug) and remove it. Stand back and let the water drain until the tank is empty, then replace the plug with either some Teflon paste/tape or pipe dope on the threads to prevent leaks when you refill in the spring.

from growing in the stagnant water and creating bad taste and odor.

A good wash from top to bottom is important, but before you break out the hose and bucket, carefully climb up on the roof and give it a good inspection. Check the sealant around any transition seams, roof vents, antennas, etc., for cracking, peeling and splitting. Any questionable areas should be carefully cleaned and new caulking applied where necessary, particularly if you will be storing the motorhome outside in a rainy or snowy environment. Look at the air-conditioning unit (or units) and make sure that they are sitting level and don't show any signs of sagging.

Once roof repairs (if any) have been made and the sealant is completely



1



2



3



4

dry, give the motorhome a good wash, starting at the top and working your way down. How you clean the roof depends largely on what it is made of: If it is rubber, use one of the many rubber-roof cleaners on the market offered by companies such as Protect All, Camco, Thetford, Dometic and others; suitable household cleaners can also be used. Follow the directions on the package, and agitate the surface with a medium-bristle brush on an extension pole. If



5



6



7



8

[5] Most motorhomes have low-point drains that are visible from underneath the coach. Open them and empty the freshwater tank in preparation for storage. If the plug is not visible, see your owner's manual or contact an RV center to determine how the freshwater tank is drained. [6] Before washing the roof, inspect it carefully for sealants that may have cracked or lifted around roof vents, etc. Inspect all areas and then reapply new sealant as necessary. [7, 8] Small cracks in seams and transition areas can be filled with rubber roof lap sealant.



9

[9] Carefully inspect the area around the air-conditioning unit. If it appears to have sagged, the surrounding area shows signs of water collection, or if it's just been many years since the gasket was replaced, remove the air-conditioning unit, scrape away the old gasket, and replace with a newer white gasket. The white gaskets seal better and last longer. [10] Camco, Dometic, Protect All and Thetford all offer their own brand of rubber-roof cleaner/treatment systems.

you have a fiberglass roof, the same applies, except you can use common car wash soap here. Rinse the roof and coach thoroughly, then wash/wax the rest of the motorhome as normal. If you have a rubber roof, apply a rubber-roof treatment that is free of petroleum distillates once the surface is dry.

Clean the tires with a quality tire cleaner and treat it with a rubber-protectant product that contains no petroleum distillates (see the



10

article, "How to Maximize the Life of Motorhome Tires," on page 54). Now is a good time to check and adjust tire pressure, and if the motorhome is stored outside in a sunny area, protect the tires with RV tire covers, which are available through companies such as ADCO and Camping World. Tire covers prevent UV light from degrading the tires, helping to prevent premature aging and cracking while the coach is in storage.

FUEL AND BATTERIES

Generally speaking, if the motorhome will only be put away for three months, fuel stabilizer isn't necessary, unless you have a diesel coach and live in a very moist and/or warm environment. These conditions can lead to microbial growth and bacteria in the fuel that will contaminate it. Fill the tank to prevent condensation on the surface, then add the stabilizer. In the case of gas coaches, pump gas typically has no trouble staying good for up to six months, but when in doubt, adding fuel stabilizer certainly won't hurt.

If the batteries are the flooded-cell variety, check the water level and top them off as necessary, then bring them up to a full charge. If you have the luxury of indoor storage or have power available, you can keep the batteries on a maintenance charger for the duration. If the coach will be stored long term in a cold environment, it might not be a bad idea to remove the batteries (if possible) and keep them on a maintenance

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ESSENTIAL TIPS FOR COACH STORAGE

[11] Before putting the coach away, make sure to check and adjust tire pressure. Doing so will help prevent sidewall damage if the coach will sit for a long period without being moved. [12] Wash the wheels and tires, then treat the tires with a good rubber protectant like Aerospace Protectant from 303. [13] Even if you treat the tires with a product that protects them from UV rays, it's still a good idea to cover them with white tire covers that help reflect light away from the surface.



charger at your residence to keep them in good shape — just remember not to store the batteries directly on concrete.

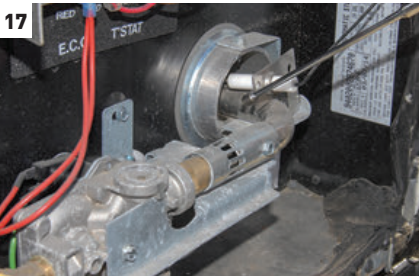
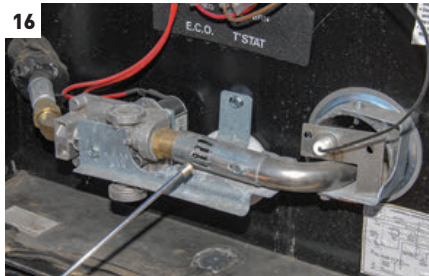
And before you walk away from the coach, make sure that the LP-gas supply is turned off.

DURING STORAGE

It isn't necessary to store the coach on jacks; in fact, storing a motorhome this way for any period can be dangerous if you don't know what you're doing. If the coach will be in storage long term, you're better off just to move it every month or two if possible. It also doesn't hurt to place the tires on wood or plastic pads, especially if your storage

area surface is dirt or concrete. Having the tires on a porous surface that won't collect water will help prevent rot.

Once a month, it's a good idea to stop by the storage yard and run the generator for at least 15 minutes or so,



[14] Once the coach is parked, take a few minutes to sprinkle some Comet around the tires. This helps prevent ants from climbing up the tires and trying to find a home inside your coach. Even if the motorhome is parked outside in the rain and/or wind, the residue will still help discourage unwanted guests, and you can reapply periodically as needed. [15] Check battery water levels, and make sure the batteries are charged before putting the coach away. If possible, connect a maintenance charger to keep the batteries charged and ready for use. [16, 17] During storage, visit the coach once in a while to make sure insects aren't taking up residence in the nooks and crannies of your coach. The water-heater compartment is a favorite place, as certain insects are drawn to the smell of LP-gas and like to nest in the mixture tube and burner. The furnace exhaust is another popular hiding place.



Insect screens are effective at preventing insect intrusion. Screens are easy to install — just remember to remove the screen before using the furnace.

and place a load on it such as the air conditioner, a coffeemaker, etc. Doing so prevents the carburetor or injectors from gumming up with stale fuel, and keeps the cylinder walls and other surfaces coated with oil. While you're running the generator, take a walk around the coach and look for signs of rodent and insect intrusion. Spiders, mud daubers and other insects like to take up residence in places like the hot-water tank tube, furnace vents, etc. Companies like Camco offer furnace and water-heater-vent insect screens that prevent insect intrusion if that's a problem in your area. Walk around the coach and make sure that tire pressure is where you left it; if not, adjust the tire pressure accordingly.

Step inside the coach and look for signs of water intrusion, especially around the aforementioned roof air-conditioning units and walls; look inside the overhead cabinets using a flashlight. Over time, the roof can sag under the weight of the air-conditioning unit, creating a recessed area that collects water. If the seals underneath the unit are old, that water can seep into the roof insulation, causing major structural damage. Eventually, the water can penetrate the ceiling, leaving unsightly stains.

If weather conditions and/or your storage unit allow, stop by and give the coach a quick wash or at least a rinse every couple of weeks to prevent dirt, pollution and bird-dropping buildup. As it's often said, frequent cleaning is easy cleaning.

Putting your coach away for the winter season may be bittersweet, but your investment in time and elbow grease will ensure it is ready to travel for many years to come. **M**

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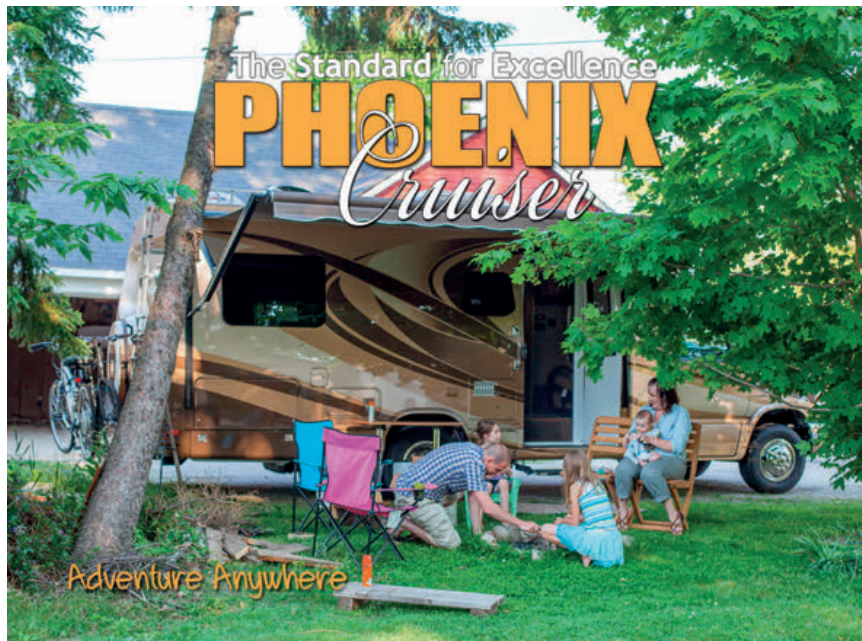


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By E. Don Smith

HOW TO MAXIMIZE THE LIFE OF MOTORHOME TIRES

With a few protectant products and a little care, premature sidewall damage can be greatly reduced

If you own a motorhome long enough, you will eventually have to replace the tires. Most coaches require six tires, and a tag axle means two more. If you have priced tires lately you know that it is a major expense, so much so that it will make you rethink your tire care strategy to ensure you get 100 percent of their intended life.

When looking at the Michelin tire care handbook, the company has specific suggestions on the life of motorhome tires and when to replace them:

"While most tires will need replacement before they achieve 10 years, it is recommended that any tires in service 10 years or more from the date of manufacture, including spare tires, be replaced with new tires as a simple precaution even if such tires appear serviceable and even if they have not reached the legal wear limit."

Despite the maximum 10-year life suggested by Michelin, very few owners obtain this life due to sidewall cracking. Since motorhomes are usually driven less than automobiles, this means they sit parked in places such as RV resorts, garages, driveways and storage lots. This much sitting around results in a lot of UV exposure for tires unless they are properly protected. Tires exposed to damaging conditions such as high UV, or even ozone, can experience premature sidewall damage (cracking) that often



results in early replacement. Other than road hazard failures and blowouts, sidewall cracking is one of the most common reasons owners replace their tires earlier than expected.

In addition to service-life limits, Michelin also has some very specific suggestions on how to care for its tires, and we have followed those suggestions carefully for seven years on the tires shown in these photos. Michelin recommends cleaning the tires with a mild soap. If you plan on using a tire dressing, the company suggests not using one that contains petroleum distillates, alcohol or silicone.

With these suggestions from Michelin in mind, we have used the following process since June 2007, and as of this writing the 7-plus-year-old tires look perfect. Just a few months ago while talking about tires with a fellow motorhome owner, he walked over to our coach and asked about the age of the tires. When I said they were 7 years old, he was shocked. He assumed they were brand-new because they certainly looked that way. Your results may vary, but if you want to increase your motorhome tire life, follow this program and you can save yourself a lot of money.



▲ Just to show we are not kidding, here is the DOT date code on the tires we are using as examples. The tires were manufactured during the 52nd week of 2006. The coach was purchased new in June of 2007 and has been in use since then.

► In order to properly clean and protect motorhome tires you need the right products. We have always used this combo and can attest that it works great. To get started, you'll need Griot's Garage Rubber Cleaner and a good scrub brush, also from Griot's. To protect the tires (or any other vinyl or rubber on the coach) we use 303 Aerospace Protectant.



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TIRE CARE



[1] Using a water hose and spray nozzle, completely flood the tire to rinse off all loose dirt and grit.

[2] Next, spray the tire with Rubber Cleaner until it is completely covered. Unlike harsh cleaners, this one is safe for tires and other rubber in your coach. It cleans without damaging or accelerating the aging of the tire.



[3] Scrub the tire all the way around to remove road dirt, grime and oils. Notice the color of the foam as it starts to turn brown from the grime it is removing. Then finish scrubbing and rinse completely to remove all soap and dirt.



[4] Using an old towel, wipe the tire completely dry in preparation for the 303 Aerospace Protectant, which goes on next.



[5] Once the tire is dry, spray it with the 303 Aerospace Protectant. Unlike some other tire dressings, it is water-based and actually helps tires look great and protects them from damaging UV rays. Many other automotive tire dressings contain very high levels of petroleum products and are damaging to tires. This is the reason Michelin specifically states not to use that type of product on motorhome tires.



[6] Immediately after applying the 303 Aerospace Protectant, wipe the surface with a dry cloth and buff until completely dry. The manufacturer suggests reapplying every three to five weeks for maximum UV protection, but I find that it lasts much longer because my motorhome tires are usually covered and stored.



[7] After wiping the surface dry you will be rewarded with a smooth matte surface that is also protected from UV rays and is static-free. You will also notice that the tires look good longer than unprotected tires. When you roll into your favorite resort with your tires as black as night, you will be the envy of all your neighbors.



[8] The last step of our three-part recipe for success is to always cover the tires when not driving. Unless it is dark when I arrive at a spot for the night and I am leaving the next day, these tires have never been exposed to sun. After arriving home from a trip or reaching an RV park, covering the tires is the first priority. **M**

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New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	January 16-18	New Jersey Expo Center
Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	February 12-15	Minneapolis Convention Center
Richmond Camping RV Expo	February 13-15	Richmond Raceway Complex
North Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greensboro	February 13-15	Greensboro Coliseum
Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	February 13-16	Atlantic City Convention Center
Harrisburg RV & Camping Show	February 26 - March 1	PA Farm Show Complex & Expo Center
Colorado RV, Sports, Boat & Travel Show	February 26 - March 1	National Western Complex
Greater Atlanta RV Show	March 6-8	Georgia World Congress Center
Virginia RV Show	March 13-15	Hampton Roads Convention Center
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A motorhome is your home away from home, and we're all about bringing as many creature comforts aboard as possible. Although in this case, we're talking about creature comforts outboard. That's because we're focusing on racks and carriers designed to transport bikes, kayaks, canoes, etc., on your motorhome or dinghy. And with paddleboards becoming the hot new trend, many are available to fit these as well. After all, if you're looking to escape, you're likely to do so near a lake or somewhere rugged, where a water-going vessel, skis, or bike for exploring the area would make the trip that much more satisfying and adventurous.

What you'll typically find is that a dinghy vehicle's roof racks have the most versatility, but with that may come a slightly heftier price tag. Hitch, tire and trunk racks were previously usually built for bikes, but some are expanding to include kayaks as well. Using a carrier or rack used to mean sacrificing access to the rear of the vehicle, but today's technologies allow for a lot of tilting and folding of the hardware, thereby preventing any restrictions. Just remember to look in the vehicle owner's manual for the maximum acceptable poundage the roof can handle.

With that said, here's a look at some of the newest innovations as well as base units in the rack-and-carrier market.

◀ Vertical Rack

RV Kayak Racks offers something growing in popularity: vertical racks for motorhome use. These kayak racks allow transport of up to two kayaks with bikes (or stand-up paddle boards or surfboards) on the back of a motorhome. There are adjustable custom-made kayak nose guards to protect the yak, and the rack itself has a powder-coated steel frame and stainless-steel hardware. The setup mounts to the motorhome via a standard Class 3 (or higher) hitch receiver. Models are available to deal with existing ladders or spare tires, and various attachments are available. The starting price is \$1,199 at www.rvkayakracks.com.



Photos courtesy the manufacturers



Two-Bike Hitch Rack ▲

Meet the XC Tow Mount two-bike hitch rack from Swagman. It's designed for 2-inch hitch receivers and can carry any type of bike without having to remove the wheels or use tie-downs. The ratchet arms have a soft coating to protect the bike's finish. You can get it for \$215 from www.campingworld.com.



◀ Four-Bike Hitch Rack

If you need a hitch rack

for four bikes, this one from Swagman fits the bill. It's designed for a 2-inch hitch receiver and, according to Swagman, all of its bike racks are tested for use on the rear of motorhomes. Plus, there's a built-in anti-wobble device to cut down on vibration and rattles, and the arms fold down when not in use.

It's available at www.campingworld.com for \$184.99.



Carry Two Bikes ▲

The Dual Trekker Platform bike carrier (also called RBC048) from Rhino-Rack can carry two bikes using the vehicle's hitch receiver. It has ratcheting arms that cinch down over the wheels, so there's no contact with the bike frame. The Dual Trekker Platform tilts down so that you can access the rear of your dinghy vehicle or motorhome, and it folds up when it's not needed for bikes. It fits 1½- to

2-inch hitch receivers and includes a hitch lock. It is available for about \$375 at www.rhinorack.com.



Cargo Basket ▲

The Dart Cargo Basket can hold up to three bikes. Not using it? Fold it upright. It will fit any 2-inch hitch receiver, and it comes with a rise shank for more ground clearance. Skid and side plates and built-in license plate relocation holds are part of the package. You can also get an optional bike clip or LED/standard lighting system. It is available from ROLA for around \$400 at www.rolaproducts.com.



Easy-to-Fold Bike Carrier ▲

Thule's EasyFold is a compact and simple-to-use bike carrier — and when we say compact, we mean it. The EasyFold can be stored inside your dinghy vehicle or motorhome. It can carry all kinds of bikes, including ones with a long wheelbase. It's lightweight, thanks to aluminum and other materials. It has a removable ramp, fits 1¼- and 2-inch hitch receivers, and fully locks the carrier to the vehicle and bikes to the carrier. It runs about \$700 at www.thule.com.



◀ Spare Tire Bike Rack

The SR1 Spare Tire Bike Rack design allows for quick installation or removal. This bike rack

system is fully adjustable, meaning it can fit most spare tires, and the support arms can be centered for side-mounted tires. It comes preassembled, ready for two bikes. It can be had from Sport Chalet for about \$150 via sportchalet.com.

Ladder-Mount Rack ▶

What could be simpler than using a ladder-mount rack on the back of your coach? The Stromberg Carlson two-bike rack is made of aluminum and attaches to any 1-inch diameter RV ladder (this rack will not work with 1.5-inch-diameter TopLine Phat ladders). Once the bikes are secured, the company promises a no-rattle performance. The securing pins can be pulled and the rack removed to provide access up and down the ladder. Retail price is \$74 at www.campingworld.com.



RACKS & CARRIERS FOR DINGHY VEHICLES



Big Load Hitch Mount ▲

The T-Load hitch mount is ideal for securing big loads like a kayak to a roof rack (and allowing the job to get done by one person). The T-Load goes into a 2-inch hitch receiver and offers adjustable height positioning and the ability to tilt at a 45-degree angle. The kit includes a crossbar fitting and crossbar as well as a nonslip mat. It comes from Rhino-Rack and is available for \$299 at www.rhinorack.com.



FullSwing and FullTilt Bike Carriers ▲

Yakima's FullSwing and FullTilt are hitch racks that have their controls for the arm/fold/mast title atop the unit. The FullSwing holds four bikes, while the FullTilt comes in models that can handle four or five. There's a curved mast shape that prevents the bike from making contact with the dinghy vehicle, while fully padded arms ensure the bike doesn't get scratched. You can position the bike anywhere along the arms since there are adjustable cradles, and there's an integrated security system that locks the bike to the rack and the rack to the vehicle. Pricing starts at \$399 on www.yakima.com.



Top-of-Vehicle Carrier ▲

No need to remove the front wheel — Yakima's FrontLoader carrier will hold your bike as is. No tools or assembly are needed for installation, and it fits 20- to 29-inch wheels. There's an integrated cable to secure the bike to the rack, and the universal hardware fits round, square, factory and aerodynamic crossbars right out of the box. It runs \$179 at www.yakima.com.



Canoe Rack ▲

Sometimes it's a challenge to load a boat when you're alone, but this canoe loader and rack device makes it simple solo. It's made of heavy-duty steel and has a weather-resistant finish. It mounts to the hitch receiver (you need only basic hand tools to get things going). It's available from Cabela's for \$110 at www.cabelas.com.



Locking Stand-up Carrier ▲

This carrier is aimed at canoes and kayaks (as well as surfboards and paddle boards). It has a universal mounting system fitting square, round or most factory crossbars. There's a floating strap system and ratcheting mechanism for easy loading and secure tightening, respectively. Board pads and a lock and keys are included. The Inno carrier can be had from Sport Chalet for \$230 at www.sportchalet.com.



Paddleboard and Canoe Carriers ▲

The SUP-Shuttle standup paddle carrier and Portage canoe carrier use the Thule FlipFit bracket that fits all Thule racks, round bars, and factory racks. The SUP-Shuttle allows for two boards, thanks to a dual loading system, and the telescoping design creates a custom

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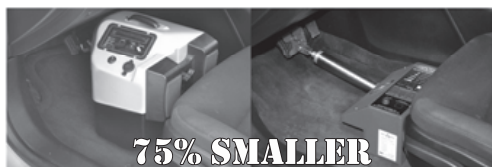


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fit for boards up to 34 inches wide. The Portage has gunwales with cushioned base pads for securing the canoe and ramped sides for no-brainer loading. The SUP-Shuttle runs \$150, while the Portage is \$120. Get them from Thule at www.thule.com.



Kayak Mounts ▲

The J-Cradle and Saddle Roller kayak carriers break down as follows: The J-Cradle has fold-down cradles — so, pretty much invisible when not being used — and SmartLoad slide-out arms are for easy loading of the vessel from the side. The Saddle Roller also uses the SmartLoad rollers, and it has adjustable padded saddles for any kayak size and shape. QuickDock means the carrier can be installed or removed fast, something the J-Cradle also employs. Get them for \$299 each at Whispbar, www.whispbar.com.



Roof Basket for Bikes ▲

The Vagabond has a two-bike capacity and a built-in skewer mounting system within the roof basket. It will mount to all factory and aftermarket crossbars. The Vagabond X model includes an integrated cable lock for gear and cooper plate decals, plus is in a special Gun Metal Gray color. Get the Vagabond for \$295 and the Vagabond X for \$489 from Küat at www.kuatracks.com. **M**

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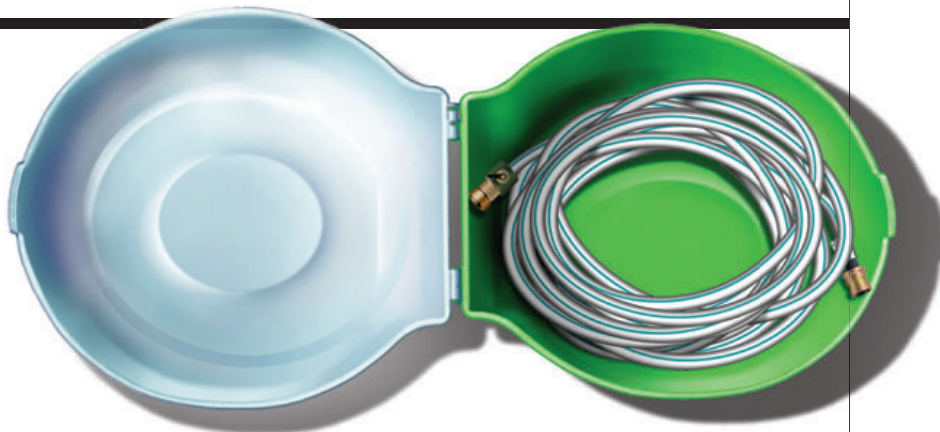
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That's a Wrap

I use a Christmas-wreath container to store my freshwater hoses. It's the perfect size for easy coiling, and it keeps the hoses orderly and clean.

Basil Vanderboegh | Benton Harbor, Michigan



Spicing Things Up

My Winnebago Vista had a mirror installed behind the stove. I hated it and wanted it gone, but instead I took a dry-erase board and covered the mirror with it. I attached it at the bottom by screwing it into an edge and at the top with metal clips attached to the hood of the stove, which I painted black. Then I bought Grundtal magnetic containers at IKEA and labeled the tops. I have also found small magnetic containers in thrift shops as well as Cost Plus and Bed, Bath & Beyond.

Patty Hart | St. Augustine, Florida



Put a Sock on It

My wife and I grew tired of the constant "clinking" of glassware and the eventual scratching/marring of our glasses from bouncing down the road. I screwed a spice rack to the back wall of the cabinet, tie-wrapped another to it and my wife covered the glasses in fun/funky socks she bought at the store. What we get is no noise, no scratches and a good look.

Jim and Betty Stroh | Loveland, Colorado



Have an Idea? Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your 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.

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Steam Powered

Compact, nesting cooking system from SteamVita uses boiling water to prepare great-tasting, healthy foods

By Kevin Livingston

COOKING

Cost: \$56⁰⁰

Time: varies

Difficulty: 1/10

Quite often, the kitchen is the place where friends and relatives gather. Let's face it, we all love to eat and many times it's even the main reason for gathering in the first place. Experiencing foods from different cultures is always a

great way to enjoy a motorhome trip, but reality dictates that there's only so much chefs can do in the limited confines of a typical galley.

One method of cooking that is often overlooked is steaming, which is actually a healthy and practical way to prepare simple to complex foods. The sheer size of many steamers is a good reason that they are left behind, but SteamVita offers a good alternative to standard — and giant — steam pots with a sectional cooking system that fits nicely in any motorhome kitchen.

SteamVita is a stackable system utilizing two, three or five round stainless-steel steamer pots, each measuring little more than 6 inches in diameter and 3 inches deep. We tested the three-pot version, which seems to make the most sense for motorhome travel. The bottom pot is the water chamber and the other two have a strainer in the bottom; these are called cooking chambers. Steam produced by boiling water in the bottom chamber travels through the other two pots, ensuring thorough cooking for each level. Steaming is said to be one of the best forms of cooking for vitamin and mineral retention, thus making a steamer a very viable option for healthy cooking and living, especially since no butter or oil is needed. When cooking is completed, all three pots are stacked and retained by a metal strap, which makes the system compact and easy to handle.



Steaming opens up many possibilities when it comes to cooking interesting meals in a relatively short time. Here, beef and fresh vegetables are put to the test.



SteamVita's three-pot system is practical for cooking and storing in just about any motorhome.

To use the SteamVita, the cook adds up to 2 inches of water to the bottom pot. Once the water comes to a full rolling boil, the other two chambers with the selected meats and vegetables are stacked, making sure the food that needs more time to cook is on the bottom; obviously the one closest to the boiling water will get hotter. While the food and water chambers fit nicely, they allow for enough steam loss to prevent excessive pressurization.

The food cooked in the SteamVita proved to be quite delicious. Our meal consisted of a choice cut of beef, fresh veggies and a little meat seasoning. The result was one of the most flavorful meals we've ever made in an RV; cooking time was 40 minutes. However, perfection wasn't reached immediately; our first attempt resulted in slight overcooking. Personal experimentation is required to become an expert steam cook, learning how to use the right herbs and spices, and finding the proper cooking times. The company offers a free cookbook download to help those who are not experienced with preparing meals using steam, which helps with cooking times.

While the SteamVita provides amazing cooking opportunities, there are a few minor limitations. The three-stack model is designed to cook food for one to six people. The chambers become filled quickly with ingredients and might not feed as many as expected, depending on appetites. The five-chamber model is probably a better choice for larger families — or big eaters.

All in all, the SteamVita is a wonderful RV cooking utensil with many options and uses. It can be found on the Internet with the three-stacker system selling for around \$56. The company is 100 percent U.S. veteran-owned and a portion of every sale goes to registered charities that support veterans' wellness programs. And that makes eating healthy feel even better. **M**

SteamVita, www.steamvita.com

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47	\$36.20	\$30.50	\$52.80	\$44.25	\$86.00	\$71.75
48	\$37.20	\$31.40	\$54.30	\$45.60	\$88.50	\$74.00
49	\$38.20	\$32.30	\$55.80	\$46.95	\$91.00	\$76.20
50	\$39.30	\$33.10	\$57.45	\$48.15	\$93.75	\$78.25
51	\$40.30	\$34.00	\$58.95	\$49.50	\$96.25	\$80.50
52	\$41.30	\$34.90	\$60.45	\$50.85	\$98.75	\$82.75
53	\$43.30	\$36.50	\$63.45	\$53.25	\$103.75	\$86.75
54	\$45.30	\$38.10	\$66.45	\$55.65	\$108.75	\$90.75
55	\$47.40	\$39.60	\$69.60	\$57.90	\$114.00	\$94.50
56	\$49.40	\$41.20	\$72.60	\$60.30	\$119.00	\$98.50
57	\$51.40	\$42.80	\$75.60	\$62.70	\$124.00	\$102.50
58	\$53.50	\$43.90	\$78.75	\$64.35	\$129.25	\$105.25
59	\$55.60	\$45.00	\$81.90	\$66.00	\$134.50	\$108.00
60	\$57.60	\$46.20	\$84.90	\$67.80	\$139.50	\$111.00
61	\$59.70	\$47.30	\$88.05	\$69.45	\$144.75	\$113.75
62	\$61.80	\$48.40	\$91.20	\$71.10	\$150.00	\$116.50
63	\$64.40	\$50.30	\$95.10	\$73.95	\$156.50	\$121.25
64	\$66.90	\$52.20	\$98.85	\$76.80	\$162.75	\$126.00
65	\$69.50	\$54.00	\$102.75	\$79.50	\$169.25	\$130.50
66	\$72.00	\$55.90	\$106.50	\$82.35	\$175.50	\$135.25
67	\$74.60	\$57.80	\$110.40	\$85.20	\$182.00	\$140.00
68	\$80.30	\$62.50	\$118.95	\$92.25	\$196.25	\$151.75
69	\$86.00	\$67.20	\$127.50	\$99.30	\$210.50	\$163.50
70	\$91.80	\$71.90	\$136.20	\$106.35	\$225.00	\$175.25
71	\$97.50	\$76.60	\$144.75	\$113.40	\$239.25	\$187.00
72	\$103.20	\$81.30	\$153.30	\$120.45	\$253.50	\$198.75
73	\$108.90	\$86.00	\$161.85	\$127.50	\$267.75	\$210.50
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Good Sam
 Life & Health Solutions

Tire-Monitoring-System Mishap



Having experienced ongoing problems with an after-market system for his motorhome and dinghy, a reader asked Hot Line for assistance. He wrote:

“ I purchased a tire-pressure-monitoring system for 10 tires from Tire-SafeGuard. Right out of the box, the product didn't function correctly. I returned the entire system to the company and detailed the problems with the unit. The company replaced six sensor batteries and returned the system to me. There was no change in the system's operation.

Let me say that I am not a full-timer and I only drive my motorhome approximately four times a year.

In January, I attended an RV rally in Indio, California, and returned the unit to the person who was working at the Tire-SafeGuard display booth. I again explained the problems that I was having with the unit. I checked back at the booth later in the day and was told that they had not had time to check out the unit and to call back in a day or two.

I called two days later and spoke with the Tire-SafeGuard sales and tech support representative, Dion Elrod, who said the system was on his bench and that he was working on it. He said he would deliver it back to me on his way home that evening. He never arrived.

I have since contacted Elrod on numerous occasions with no result. He has neither repaired and returned my unit nor replaced it with a new and improved unit, as he promised in our phone conversations.

At this time I am out more than \$500. Can Hot Line please help?

Elmer Green | Beaverton, Oregon

Hot Line sent two letters to Tire-SafeGuard on Green's behalf. The company did not respond to our inquiries, but we did receive a follow-up from Green that closed the case. It read:

“ Thank you for your follow-up on this issue. I returned home yesterday, after being gone a month, to find a copy of Hot Line's second letter and a box from Tire-SafeGuard containing a used tire-monitoring system, which hopefully will operate correctly this time. I have little doubt that this would not have been resolved but for your dedicated assistance and second letter.

E.G.

Used Coach Commotion

Finding it difficult to get his plea for a refund recognized, a reader turned to Hot Line for help. He wrote:

“ In May we purchased a used 2008 Thor Motor Coach Presidio diesel pusher from Freedom RV in Liberty Lake, Washington. During our orienta-

tion of the coach at the dealership a problem arose with the front shade. It turned out to be an operator error that caused, during the dashboard removal, the air-pressure sensor to become dislodged. It also caused the emergency warning system to activate on our drive home. I called the dealership and the service manager told me to continue home and he would let me know where to take the coach for repair. That never happened.

I found an authorized Cummins dealer (Northwest Truck Repair Inc.) in Kalispell, Montana, to make the repair. While the coach was at the facility, service technicians found more things that needed to be fixed, such as the front wheel bearing out of oil, rear axle differential almost out of oil, etc. I authorized the repairs. I took the repair list to the manager at Freedom RV, but he refused to stand behind the repair costs. Can Hot Line please help?

Edwin Wykoff | Kalispell, Montana

Hot Line sent a letter of inquiry to Freedom RV. Sometime later Wykoff sent the following update:

“ Please be advised that although Freedom RV failed to make a response to Hot Line's letters of inquiry, it pleases me to report that your communication with the company prevailed on a positive note. Approximately two weeks ago I received from Freedom RV a check for the balance of my out-of-pocket expense associated with my original letter to Hot Line. Thank you for your assistance and intervention.

E.W. M

Take Action

Contact Hot Line for Help

Hot Line assists in mediating conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources, send typed letters to *MotorHome* Hot Line, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 and enclose copies of appropriate bills and correspondence, plus a self-addressed, stamped envelope. Selected letters will be edited and published unless otherwise requested.

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

By Ken Freund

Super Singles

Q I have seen “super single” tires on a few motorhomes and a number of tractor-trailers, and I have a friend who uses them on his motorhome. What are the advantages and disadvantages for motorhome use?

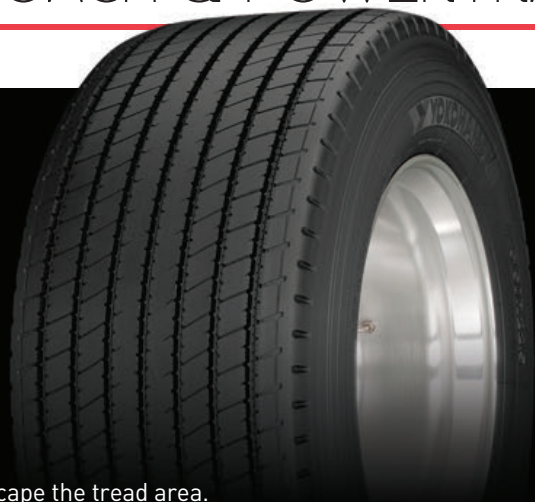
Ron Darrah | Via email

A The main advantage I have heard of is slightly improved fuel economy, related to less weight and rolling resistance. The ride might also be a little softer. Keep in mind that the initial conversion requires you to buy new wheels and tires, and then you can't rotate front to rear.

I've heard of a lot of disadvantages, including greater costs when a tire fails, more body damage from the heavier tire, destroyed rims (and the wider super single wheels are more costly) and less traction on wet roads, snow and mud. They are said to hydroplane easier, because the width creates a longer path for water to

escape the tread area.

When a dual tire goes flat, it usually doesn't damage the rim because the other tire supports the load, and sometimes folks limp in to a nearby tire shop without needing a tow or mobile road service. Be sure to inspect the dual tire that didn't go flat for any signs of impact or overload damage from the other tire going flat. Most fleet operators insist on using tire-pressure monitors with super singles because so much is riding on one tire. Another concern is availability. Not every truck tire shop has these, and mobile services may not, either.



Continuing Brake Problems on Workhorse W22 Chassis

Q I have experienced the same brake problems that the recall of the Workhorse W22 chassis was supposed to fix. I had the recall done, but a Winnebago dealership recently told me my brake rotors exhibited the same signs of overheating that the recall was for. This is after the coach has been in storage for six months or so. Am I the only one having this problem? Has anyone else experienced brake hang-up problems after the recall was done on their Workhorse chassis?

Stephen Rusk | Elkin, North Carolina

A The recall notice mentions that vehicles that are stored for extended periods, particularly in damp areas, are more susceptible to this problem. This is because the original Bosch-made phenolic caliper pistons stick in the extended

position (particularly when there is high moisture content in the air), and moisture is absorbed in the brake fluid. There is normally only about 0.003-inch clearance. When the pistons absorb moisture and then expand when hot, they jam in the bores. Corrosion can also occur to the steel bores and the pin-slide mechanisms, causing brake sticking and drag.

Heavy brake use, such as driving down mountain grades while riding the brakes and not downshifting, can cause similar brake overheating as the brake-recall vehicles experienced. Towing a dinghy vehicle without an auxiliary braking device can exacerbate the problem. Failure to change and flush brake fluid regularly (or use the wrong type), or failing to clean and lube the pin-slider mechanisms can also cause brake drag and failure.

Workhorse has a special section on its website (www.workhorse.com) for the 50901-C brake recall. Owners

can find out if the recall affects their chassis and determine the location of the nearest Workhorse authorized dealer to have repairs performed.

Fiberglass Roof Cleaning

Q I have a 2005 Winnebago Minnie that I bought in 2010 and the former owner kept it outside. The roof is fiberglass. How can I get my white roof back? The roof is very white where the fold-down TV antenna was. How can I make the rest of the roof look the same way?

Jay Hartpene | Southampton, New Jersey

A It's likely that you will never be able to get it as white as it was when new. However, a rigorous cleaning can bring it back to looking decent. I checked with Winnebago's technical department and was told it doesn't have any special recommendations. There are a number of products

designed for cleaning fiberglass such as Davis Fiberglass Stain Remover (FSR) and 3M Marine Fiberglass Cleaner and Wax, which are available in RV and boating supply stores.

For light oxidation, use a cleaner/wax. Apply products using a circular motion, and follow the manufacturer's directions. For a more oxidized roof, use a polish containing a mild abrasive. An orbital buffer makes the task easier. If necessary, put some rubbing compound on the buffing pad, although it can be aggressive, so go easy.

After cleaning and/or removing the oxidation, the roof needs a protectant. Some manufacturers recommend using 303 Aerospace Protectant. Just remember that waxing the roof can make it very slippery, especially when wet. Some RVers use liquid acrylic products such as Poli Glow or Zep Wet-Look. For surfaces in rough condition, you might try the MS GelCoat Restoration System, which is available at boating stores.

Stuck Mirrors

Q In July 2010 we purchased a new 2010 Forest River Sunseeker 3120DS motorhome. After having the Sunseeker for a while, my wife wanted to help me drive. She attempted to adjust the mirrors, which are manual, and found they are frozen in place. I attempted to adjust them by hand and they won't move at all.

We took our coach back to the dealer, Keystone RV Center in Greencastle, Pennsylvania. We were told that the Class C was no longer under warranty and that the problem was an issue for the chassis manufacturer, which is Ford. We went to a Ford dealership and were told that Ford does not deal with this issue because it's a motorhome. We also attempted to contact Forest River regarding this issue, but to no avail.

As it stands, I am the only person who can drive this motorhome because the mirrors won't adjust. We hope that you can help us with this issue.

Roger Mitchell | Mount Jackson, Virginia

A I'm sorry to hear that you've been getting the runaround. The mirrors are installed by the coachbuilder and supplied by an outside vendor. Sometimes, manually adjustable mirrors can be removed and freed up with penetrating oil and careful movements back and forth. Electrically controlled mirrors stick because of corrosion also, but troubleshooting them is a little more complex. Usually, you can find information by putting the name of the mirror into an Internet search engine. A good body shop or RV center that repairs motorhomes should be able to help you repair them. In some cases, a manually adjustable mirror is equipped with set screws that allow you to lock the mirror in place once you arrive at a satisfactory adjustment. It doesn't seem as if this is the case in your example, but it's worth checking.

Oil Consumption Mystery Revisited

Q This is in reference to the June letter, "Oil Consumption Mystery." I have a 2003 Newmar Mountain Aire with a 400-hp Cummins ISL engine. I encountered the same oil consumption problem that Mr. Whitcomb has with his engine. I contacted Newmar and Cummins. They suggested that I calibrate the dipstick. In other words, drain the oil in a clean container, and then put back in the correct amount according to specs. After completing this, check the dipstick measurements.

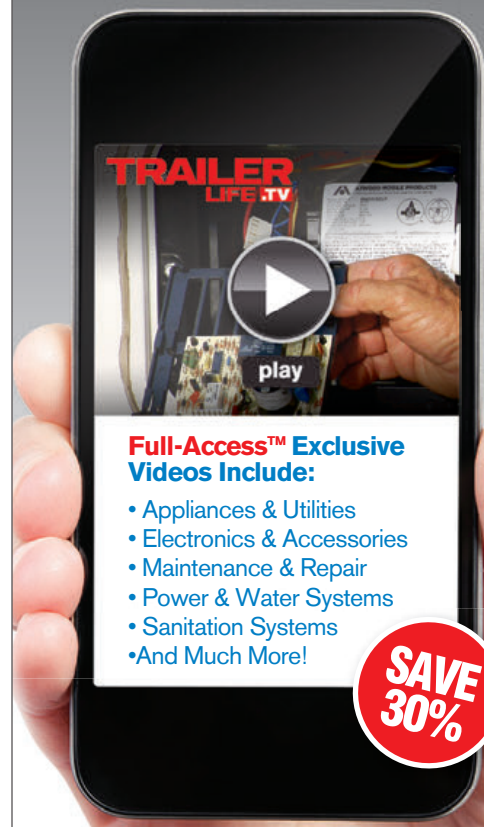
In my case, it showed almost a gallon too low, which of course was not correct. Using the dipstick at this point, I would have added oil. The dipstick was moved and adjusted to show correct on the full mark. The problem was solved nearly 100,000 miles ago and still going strong. One thought, I use Amsoil Synthetic 15w40 oil and have changed it at the 15,000-mile mark as suggested by Cummins.

George McElvy | Edgar Springs, Missouri

A Thanks for sharing your experience, George. Incor-

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rectly marked dipsticks have been a recurring problem for many years with a number of models. It's a good thing to check if you're having problems with leaks or excessive oil consumption. When an engine is overfilled it will consume oil much faster.

Toy Hauler Alternatives

Q It seems to me that using expensive motorhome space for an inside garage is an extravagant use of money. How about alternatives (other than towing) for ATVs, side-by-sides, dune buggies, etc.? Raised platforms behind the RV seem to be possible and a cheaper form of transport. Are there laws against that? What specific solutions are available?

Hugh Mulholland | Herndon, Virginia

A You pose an interesting question. I see a lot more toy hauler trailers on the road than toy hauler motorhomes, so apparently a lot of other folks agree with you. Platforms per se are not illegal, although laws limiting vehicle length and weight do apply. However, engineering and safety can be major issues. Most motorhomes already suffer from long rear overhangs and many are subject to sway going down the highway at least in part because of this mass

behind the rear wheels. Hanging more weight, especially many hundreds or thousand of pounds (in the case of dune buggies), could totally overload the rear suspension, and lever weight off the front wheels, causing further overloading and steering/stability issues. Unloading the front end and overloading the rear is a prescription for disaster, as an uncontrollable high-speed handling condition could easily occur, resulting in a crash.

Hot-Oil Smell Comment

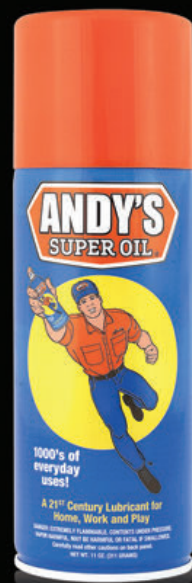
Q I, too, have had a problem with hot-oil smell on my dinghy vehicles ("Hot-Oil Smell," May). Presently I tow a 2012 Chevy Captiva (automatic) behind my Allegro Bus. Previously I towed a 2010 Dodge Caliber (manual) behind my Itasca SunCruiser. When the smell first occurred, I had the Caliber checked at a Dodge dealership and there were no runs, drips or problems in the mechanicals. I checked the bottom of the motorhome and found nothing. Now it happens on my Allegro/Captiva. I am beginning to suspect a road-caused problem rather than a motorhome/car problem. Nevertheless, I would like to find the smoking gun and know for sure.

Howard Scott | Port Orchard, Washington

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For more information visit www.andyssuperoil.com



A I wish there was a way to analyze the odor and determine the cause. Since I've heard from several owners with the same complaint, I'd like to hear from anyone who thinks they have solved this puzzling situation.

Motorhome Handling Comment

Q The "Motorhome Handling" letter (May) from Rod Harris may have a simpler and cheaper solution. My first coach was a 2003 Fleetwood Southwind gas. One of the first things I noticed on the road was "blow-by" or the push I would get in high winds or when semi-trucks passed me at speed. I figured I would have to live with it until I heard about Airtabs. I am not one to jump into "miracle cures" so I went online and checked out the product. Everything they stated made sense, so I took the plunge and bought a set for about \$200. I installed them — peel and stick — along the back and top of the motorhome and couldn't wait

for my next trip. As luck would have it we were going to the Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico, which was a three-day trip. I was pleasantly surprised to find that the Airtabs did the trick. I got little, and I mean little, or no blow-by from wind and trucks. As an added benefit, I saw a ¼- to ½-mile MPG increase in my mileage. So the trip out and back, with the increase MPG and associated fuel cost saving, actually paid for the Airtabs. We have since upgraded to a 2012 Fleetwood Southwind and I installed them on it.

Michael and Marcy Vreeland
Fredericksburg, Virginia

A Thanks for sharing your experiences. Airtabs (866-758-4100, www.airtab.com) are designed to reduce wind drag for trucks, but can be fitted to motorhomes, too. We have not tested these and I'd like to hear from other readers who have tried them. I have found that driving as far over in my lane as possible away from passing



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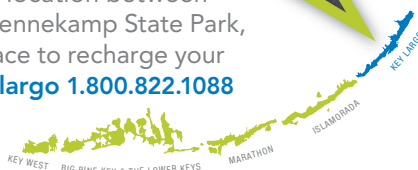
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Adapter Plugs

Q We often have power readings at the 120-volt AC outlets inside our coach of 110 volts to as low as 98 volts on bad nights. Due to the unreliable 30-amp power at several of the parks that we camp at, I am considering buying an adapter plug, sometimes known as a cheater, that combines a 30-amp male with a 20-amp male to power a 50-amp female plug. Because my coach has a 30-amp power cord, I would attach a 50-amp male to 30-amp female reducer, netting me 30 amps. An electrician said that it would result in too many amps and cause trouble. What is your opinion?

Peter Hagg | Via email

A The generally accepted minimum voltage before harm may be done to some motors, etc., is 108 volts AC. Whenever you are drawing current you will have some measurable voltage drop between the power post and the appliances in your coach. However, the low voltages you are experiencing can also be measured at the shorepower outlets (plug in a voltmeter there to check). Therefore, no matter what kind of adapters you use, you'll still have essentially the same low voltage. Low voltage typically occurs when running lights, microwaves, coffeemakers and particularly air conditioners.

If you encounter an exceptionally low voltage reading, let the campground owner know. They might be unaware of the situation, because not all RVers are as meticulous about checking their voltages as you are. **M**

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End of the Road

Discovering Bella Coola, British Columbia, Canada, proves sometimes the best travel plan is not to have one

By Alan Rider

Crossing into Canada recently, the business-like border guard asked me where I was headed. When I told her Bella Coola, British Columbia, she wanted to know the reason for my visit. After admitting, perhaps a bit too forthrightly, that I'd gotten the idea late the night before after noticing on a map that it was literally the end of the road, she gave me a long, searching look and politely requested I pull over for a more thorough secondary inspection.

In the moment, I assumed I was singled out for this additional scrutiny because that last answer marked me as someone who might be, well, a nutcase. Having had some time to reflect on this encounter, however, it occurs to me that the border guard's suspicions were aroused simply because I was an anomaly.

In an age when most vacationers are so fixated on their destination that the trip itself is reduced to an ordeal to be endured, I imagine someone with such an impulsive approach to travel planning probably did seem odd. Stranger still was the fact that the nutcase behind the wheel seemed completely unaware of the 27 miles of narrow gravel road, filled with switchbacks, sheer drop-offs and steep 18 percent grades, that lead down into the valley from the top of Heckman Pass.

After successfully negotiating the 5,000-foot descent locals call "the Hill" (drivers of large motorhomes who'd rather avoid it can do so via the BC Ferries), I was surprised to

discover the Bella Coola Valley (www.bellacoola.ca) is home to several RV parks, including one of the nicest I've ever visited (Rip Rap Camp, 250-982-2752, www.riprapcamp.com). Which tells me I'm not the only motorhome traveler with the unique mix of wanderlust and curiosity it takes to seek out end-of-the-road outposts like Bella Coola just to see what's there.

For me, this inclination dates back to the driving vacations of my childhood, where the trip itself always seemed at least as interesting as wherever our family ended up. Even now as an adult, I'll admit that on more than one occasion I've arrived at my destination after driving for days and wanted nothing more than to keep

right on going.

Understanding this penchant for keeping the wheels turning will hopefully put my experience in Bella Coola into perspective. In short, I was so awestruck by this isolated valley's magnificent setting — surrounded by jagged mountain peaks, blue glaciers and dramatic waterfalls — that I've already decided my next visit will be measured in weeks instead of days. From a guy like me, there is no higher compliment than to say this is a place I'd like to stop and hang out for a while.

The paradox of this serendipitous discovery at the end of Highway 20 of course, is that I found it precisely because I wasn't obsessed with some predetermined destination. Which brings me back to what I believe to be the true magic of motorhome travel, concisely summed up in the words of Robert Louis Stevenson:

"I travel not to go anywhere, but to go. I travel for travel's sake. The great affair is to move."

Looked at in this way, there really is no such thing as the end of the road. Because every end is, in its own way, the beginning of some new and exciting journey. And it's that promise, my friends, that keeps us all out here in search of the unexpected pleasures that can only be found along The Road Ahead. **M**

"I've already decided my next visit will be measured in weeks instead of days"

Off the Beaten Path ➡

If driving into the Bella Coola Valley, be aware that the Hill is packed gravel and at times, narrows to a single lane with very tight bends. Access is easier via BC Ferries.



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