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December 2015

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SPECIALTY VEHICLES



Spartan Chassis, Circle 124 on Reader Service Card



Palm Springs RV Resort is an oasis in the Southern California desert, with spacious sites, picnic tables and plentiful palms (see page 21).



TPMS devices allow the driver to keep an eye on tire pressure from the coach cab using a display and audible alerts. Pg. 52

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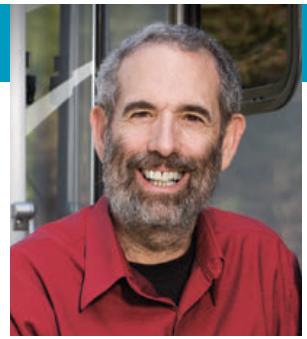
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Freightliner's new UltraSteer option for its tag-axle chassis improves maneuverability and reduces the turning radius by 17 percent

ON THE COVER

The 2016 Nexus Phantom 33SC is parked for a scenery break at Klines Resort (www.klinesresort.com) on Portage Lake in Three Rivers, Michigan (see test on page 36). The RV resort has spacious back-in or pull-through sites, full hookups and the option to bring a boat and use the resort dock. Photo by Shawn Spence Photography.





By Bob Livingston

December Versatility

Allow me to play the role of a contrarian for just one moment. I think December is one of the best months of the year to travel in a motorhome. Many people scoff at the thought of traveling during this time of the year, especially those who dislike winter weather. For me, December is one of the most versatile months of the year, because the choices are exceptional — not to mention the joy the holidays offer. Those who live in the north can escape the cold and snow by following the snowbirds; those who live in areas where the weather is moderate can go up to the mountains to ski or play in the snow — and be cold. See what I mean? America's playground flips, depending on where you live and your interests. If you're going to move around during this time of the year, a motorhome is the RV of choice.

high on our list, even though we've been lucky enough to spend time in the park many times. Photographing wildlife has always been a secret desire of mine, and after reading the article, "Bison and Eagles and Bears, Oh My!" on page 31, I'm ready to don my camera gear and head out to Yellowstone. Author Rosanne Wagstaff clearly shows that it's possible to capture wonderful wildlife images, even with modest camera gear. Being in the right place at the right time — and having lots of patience — can make or break a photographic experience.

My wife, Lynne, and I live in Southern California, and we enjoy the snow country. So we have to travel to higher elevations if we want to partake in snow sports — or just hang out and take in the beautiful scenery. Realizing that it's certainly more work to get a motorhome ready for travel to colder regions, we've migrated to the Palm Springs area just about every other year during the holidays to soak up the warm December sun and party with our desert RV community friends. Palm Springs is fabulous snowbird country and author Ken Reid describes this popular desert playground perfectly in his article, "Escape Those Winter Blues," on page 21.

Like many snowbird destinations, the Palm Springs area RV parks fill up

rapidly right around New Year's. We've learned that if we procrastinate too long and look for reservations later in the year, we can usually find space before and during Christmas, but expect to be booted out right before New Year's Eve. If we plan in advance, we're able to stay longer and usher in the new year with fellow RV enthusiasts, which is usually quite a celebration.

As we say "goodbye" to 2015 and look forward to new adventures in the year ahead, it's time to think about key destinations that will fulfill our travel goals. Visiting Yellowstone is always

I've seen a number of birds and animals while hiking the park, snowmobiling in the dead of winter or fly-fishing the Firehole River, but never took the time to seriously record photographic images that will allow us to relive the beauty of Yellowstone's natural environment on a TV or computer screen. That's about to change.

Although it's often necessary to put your motorhome in storage certain times of the year, venturing out in December will return good memories and a fresh attitude for the year ahead. Happy holidays to all. **M**

“For me, December is one of the most versatile months of the year, because the choices are exceptional ...”

Contributors | December



Ken Freund has been a contributor to *MotorHome* since 1988, and has written *Coach & Powertrain* and its predecessor, *Powertrain Q&A*, for 20 years. He's been an avid camper and traveler since he was a child.



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



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.



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.



Rosanne Wagstaff and her husband, Greg, an award-winning photographer, are living their dream of full-time RVing in their Monaco Diplomat motorhome and enjoy sharing their adventures.



Larry Walton is a freelance photojournalist and lifelong RVer who loves exploring the Pacific Northwest with his wife, Robin, and their two dogs, Buddy and Sunny.

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Do you wash your motorhome yourself? Or do you enlist the services of an RV detailer or take it to a truck-wash station? What works best for you, and why?

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



Blue Beacon Special

In the September issue, Frank Smith asked about using truck-wash facilities for his RV. Since 1988 we have used truck-wash services. They do a good job and are very reasonably priced. Blue Beacon Truck Washes is always reliable. However, we have had success with other brands. We avoid using acid on the wheels and we do pay extra for the wax. Also, we tape a piece of plastic over our refrigerator vent on the side of the RV. It keeps the high-pressure water spray off the cooling mechanism.

A word on etiquette: Get in line

and wait until they wave you in. Pull forward until they motion you to stop. Exit the RV, and the attendant will ask for your vehicle's length and services desired. Go inside to pay and wait for services. They will alert you when to enter your RV and exit. It is OK to pull out and do your tires, etc. Just leave room for trucks to pull around you.

Hyler Bracey | Via email

ALL for the Money

After I found the product Wash Wax ALL from Aero Cosmetics, I started washing and waxing the coach myself. I have a 39-foot diesel pusher and

there is a lot to clean! I only take it to a commercial car wash if it is very muddy. I use a damp microfiber cloth to remove the dirt. I rinse the cloth off in a bucket of water as I go. After it is clean, I use Wash Wax ALL. I just put it on using a damp cloth and wipe it off using a dry one. I have also just sprayed it on and wiped it off using a clean cloth. I purchased the extendable mop so I can reach the top of the coach without having to use a ladder. It is so easy and fast to wax it using Wash Wax ALL that I wax it a number of times per year. It is also easy to do spot cleaning while on the road. I use the same

Featured Letter

Take Your Time

The best answer as to whether I wash my 2004 Fleetwood Storm 34F myself or at a truck wash is based on where I am.

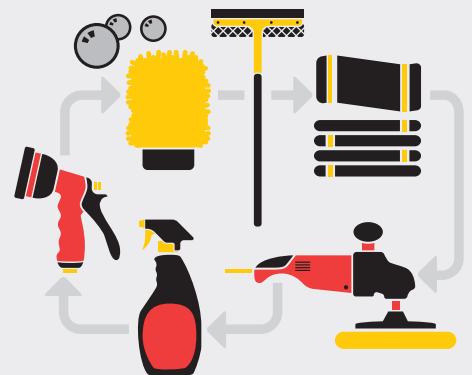
On the road, I use a truck wash and never have had any issues using them; at home I do it myself. I have a system that I believe would work well for most folks. I do the motorhome roof first thing in the morning if it needs it before the sun gets hot, then and maybe the next day I do the side and end which are in the shade and take it easy until the other side goes into the shade and do that section.

I have used several excellent wash/wax products over the years but always do the washing using an extendable handle with a large, soft-bristle brush head. I do the washing in sections then squeegee that section, also with an extendable handle. After each side is finished

I follow up drying where necessary. Windows are done in the shade too.

Southwestern sun can be very hot and might damage the wet unit but it works fine and isn't physically overtaxing done this way; if it's too much to do in a day, do the other side the next day.

Tom Zanotti | Rio Communities, New Mexico



process on our automobiles.

Nancy Crowley | Hurricane, Utah

Spot-Free Solution

We have to store our coach away from our home and can't wash it due to its location. We do, however, frequent the Blue Beacon Truck Washes at least two or three times a month when we're traveling. Over the years, we have probably visited 20 to 30 different locations. Each and every time, the staff has been extremely friendly and helpful. Most importantly, they do a great job. Just a word of caution: If you do use them, get the Rain-X treatment — it's worth every penny to have your coach almost spot-free.

Bob Weber | Mishawaka, Indiana

Leave It to the Pros

I own a 2010 40-foot Tiffin Phaeton motorhome that is black and tan, and I do not wash it. I washed it once when I first got it but there were swirl marks on the black surfaces. I asked a local company — The Detail Shop in Lansdale, Pennsylvania — if they would wash it because they hand-wash my cars, which are both black. They use a rinseless solution that only uses a small amount of water when they wash it and they do not use water to rinse it. Then they apply a spray wax as they are drying it.

They agreed to wash the motorhome and I take it there several times a year. There aren't any swirl marks and it really shines. They only charge \$110 for the service and I don't have to spend hours washing it myself.

Ken Finger | Lansdale, Pennsylvania

Partial DIY

I live near a tank-cleaning company that specializes in semi tankers and it also does semitrailers and tractors, and motorhomes, too. We have a 36-foot Class A diesel pusher and they will wash it for \$40. For an extra \$10 they will wash the roof. They rinse the whole coach first, then they soap the coach, then go over the entire coach with a soft brush to break up any dirt before they rinse it twice before giving

it back to the customer. I usually bring it back home and dry some of the windows and wipe the mirrors down. I am a big fan of Wash Wax ALL and then I give it a coat.

**Gene and Joanne Marcotte
Kankakee, Illinois**

Such a Deal!

When I have the chance I will stop at Blue Beacon Truck Washes. I have a 34-foot Nexus Super C Ghost and, depending on where we are, it will cost between \$35-\$50 to have the motorhome washed. They even tilt the hood and do the motor. Money well-spent.

Harry Wilmoth | Via email

Waterless Washing

When we visit most campgrounds we aren't able to use their water to wash our motorhome. Shortly after we purchased our RV we encountered a very nice camper who shared his method of getting his vehicle washed.

Aero Cosmetics Wash Wax ALL allows us to clean our motorhome without using any water at all. We also purchased the cleaning kit. It came with a telescoping wand along with large and small head with hook-and-loop attachments along with brushes and scrubbers.

Purchasing the necessary materials (degreaser and wash/wax detergent) enables us to get several washes and that sort of offsets the cost.

A big benefit of the wash/wax detergent is that bugs come off easier than before.

Michael Haskell | Via email

Dealer Detail

During most of the year I do washes myself (my storage facility supplies a covered bay, hose and vacuum facilities). This makes it convenient to do in the shade and I get few water spots in the process. Once a year, however, we travel to our RV resort in the Southwest from Northern California. Once we arrive, the RV is full of bug splatter and I've found that

our local detailer will come out and do an excellent job. They usually arrive with two people who spend a couple of hours working on it. They charge between \$120 and \$150. I think that's a terrific deal considering I probably couldn't do as good a job and my own labor wouldn't be as reasonable. We usually give them a generous tip as well.

**Drew and Laurie Mueller
Martinez, California**

It's a Process

We own a 2008 Holiday Rambler 33SFS coach on a Workhorse chassis that we are quite pleased with. Based on time and weather I use various methods to keep the coach clean.

I have washed it myself at a large car and truck wash, but that's not high on my list. I have also washed it at my home on occasion. I'm not a fan of that either. My preference has been the local Blue Beacon Truck Washes. I have been very satisfied with their service. I also get the tire dressing treatment and citrus cleaning of wheels and Rain-X protection. I do the windows and interior myself when I get back to my storage garage.

Weather and time permitting, I then use Turtle Wax Express Shine or Ice Liquid Wax. There's no residue, and no elbow grease required. This works well for me, the coach looks great and rain beads on it.

Once a year I take the motorhome to a professional truck and motorhome detailer about 2 miles from my storage bay for washing, wax and power buffing. This also works well for me.

Dave Sarley | Via email

Don't Soak the Heat Sensor

I prefer to wash my motorhome myself. I have used Blue Beacon a few times when I couldn't do it myself, but they do not hand-dry so you will have water spots and some streaking afterward (but it is better than leaving road film on for weeks).

One caution with any car wash-type service: If you have a Norcold refrigerator with the mods incorporated, they

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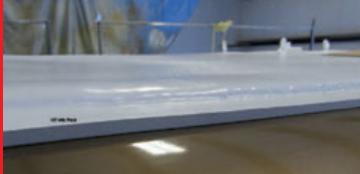
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will soak the heat sensor, which will cause it to shut down your refrigerator and you will be required to visit a Norcold authorized service shop to get a reset or replacement unit installed. This means your refrigerator will be inoperative for three to five days while the part is ordered!

Robert Gardner | Fort Worth, Texas

Terrific Truck Wash

I've had my motorhome washed at a truck wash for 20-plus years. The facility charges \$1 per foot and does an outstanding job. I am normally in and out in less than 30 minutes and couldn't be happier. I drive a 36-foot diesel pusher and it is quite a job to wash it. This is the only way to go, in my opinion.

John Armstrong | Gig Harbor, Washington

Lots of Options

I have arthritis and my husband had a stroke, which limits his mobility. Even so, we wash our RV ourselves 90 percent of the time. We use a commercial car wash with a dedicated RV bay. The RV bay has a reduced pressure setting on the wand, so it is easy to handle and also the reduced pressure does not damage any paint or fittings on our rig. It also has a credit card payment system, so you can run your card through, then stop the timer whenever you want. This allows us to stop the soap or rinse cycles when we get tired and resume when we are ready. We have a long-handled brush to reach up the sides and windshield, and we bring lots of microfiber towels to prevent scratching the paint when drying off the motorhome. We can wash the RV (except the roof) for \$10-\$12.

We sometimes take advantage of our local Mercedes-Benz dealership (we have a 25-foot Winnebago on a Sprinter chassis). They perform a wash for free, but it's not a very thorough one, and we generally have to do touch-up cleaning afterward.

Once a year we have our RV repair shop do a roof inspection and while we're there, we pay them to clean the roof, since neither of us can reach that part of the motorhome.

Robbie Nelson | Via email

Why Risk It?

I use a truck-wash service adjacent to a Pilot Flying J. I pay \$30.50 for my shorter than 30-foot Class C coach. Rain-X and tire treatment are additional. The cleaning process removes all bugs and road dirt from the rig even after 43 days on the road. The four-man service is professional and thorough, meaning my coach is finished in 15 minutes. With their special hoses and powerful water pressure, I'm assured of a sparkling clean rig.

I can't imagine myself climbing with hoses and cleaner scraping all the grime off the RV without impairing life and limb. That's probably the real reason I use a truck-wash service.

Dave Thomas | Rio Vista, California

Beware of Harsh Chemicals

I've never used a truck wash for my motorhome; in fact, as a retired truck driver, I wouldn't even recommend it because some of them use harsh chemicals. About a year ago I paid a professional detailer to restore the gloss to my 1996 Coachmen Mirada and while it was pricy it was worth every dime to me for compounding to remove oxidation plus wax and sealer. It still shines like new. My local independent repair shop also washes by hand with brushes and pressure washer for \$40. I'll pay that as long as they continue to offer it.

David King | Moore, South Carolina

Pride of Ownership

I wash my motorhome in my driveway using a telescopic brush and Protect All cleaning products. I can do a better job of washing/waxing it than most places I've taken it to, but at my age, I wish I could find someone to do it who takes pride in their work.

Nancy Larmore | Whiteland, Indiana

Too Much Pressure

We drive a Class A motorhome with full-body paint. The first two years we owned it, we were unable to wash it ourselves so we took it to Blue Beacon Truck Washes. The results were variable. Sometimes the washers would miss a spot, and sometimes the soap

was not completely rinsed off. However, the low price and convenience made up for the variable results.

The last time we were there, the high-pressure hoses blasted off paint from some of the plastic trim pieces. It's possible that the paint was loose, but hand-washing probably wouldn't have removed so much. Now we use Wash Wax ALL with a two-headed mop on an extension pole. We do a little at a time, and it doesn't take much effort.

Valerie Chapman and Ken Braun
Berlin, Massachusetts

United We Stand

I'm not an emotional man. However, I'm sitting here with tears in my eyes after reading the sensitively written article "Remembering 9/11" in your September issue. Author Christine Goodier's restrained description of the three memorials in New York, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville puts the reader firmly in these locations. It is a memorable piece of writing amplified by some excellent color photography.

Tom Gauger
Shermans Dale, Pennsylvania

Residential Refrigerators

We've been looking at new rear-diesel Class A motorhomes and are finding that more and more of them offer all-electric residential refrigerators. I want to know from folks who have one, how it works for them. What happens while dry camping? Do they set the generator to kick on during generator-allowed hours? And how long will the fridge run on a full charge?

Russell and Linda Houk
Melrose, Florida

Question of the Month

Does your motorhome have a residential refrigerator and, if so, what are the pros and cons — especially when dry camping?

Send your comments to:

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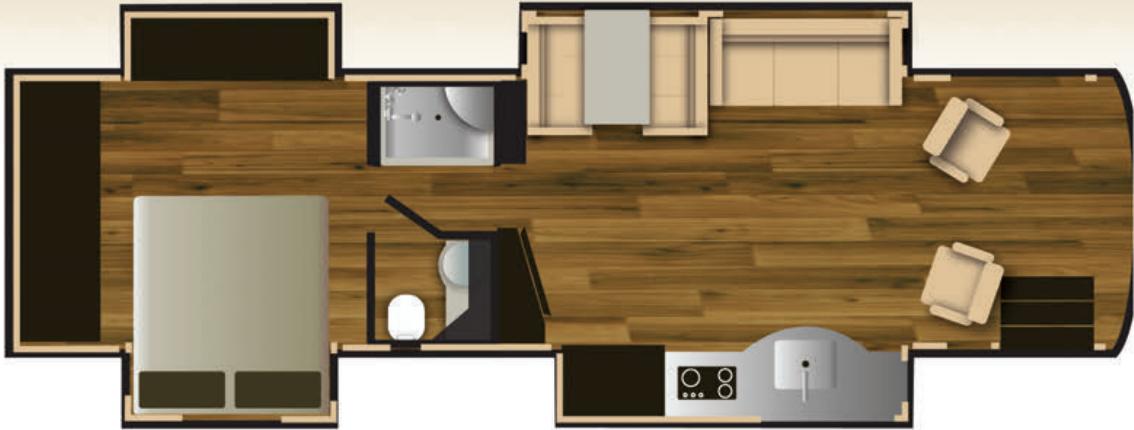


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ESCAPES

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A new RV roof cleaning kit from the company that makes Love Bug Erasers — Awesome Products. [pg. 14](#)



12 ROAD FOODIE | 14 WHEELS & GEAR | 17 NOTEWORTHY & NEWS BRIEFS | 18 CROSSROADS



Mountain Mansion

This grand estate features nature trails, restored 19th-century homes and breathtaking views

By James Richardson

In 1955, Dr. William Henry Burritt — a physician and Huntsville, Alabama, native — willed his estate and mansion (known as Round Top Mountain) to Huntsville to create the first museum in the city. Now called Burritt on the Mountain, it sits on top of Monte Sano (Mountain of Health) and offers an incredible view of Huntsville below. Its 167 acres contain the mansion, which is open for tours, an interpretive museum, and a re-creation

of a 19th-century farm complete with livestock. The mansion has a unique architectural style and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Monte Sano State Park, at the other end of the horseshoe-shaped mountain, has hiking trails and a campground with hookups.

For more information, call 256-536-2882 or visit www.burrittonthemountain.com



From far left: The gazebo behind the mansion serves as a popular location for weddings. A single-room log cabin is one of the historic structures on the grounds. The parlor of the Burritt mansion is one of the rooms with original furnishings.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

More Holiday Foodie Gifts

I can't believe holiday gift-buying time is just around the corner. Now's the time to order food gifts online for yourself or for friends and loved ones. Food gifts are like money — they're practical, and everybody loves them.

Last December, I offered suggestions for food-related holiday gifts for folks who love baked goods, olive oil, mustard, maple products and coffee. That holiday column proved so popular I thought I'd share ideas for several of my favorite foods — chocolate, meat and seafood. All of these artisan food producers ship right to your door.

Chocoholics

Chocolate makes a great gift. A fellow *MotorHome* reader and RVer, Berry Ann Greer, operates **Kopper Kettle Candies** in Fort Smith, Arkansas. The company offers artisan chocolates made in small batches, the old-fashioned way.

If you like chocolate and cherries, you'll love **Chukar Cherries** from Prosser, Washington.

Portland, Oregon's **Moonstruck Chocolate Co.** gourmet cocoas are comfort food in a cup. You can buy in tins or individual packets for stocking stuffers.

Mrs. Prindable's Gourmet Caramel Apples (in caramel, chocolate and other flavors) are big and beautiful, and make an unusual and delicious gift.

Meat Fans

If you love country ham and other pork products, check out Kentucky's **Newsom's Country Ham**. It's family-owned and produces delectable smoked and cured meats free of additives and growth hormones.



From top: Hama Hama on Washington's Olympic Peninsula ships fresh and smoked oysters. You can get sweet, briny king crab legs delivered right to your door from Tracy's King Crab Shack in Juneau, Alaska.

Pig of the Month BBQ will make sure your pork lovers have all the delicious pork they can eat. The company offers smoky and tender baby back ribs and pulled pork in 1- and 5-pound packages as well as barbecue sauces and sides, delivered right to your door.

If beef is more your style, check out my favorite beef jerky, **Mingua Beef Jerky**. It's moist, deeply flavorful and, unlike many too-thick-too-dry jerkies, this one is easy to chew.

Seafood Aficionados

If you love Alaskan seafood, you can have Alaska king crab legs or creamy Alaskan king crab bisque shipped to you from **Tracy's King Crab Shack** in Juneau, Alaska. During the summer, Tracy's is *the* place to go in southeast Alaska for king crab. She buys her king crab only from the best local fishermen, who bring her premium product.

Kent Island Crab Cakes is a third-generation, family-owned company run by folks born and bred in the watershed of the Chesapeake Bay — the largest estuary in the U.S. They'll ship you tasty crab cakes and other seafood delights that will make your holiday entertaining easy and tasty.

Hama Hama seafood on Washington's beautiful Olympic Peninsula is a fifth-generation, family-run oyster and clam farm with a reputation for quality. It ships seasonal products like smoked and fresh oysters.

Tasty Treats

From far left: Mrs. Prindable's chocolate, nut and caramel-dipped apples make an unusual and delicious gift. Yakima Valley's Chukar Cherries makes a wide variety of chocolate-covered cherries.



Chocolate Gifts www.kopperkettlecandies.com, www.chukar.com, www.moonstruckchocolate.com, www.mrsprindables.com

Meat Gifts www.newsomscountryham.com, www.pigofthemonth.com, www.mingua-beefjerky.com

Seafood Gifts www.kingcrabshack.com, www.kentislandcrabcakes.com, www.hamahamaoysters.com

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Fridge Coasters

If you use the refrigerator in your motorhome a lot, you know it's only a matter of time before the shelves and bins start to get stained and sticky from food spills and drips. That's where Fridge Coasters come in. Created on the notion that you should spend more time enjoying yourself and less time cleaning, Fridge Coasters are natural, absorbent liners that do the dirty work for you. Not only do they help prevent messes, the breathable material helps fruits and vegetables last longer by keeping them off the plastic surface, allowing air to flow underneath, according to the company. Both recyclable and biodegradable, Fridge Coasters are offered in packs for various areas inside the box, and are available for Norcold and Dometic refrigerators. MSRP is \$5-\$18.

Fridge Coaster, 704-750-1912, www.fridgecoaster.com



Cellphone Coverage Booster

You never know where you might travel or how strong the cellphone signal will be when you get there. Ordinarily, spotty service isn't anything more than a minor inconvenience — until there's an emergency, you need directions or you have to find the nearest fuel station. To keep RVers connected, SureCall has introduced the Fusion2Go cellphone signal booster to keep both driver and passenger(s) connected by boosting the cell signal in the motorhome. Fusion2Go is a five-band booster that reportedly improves cell signal for 2G/3G voice and 4G data for all major U.S. carriers, including Verizon, AT&T, Sprint and T-Mobile. The kit includes the booster unit, antenna and power cords, and is designed for easy installation in just a few minutes. MSRP is \$449.

SureCall, 888-365-6283, www.surecall.com

Your New Pad

As much as motorhome owners dread cleaning the roofs of their motorhomes, most realize that it's necessary to prevent ugly streaking down the side walls and to maximize longevity. There are a variety of chemical products designed for this purpose, but the way we apply them is usually a run-of-the-mill bristle brush. Awesome Products claims it has developed a faster, easier way to remove dirt and crud with new cleaning pads in its Boss RV Roof Cleaning Kit. Eight times more effective than a brush and designed for rubber, vinyl or fiberglass, the new pads are so efficient you'll only need to use one-third to one-half of the cleaning product you normally use, according to the company. Two kits are available: one to clean the roof only, and another to clean the roof and the rest of the coach. MSRP is \$39.95-\$49.95 (plus shipping and handling).

Awesome Products Corp., 904-280-1499, www.lovebugeraser.com



Groove Tubes

Many older motorhomes have fluorescent tube lighting in one or more areas. While these fixtures are energy-efficient, they often produce unflattering light and can start to flicker as they age. If you've been looking for a suitable alternative, M4 Products may have the answer with its new 12-volt DC LED tube lights. Offered in standard and hard-to-find sizes including 12- to 36-inch and circular 8-inch tubes, these lights are even more efficient and don't require fixture replacement — simply rewire the fixture with the included installation materials that eliminate the ballast. M4 tube lights use the natural sockets in the fixture, and are available in three colors: Cool White (6,000k), Natural White (4,500k) and Warm White (3,200k). MSRP starts at \$16.99.

M4 LED, 818-717-8840, www.m4led.com

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IN MEMORIAM

John N. Dodgen was a father, husband (65 years), RV manufacturer (Born Free motorhomes), salesman, inventor, fisherman, World War II veteran, minister ... and a character.

John was 89 when he passed away in August after more than 60 years at the helm of the company that he, his brothers and his father founded.

For his 80th birthday, he invited his customers, friends (including me), business associates and his staff to his milestone celebration in the Born Free factory at Humboldt, Iowa, whereupon he announced, "I have a video to show you. It's about my life, and I made it for my funeral." Well-known for his sense of humor, John got a laugh out of the audience, and went on to show the piece. It was shown again at his funeral in Humboldt on Sept. 12.

That may appear to depict a man too full of himself, but John was not that way. He was dedicated to his staff and to quality, whether it was in the farm equipment he built in the early days or in the Born Free units he began building in the 1960s. He exuded enthusiasm, loved people and enjoyed building motorhomes for a legion of loyal customers.

The early units the company built were large, luxurious truck campers that John liked to call Born Free "motorcoaches." They were too big and heavy to be hauled unaided by pickups of that era, but John had developed a tag-axle/camper-loader system that was included with the camper, which made it possible to handle the extra weight while improving roadworthiness.

In one of my early forays into magazine field-testing of RVs, John offered the use of one of his display units from the Denver RV Show in January 1970, and I took this rig to the Vail ski area — during a snowstorm. Tire chains were necessary all the way, but despite the weather the unit was comfortable, and its

water system did not freeze. The results were published in *Camper Coachman*, which was later combined with *MotorHome Life*, the predecessor of *MotorHome* magazine.

After only a few years, John transitioned to high-quality Born Free Class C motorhomes. From the start, he emphasized aerodynamics in an era when many RVs were shaped more like bricks, and he included dozens of his own innovations as the coaches grew in size and sophistication.

He was fond of saying that he wanted to build "every one of them like they were going to my mom," and he was the driving force for the company in sales as well as design and quality. During lean years, the company survived on his determination, salesmanship and strength of character.

John traveled widely in his motorhomes, including annual caravans to Alaska with the Born Free Owners Club, during which he led the fishing, cooking and joketelling. In the 1990s, his company built catering trailers that he named "Rib Cage," and during one of his forays he drove a Born Free motorhome towing a Rib Cage to the *MotorHome* office in California, where he cooked a barbecue lunch in the parking lot for the staff. He also built mobile medical clinics in the Born Free shell.

He was an inventor, holding patents on devices ranging from a tomato plant cage to a slope-reading golf putter — and the Rib Cage.

John seemed at his best and happiest when he was face to face. His enthusiasm, intellect, affection and his motorhomes touched a lot of people who were privileged to call him friend, including me. — *Bill Estes*, *MotorHome's* publisher emeritus



Every Kid in a Park, For Free

To help engage the next generation of national park visitors, the White House has launched the "Every Kid in a Park" initiative. This new program provides fourth graders free access to federal lands and waters. The access pass is valid for the 2015-2016 school year (Sept. 1, 2015-Aug. 31, 2016) and grants free entry for fourth graders and three accompanying adults (or an entire vehicle for drive-in parks) at more than 2,000 federally managed sites. Visit www.everykidinapark.gov to learn more.

Go Fish!



The editors and consultants of the "Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide" have chosen their Top RV Parks for Fishing from the annual publication's database of more than 7,000 private RV parks. According to the guide, "These RV parks provide guests with great angling opportunities on rivers, lakes or off ocean coasts."

The top fishing RV parks are:

Alaska: Eagle's Rest RV Park & Cabins, Valdez

Arizona: Willow Beach Marina & RV Park, Willow Beach

California: Mad River Rapids RV Park, Arcata; Rio Bend RV & Golf Resort, El Centro

Florida: Pleasant Lake RV Resort, Bradenton; Chokoloskee Island Park, Chokoloskee; Upriver RV Resort, Fort Myers; Live Oak Landing, Freeport; Rainbow RV Resort, Frostproof; North Lake Estates RV Resort, Moore Haven; Brighton RV Resort, Okeechobee; Silver Palms RV Resort, Okeechobee

Idaho: RedRock RV and Camping Park, Island Park; Mountain Home RV Park, Mountain Home

Missouri: Basswood Resort, Platte City

North Carolina: Fort Tatham RV Park, Sylva

Oklahoma: Marval Resort, Gore

Pennsylvania: Mountain Creek Campground, Carlisle

South Dakota: Oasis Campground, Chamberlain

Texas: Spring Creek Marina & RV Park, San Angelo

Virginia: Gwynn's Island RV Resort and Campground, Gwynn; New Point RV Resort, New Point



Photo: Mary Zalmanek

St. Paul, Minnesota

Grand Gardens Under Glass

On Nov. 7, 1915, Como Park Conservatory in Saint Paul, Minnesota, opened with an exhibit of chrysanthemums. One hundred years later, the conservatory occupies 2 acres under glass with six indoor gardens. There are also three outdoor gardens. Renamed the Marjorie McNeely Conservatory in 2002, the facility manages 50,000 plants from 1,684 species. My favorite exhibits are the Sunken Garden, which hosts five flower shows each year, and the Ordway Gardens, which features a nationally acclaimed bonsai collection.

The conservatory is part of the Como Park Zoo and Conservatory complex. From its humble beginnings (Como Zoo was founded in 1897 when three deer were donated to the city), the complex has grown to include an 18-hole golf course, mini golf, amusement park, restored antique carousel and more. It's open 365 days a year and admission is free, although donations are appreciated.

For more information, call 651-487-8200 or go to www.comozooconservatory.org — *Mary Zalmanek*

Jacksonville, Florida

A Little Bit of Paradise

Camping at Florida's Little Talbot Island State Park, just a few miles from Jacksonville, provides RVers with panoramic views of marshland and beaches. There are lots of options for keeping active on this barrier island, from taking walks on the 5-mile stretch of Atlantic Ocean beach, to bird-watching along the western marshes, to kayaking through the bay. The park's campground offers 40 electric and water hookup sites.

Nearby is the Kingsley Plantation on Fort George Island. This historical park operated by the National Park

Service portrays the plantation life of Zephaniah Kingsley, who in 1814 established a business of sea-island cotton, citrus, sugar cane and corn. Visitors can tour the home and learn about the operation of a plantation in the early years of settlement.

Leaving the plantation area, take the St. Johns River ferry by the entrance to Fort George Island across the St. Johns River, to Singleton's Seafood Shack on A1A, which serves great-tasting shrimp po'boys.

For more information, call 904-251-2320 or visit www.floridastateparks.org/park/little-talbot-island — *Morey Edelman* 

Photo: Morey Edelman



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Joshua Tree National Park

Escape Those Winter Blues

Be it by land, air or Salton Sea, the Palm Springs area in Southern California is the perfect foil for cold-weather chills

By Ken Reid

Nearly everyone eventually succumbs to the winter blues. When the sun doesn't shine for weeks, the temperature only varies from cold to colder, drizzly fog soaks everything and everyone outside, and the weather report doesn't hold promise of change anytime soon, my wife, Gayle, and I are ready for an escape. Invariably we begin daydreaming about a road trip in our motorhome to someplace warm, with plenty of sunshine, maybe even palm trees, and sand to dig our toes into; a place where we can relax in swimsuits and sandals, perhaps sipping a cool, tropical drink on a beach or around a pool. This time, we sought a destination within a single day's drive of our home, where we could take maximum advantage of the limited away time. While checking maps and weather reports, one part of Southern California drew our interest. The Coachella Valley area, and Palm Springs in particular, seemed to offer just what was needed to send our blues packing.

After doing some research online and making a few phone calls,

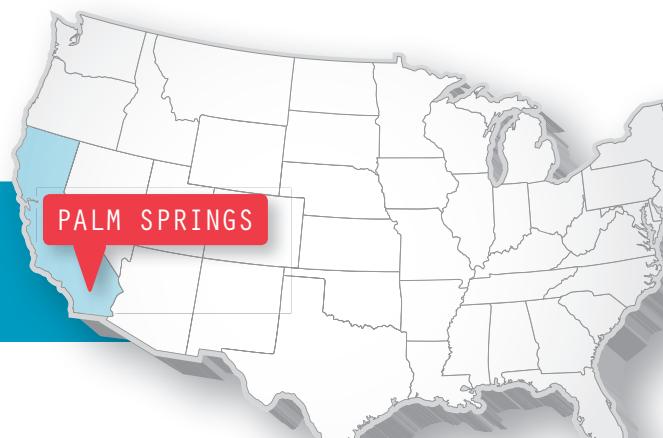
we were able to set up a two-week stay at the Palm Springs RV Resort. What a wonderful destination it turned out to be. Everything was first-class — from the very modern facilities, plentiful amenities, myriad organized activities, to cheerful and professional staff. Centrally located to dozens of prime attractions for all ages, it was also within a 45-minute drive of every activity we had planned.

Upon leaving our home in Northern California early in the morning, it was 35 degrees Fahrenheit and socked with dripping, wet fog. When we arrived at the resort, shortly before the sun set behind nearby mountains, the temperature was 77 degrees, with beautiful, clear skies. Virtually everyone we saw as we looked for a place to set up was dressed in swimsuits or shorts, many leisurely strolling on the paved internal roads or sitting around with drinks in hand. The smell of barbecues made our tummies growl. Statuesque palm trees were liberally scattered throughout the resort.

All of the spaces on one side of the RV resort are drive-through, but have only 30-amp electrical

Getting Here ➔

Palm Springs is located in Southern California. On Interstate 10, it is a two-hour drive east from Los Angeles, and a four-hour drive west from Phoenix, Arizona. If traveling from Las Vegas, take Interstate 15 south to I-10 east.



GETAWAY

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

service. The other side is for back-ins, but with the option of 30- or 50-amp electrical service. By the time we got there, only three of the latter were left to choose from; but any of them would have accommodated our 35-foot motorhome and dinghy vehicle. All of the unusually spacious sites were landscaped with sand and grass, which invited taking off our shoes during setup.

It is definitely a good idea to make reservations well in advance if possible because this park is typically full throughout the winter. Of course it never hurts to call and see if there have been cancellations.

The next morning we began a walkabout to check everything out. Entertaining but elusive roadrunners strutted their stuff while hunting for food. Horseshoe pits, pickleball and shuffleboard courts were all in such good shape that they looked brand-new. Just outside is a wonderfully appointed family lodge, with a large patio, pool and spa, surrounded by landscaping and nicely manicured lawns. In addition to a large barbecue area, there are plentiful shaded tables, chaise lounges and even cabanas. Just outside the park's southwest side are several hundred acres of sand and scrub brush that invite exploration by four-legged companions.



From above: Soar 2½ miles up the cliffs of Chino Canyon on the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. At the top is an alpine forest, natural history museum, café and viewing areas.



On the other side of the park entrance is a big recreation center and library. We were amazed at the number and quality of recreational and entertainment opportunities scheduled, for daytime and evenings, seven days a week. Some examples included pickleball, shuffleboard and horseshoe matches, Zumba, water aerobics, water volleyball, and Wii bowling; also, card games like Texas Hold 'Em; and special presentations, including "Introduction to Photoshop" and "Stitchin' Time." Our first Saturday night included live professional entertainment. Monday night jam sessions drew outstanding musicians from around the park. On

Tuesday evenings it was karaoke; and there were plenty of other fun activities beyond those mentioned.

To get a better idea of how our points of interest were juxtaposed in and around the desert valley, we chose to first get above it all by riding in the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway (to a breathtaking 8,516-foot elevation at the Mountain Station). These are the world's largest rotating tramcars. During the impressive 10-minute, 2½-mile ascent, riders start at the



One of the hiking trails inside Palm Canyon.

From right: Smoke Tree Stables offers equestrian tours of Palm Canyon. Activities at the Salton Sea (one of the world's largest inland seas and lowest spots on earth) include fishing, camping and bird-watching.

base, in the Sonoran Desert ecosystem, and end at the top in an alpine forest. The tram is a major means of accessing the 14,000 acres of park wilderness, including 54 miles of hiking trails, primitive campgrounds and an adventure center for winter activities (during snow season). Amenities at the top include a café, fine restaurant and cocktail lounge, as well as a natural history museum, theater, gift shop and strategically located viewing areas.

We could see the entire distance, from the hundreds of windmills around Cathedral City, past Palm Springs and Desert Palms, all the way to the Salton Sea. Even the San Andreas Fault can be seen from there. No matter where you are at the top, inside or outside the structure, views are spectacular. There are lots of telescopes, but binoculars offer more versatility. We spent several hours at the top, concluding the stay with fine dining after watching the sun set over nearby peaks. The temperature at the top can be 40 degrees cooler than the valley floor, so dress accordingly. Handicapped parking is available, as is wheelchair access to and onto the tramcars.

Another way to get the lay of the land is to take a ride in a hot air balloon. We wanted a bird's-eye view of the unique landscape, including the appearance of various textures — afforded by huge plots of date palms, grape vineyards, citrus orchards, row crops and new housing, contrasted with low- and high-desert terrain. Hundreds of windmills, and the shadows they cast on the desert below, can sometimes be seen off in the distance. Most operators offer flights both in early morning and afternoon. One advantage we found to the afternoon flight is that if the conditions allow, the pilot can create the impression of multiple sunsets during a single ride just by going higher and lower as the sun goes down behind the mountains located on the west side of the valley floor.

We chose to fly with Magical Adventure Balloon Rides, which has a fleet of nine balloons that vary in size, from one that carries only three passengers, to one that transports 24. Our flight was awesome, about an hour long, with champagne and orange juice served after landing. It was definitely a wonderful experience and the meeting location was only a mile away from the RV resort.



Visiting the Salton Sea was next on our to-do list. About 35 minutes away, just beyond the town of Mecca, we deemed it well worth the trip. The surface of this body of water is an astounding 227 feet below sea level! Located right over the San Andreas Fault, the Salton Sea offers something for everyone. For example, along the northeastern shore is one of the most important winter stops for birds traveling along the Pacific Flyway. Tens of thousands begin arriving around October. By January or February, huge flocks of up to 400 species have taken advantage of all that this body of water offers. Visitors can also learn about the Native Americans, known as Cahuilla, who once thrived here. Kayaking, sunbathing, fishing, hiking through nearby Painted Canyon or on the Ironwood Nature Trail, swimming (with extra buoyancy

From below left: Spacious sites — with sand, grass and plentiful palms — invite a quick change to shorts and bare feet at Palm Springs RV Resort. The park has pickleball matches that take place most every day and evening. Other activities include water aerobics and pool volleyball.



in the salty water), kite-flying, exploring bat caves, testing the waters in nearby hot springs and many more fun things await.

Exploring the unusual and spectacular desert canyons located on the Agua Caliente Indian Reservation was a priority too. Of particular interest to me was Palm Canyon, with its 15 miles of trails and spectacular scenery. We wanted to experience part of it by horseback, but also via the much more versatile option of hiking. After doing research online and reviewing commercial fliers about trail rides in the Palm Springs area, our favorite by far was Smoke Tree Stables. This large, well-run operation offers a variety of one- and two-hour package deals. But more importantly to us was that the owner, Stacey Johnson, was willing to tailor rides for individuals and groups. Also, since her stables are located just below the mouth of Palm Canyon, there is only a short ride across relatively flat desert terrain before entering much more scenic terrain.

Totally awesome is how I would describe Palm Canyon. There is so much to see and do there that we didn't even make it to nearby Tahquitz, Andreas and Murray canyons. During our exploration, it

was easy to step back in time and see how much the Agua Caliente band of Cahuilla Indians depended on these canyons for survival. They created the means for irrigating crops, then grew things like melons, squash, beans and corn. The streams brought game, which provided meat. Rock art, rock mortars, house pits, dams, ditches, trails and places where their food was prepared can still be found in the canyons. The tribe invites visitors to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors. Normally you can wear shorts, lightweight shirt, sunglasses, hat and closed-toed shoes for doing that. But bring plenty of water and sunscreen. Unless traveling in a small motorhome, don't try driving there.

Last, but not least, on our must-do list, was a trip to Joshua Tree National Park. It was the farthest of our day trips, but still only took about 45 minutes from the resort to the south entrance. Plan on spending a full day, as there are an amazing number of things to see and do. After all, the park is larger than the state of Rhode Island. About 585,000 acres have been designated as wilderness area. The park straddles both San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Parts of two deserts are included in its boundaries: the Mojave and lower Colorado.

The Little San Bernardino Mountains run through the southwestern edge. Bring plenty of water and a picnic lunch. But most importantly, bring a healthy curiosity about its diverse and sometimes unique geology, flora and fauna. The Mojave (which is at a higher elevation, and therefore cooler) is home to most of the park's namesake Joshua trees, which can be found both in sparse numbers and thick clusters. Some live for well over 500 years, back to when Native Americans still roamed freely throughout the area. For those interested in photographing wildflowers, Joshua trees and other desert flora, they generally blossom from February to April. The many unusual rock formations also invite photography. Other activities include rock climbing, hiking, biking, birding, and just plain old exploring for fun. Motorhomes are allowed, and there are several campgrounds within the park. It is best to check online for details, including restrictions. However, using a dinghy affords more versatility and opportunities.

After two weeks of balmy bliss in Palm Springs, we were ready to head back home to see our kids and grandkids. But we hope to return with them in the near future, perhaps for another respite from the winter blues. Our every expectation was exceeded. I'm absolutely sure that Palm Springs will be high on our list for future winter getaways! **M**

A palm tree farm as seen from one of the Magical Adventures hot air balloons.



➔ FOR MORE INFORMATION

Indian Canyons, Agua Caliente Indian Reservation

760-323-6018, www.indian-canyons.com

Joshua Tree National Park

760-367-5500, www.nps.gov/jotr

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619-865-1187, www.hotairfun.com

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760-345-2236, www.rvonthego.com/california/palm-springs-rv-resort

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Smoke Tree Stables

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Richardson Highway provides spectacular glacier views.

ROADHOUSE RULES

An eclectic caravan, led by a trusty 1916 Dodge touring car, relives a historic journey along Alaska's Richardson Highway

The year was 1913 when an intrepid entrepreneur named Robert "Bobby" Sheldon drove the first automobile approximately 360 miles from Fairbanks to Valdez, Alaska. Back then, Richardson Highway was little more than a muddy wagon track that crossed rushing creeks and rivers. No one had ever tried driving a car down it. Fast forward more than 100 years and I've joined some new Alaskan pioneers in an RV caravan as they re-create Sheldon's journey, stopping along the way at historic roadhouses. It's a "Great Alaska Roadhouse Adventure."

We set out from Fairbanks, early, under sunny skies. Our caravan includes an antique 1916 Dodge Model 30-35 Touring car, one of Sheldon's cars and the last original car to drive this highway (then called the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail). We're also taking two Class C motorhomes and a pickup towing an auto trailer. Our adventurous group consists of Willy Vinton, manager of the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum in Fairbanks;

Steve Carey, a master mechanic; Don and Ray Cameron, and David Stone, co-owners of the timeworn Dodge; their wives, and me.

Willy and I are the first to climb into the Dodge and motor at 30 MPH down the highway with the RVs and pickup following behind. We don't get far. Within 20 minutes, we're pulled over on the side of the freeway with carburetor problems and a flat tire. Apparently, 80-year-old tire tubes rot!

It's the first of more than a half-dozen stops we make to adjust, repair or jury-rig fixes to this automobile that hasn't seen a road in decades.

The guys load the vintage Dodge into the auto trailer and Don and Ray, driving the RVs, head in different directions in search of new tubes and tire repair. Within a couple of hours, we're back on the road, this time with Willy and Steve in the Dodge and me in one of the motorhomes.

Driving the Lonely Highway

The Richardson Highway was formerly the main route between Anchorage and Denali National Park. However, since AK 3 ("The Parks" Highway) was built, traffic has substantially decreased on Alaska's first highway. For RVers, that means a roadway that's both scenic and uncrowded. It's also



filled with history and legend. The more than 360-mile stretch of road passes by several historic roadhouses that still offer travelers what they always have — food, sometimes a bed, and a break from the highway. At one time, there were more than 30 roadhouses along the Richardson, one every 10-15 miles, to serve travelers. Some roadhouses were little more than tents; others were elaborate, multistory log or clapboard structures. But all were essential to the safety and comfort of people traveling a dangerous roadway where temperatures plunge well below zero in winter. Today, about a dozen of the roadhouses still exist and we're stopping at a number of them to share the story of our historic journey.

We pass over the Tanana River, a silty waterway braided with sand and gravel bars. Ahead is the Alaska Range, its jagged, snow-topped peaks looming on the horizon. We pass through boreal forests of poplar, birch

Above from left: At Big Delta State Historical Park, Rika's Landing Roadhouse gives visitors a look at the roadhouses of yesteryear. The group makes a quick stop on its way to Sourdough Roadhouse.

and white spruce, over the Salcha River Bridge and turn at Salchaket Roadhouse, a modest log restaurant and gas station. Inside, I buy a small, tasty apple hand pie and owner Jean Thompson tells me, much like it was in the early days, Salchaket is still a community center. "We're a one-stop place for folks who live out here — the post office, the liquor store and the roadhouse," she says. "Even if it's 40 below zero, if it's Friday night, people show up here for our prime rib."

Outside, a small crowd has gathered around the old Dodge, and David, who is a retired university professor, attaches a poster route map and the guys field queries. When people learn about Sheldon's historic drive and the journey we're taking, they're excited and pepper us with

questions and have their picture taken with the car.

We're back on the road with Willy and David driving the Dodge, Ron in the first RV out front, Steve behind the Dodge in the pickup and Don bringing up the rear. The RVs keep their hazard lights on since the little Dodge tops out around 35 MPH. We pull to the side of the road to fiddle with the carburetor; again to fix a broken wire; and still again to adjust the brakes. Our mechanical frustrations are minor compared to the challenges faced by early Richardson Highway travelers.

We're following the Tanana River to the west and pass a series of pretty lakes to the east. The trees here, mostly black spruce, are stunted from harsh weather, little rain and permafrost that keeps tree roots

THE VALDEZ-FAIRBANKS TRAIL

Highway History

The old Valdez Trail (1903-1904) opened up overland access to the Alaska interior and Fairbanks. By 1905, roadhouses sprang up along the route, and in 1913, Bobby Sheldon was the first person to travel the length of the trail by car.



The original three-story Tonsina Roadhouse is still impressive.



From far left: Mirrorlike Summit Lake is a beautiful stop along the Richardson Highway. Salchaket Roadhouse still serves visitors and is an active community center.

shallow. As we pull in at milepost 275 at Rika's Landing Roadhouse in Big Delta State Historical Park, clouds begin to obscure the blue sky.

Rika's was an important roadhouse along the Richardson and the large, two-story log house is now a museum with period antiques and artifacts used during its heyday. With barns, a telegraph office and kiosks telling the story, it's a great place to get a sense of what roadhouse life was like at the turn of the century.

Our next stop is the Delta Junction visitors center. This is the terminus of the Alaska Highway and it's also the site of the Sullivan Roadhouse, now a museum. The Sullivan might be called the "traveling roadhouse" since this original log structure has been moved several times. The first Sullivan moved when the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail was rerouted. It ended up on land owned by the military and was, in fact, on the edge of an active bombing range when preservationists moved the building in the 1970s to its present location.

We hear it's raining hard farther along the highway, so the men load the

Dodge into the trailer and caravan to the Lodge at Black Rapids, our stop for the night. Along the way, we pass Fort Greely, the northernmost U.S. missile defense installation and Donnelly Dome, a large volcanic intrusion that's a prominent landmark for travelers. We're climbing now, moving into the mountains, and the Alaska Range appears ghostly in the distance with clouds hanging around its snowy tops.

Roadhouses and More Roadhouses

We begin descending into the broad Delta Valley that was cut by the glacially fed Delta River. It's not long before we pull into The Lodge at Black Rapids at milepost 227.4, a modern wilderness lodge sitting on a bluff overlooking the river. In front of the new lodge is Rapids Hunting Lodge, the original log roadhouse that Mike and Annie Hopper have been restoring.

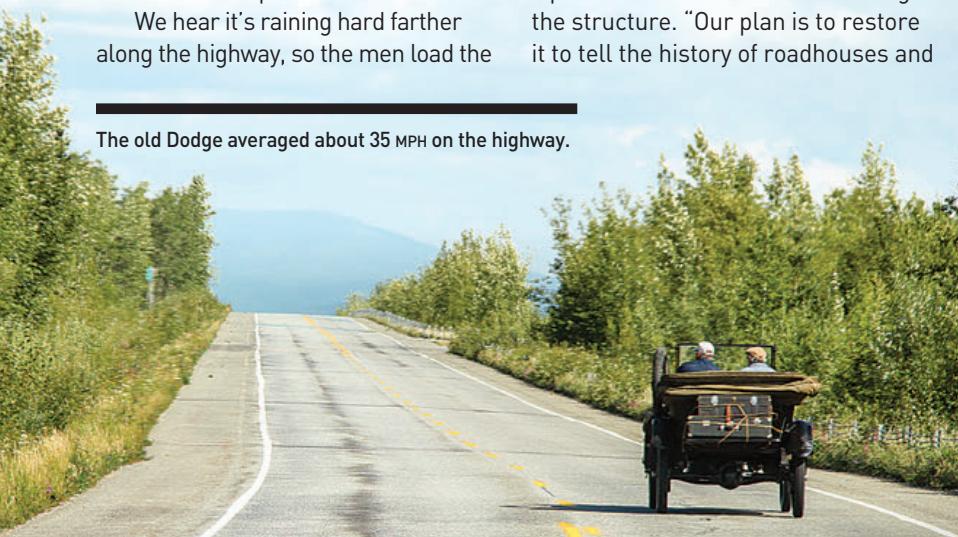
"I just fell in love with this old building, one of the first roadhouses on the Valdez Trail," says Annie as we sip iced tea on the deck overlooking the structure. "Our plan is to restore it to tell the history of roadhouses and

of the Valdez-Fairbanks Trail."

The Dodge is parked outside the old roadhouse and looks perfectly at home, the antique car and the historic building being of the same era. I've booked a room at the lodge and the rest of our crew hunkers down for the night in the RVs alongside the road. As I discover, RVing for Alaskans is different from most of us. Alaskans often bypass campgrounds and simply pull off the road for the night. Tonight it's along the roadway; tomorrow we camp at a wayside. And motorhomes here are less about looks and more about function. For example, the air-conditioning unit on Willy's 1994 Coachmen sports a big hole where a raven struck it; near the coach's entry door, there's a large dent where a moose kicked it. The rig runs fine and that's good enough. Even the RV food is different. In the evenings, we dine on moose burgers and moose tenderloin and Copper River salmon caught in local rivers by Ray and Don. It's all part of this Alaskan adventure.

After a restful night, we head out under blue skies. We are driving toward eight 10,000-foot snowy mountains dotted with glaciers. At several points, we see the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), a massive 48-inch steel pipe that snakes 800 miles from Alaska's North Slope to Valdez, the closest ice-free port. It crosses frozen tundra, boreal forest, 34 major rivers and some 800 smaller streams, major earthquake faults and three rugged mountain ranges. As we pull off at an interpretive site, we read about this engineering wonder and learn that the pipeline was constructed

The old Dodge averaged about 35 MPH on the highway.



on girders to allow it to flex with earth movement. In 2002, a magnitude 7.9 earthquake caused the ground beneath the pipeline to shift 13 feet! Fortunately, not a drop of oil was spilled.

We also pause at Richardson Monument, a broad valley dividing the Tanana River Basin and the Copper River Basin. It's also the site where Arctic Man, an extreme ski competition, is held each April.

The Dodge is holding up well and, when we stop at mirrorlike Summit Lake, a tour bus pulls up, spilling out 40 passengers who swarm excitedly around the car and snap photos. "We heard you were doing this trip," says the bus driver, pumping Ray's hand. "I told my passengers we'd find you."

We stop at more roadhouses — Paxson Lodge, Meier's Lake, Sour dough. The Meier's Lake Roadhouse original building, a large, three-story affair, still stands, but at Paxson Lodge, a jumble of tumble-down logs is all that remains of the historic log structure.

We pass through heavily forested slopes and Willy says, "You can't imagine what early travelers went through on this highway. The road wasn't as wide as the lane we're driving in. Branches from trees stabbed the radiators. When you bought a ticket to ride in a car like this old Dodge, you agreed to help out no matter what happened. That included getting out and pushing."

Today the road is flat and wide with only occasional frost heaves breaking the pavement. It's also a lonely highway with long stretches of tundra and vast stands of tamarack, birch, and black-and-white spruce between the occasional roadhouse or settlement.

On our third day, we make the final push into Valdez. I climb into the passenger seat of the Dodge with Steve driving. Top down, the morning air is cool and the sun warms us as the little car churns up Thompson Pass, one of the highest spots on the Richardson. We climb up and up and a cold fog

settles over us. I pull on my fleece, my teeth chattering. Near the top the fog is so thick we can barely see the taillights of Ron's RV up ahead.

"Anyone who sees this car coming out of the fog must think we're a ghost from the past," says Steve, gripping the wheel tightly and straining to see through the blanket of gray.

We crest the pass and begin to descend and pull over to put the car into the trailer. Without lights, it's too dangerous to drive the Dodge in this fog.

A few miles later, just outside of Valdez, the guys unload the car. All five of them pile into the little car and, with the women driving the RVs and the pickup, we parade triumphantly into Valdez — just like Bobby Sheldon did more than 100 years ago.

If you'd like to see Sheldon's 1905 Runabout, it is currently on loan from the University of Alaska Museum of the North at the Fountainhead Antique Auto Museum (907-450-2100, www.fountainheadmuseum.com) in Fairbanks. 



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If You Go

Yellowstone has five entrances, but access varies based on the season and weather conditions. Visit www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/entrances.htm

BISON AND EAGLES AND BEARS, OH MY!

How to get the most out of your Yellowstone wildlife-viewing safari

Folks, please step closer to the bear so you don't get hit by a car," the park ranger cheerily called out. "Well, that's a first!" a fellow photographer chuckled as we happily inched toward a grizzly foraging for food, compressing like a crowd squeezing into an elevator. Glancing at his camera-faced audience tucked safely on the shoulder of the road, the young bear unknowingly worked its way into dozens of hearts, sure to be the topic of many travel journals. What is it about seeing animals in the wild that thrills people and draws them to Yellowstone National Park from all over the world?

My husband, Greg, and I fell hopelessly under the spell during our first visit to Yellowstone. It's a strange brew of wonder and adventure, an etching that left us longing to return. Our traveling spirit played tug of war with our heartstrings when we departed. A few months later, destiny showed up with an opportunity to live and work in West Yellowstone, Montana, for 5½ months, right on the park's doorstep. It seemed an ideal way to trade in our tourist goggles for rookie resident specs and experience the park from an insider's perspective.

Scout for eagles along the river near the landmark nest crowning a stick tree between Yellowstone's west entrance and the Madison picnic area.

And that's how we found ourselves shuffling toward a hungry grizzly clawing at the forest's edge that sunny, snow-blanketed day.

Through trial and error and locals' sage advice we gained helpful insights on how to get the most out of our wildlife-viewing safaris. Of course, the park delivers what it chooses on any given day, but there are ways to maximize your opportunities.

Prepare Your Safari Toolkit

Packing a few essentials before heading to Yellowstone's animal

kingdom will greatly enhance your wildlife-viewing experience. Binoculars are a must! Besides observing creatures from afar, they bring you face to face with wildlife nearby. As Greg glued his eyeballs onto his camera viewfinder I found myself gazing into the long-lashed eyes of a pronghorn near the road. Locking eyes for a few moments, I wondered why I never used my binoculars at close distances. Now I do! An optional companion to binoculars is a spotting scope. Its greater magnification





reaches beyond that of binoculars, offering more viewing opportunities and up-close images. Have some fun and rent one for a day. Galleries and camera stores in the gateway cities of West Yellowstone, Montana and Gardiner, Wyoming, offer rentals.

Next, add a camera. From smartphones to professional setups boasting an assortment of lenses, the choice is yours. Keep in mind, park rules require visitors to stay at least 100 yards from bears and wolves and 25 yards from bison, elk and other wildlife, but when animals break the rules and stare through your car window, the flexibility of a zoom lens comes in handy!

Collect a park map at any entrance gate and a Yellowstone Mammal Checklist (animal map) at visitor centers. For a sneak preview, check

out the maps on the park's website. The "animal map" shows sketches of wildlife along main roads where certain species hang out and lists park mammals, their habitats and population. The highest concentration of wildlife can be found in Lamar Valley, Hayden Valley and Mount Washburn, including grizzlies, black bears, bison, elk and wolves.

You may want to consider two other tools: two-way radios (helpful at animal sightings) and bear spray (highly recommended if you plan to hike on Yellowstone's 900-plus-mile trail system).

Add lunch, snacks, water, rain gear, sunscreen, folding chairs and any other items to make your expedition comfortable. We prefer to picnic in Yellowstone's pavilion of meadows and forests in case lunchtime arrives

Bears, ravenous from hibernation, head to lower elevations to feast on plants and animal carcasses served up by winter's harsh weather.

during an animal sighting.

Finally, tuck patience in your pocket. It's the secret ingredient to seeing more wildlife and witnessing dramatic animal behaviors. Like the time we watched a mama black bear munch in a meadow for 90 minutes while her three cubs napped peacefully high in a tree. When she disappeared into the woods, we held our positions expecting to see her babies wake soon. Another hour passed. Suddenly, a boar (male bear) raced out of the forest chased by mama. Within seconds he crossed the meadow and scrambled 35 feet up a tree! Mama stood guard for a few minutes before letting him come down and retreat across the road. "Did you see that?" the crowd gasped. We just witnessed mama bear protecting her cubs and the terrifying reality of how fast bears run (more than 30 MPH, or 44 feet per second)! Finally, the cubs awoke. What a treat it was to see them chase each other around trees, wrestle, tumble and climb.

Left: Bison rule the roads, so plan extra travel time when driving through the park and keep your distance. Despite their slow lumbering, bison can sprint up to 35 MPH or as Yellowstone states: "three times faster than you can run."



Stay Safe ⚠️

Yellowstone is filled with natural wonders that are also potential hazards. According to the NPS, there is an average of one bear attack in Yellowstone each year. Remember to keep a safe distance from bears and do not approach or feed them; feeding bears is against the law. It is also

illegal to remain within 100 yards of bears. If a bear approaches within 100 yards, you are required to move so that you maintain a 100-yard distance. Also, before hiking, park rangers suggest that visitors check with the nearest backcountry office or visitor center for recent bear activity.





From above: Take a safari with fellow fans on a guided tour and be camera-ready. Visitors stay safely on the shoulder of the road while watching a hungry grizzly foraging for food in the park.

Choose Your Season

When is the best time to see Yellowstone's wildlife? The answer lies in the heart of the traveler. We favor late spring and fall, but don't cross any months off your list just yet. Each season delivers unique wildlife, camping and outdoor activity experiences. Keep in mind, Mother Nature is not bound by a calendar and often embellishes seasons on a whim.

Spring is like opening a children's pop-up book full of colorfully illustrated animals. It's a time of awakening and activity. Photographers show up in May and June with monster cameras and lenses. Bears, ravenous from hibernation, head to lower elevations to feast on plants and animal carcasses served up by winter's harsh weather. Bison rule the roads migrating from snowy meadows to freshly plowed pavement. Babies abound. It's the time to see the season's signature orange-furred bison calves. Born in late April and May, these newborns wobble to their feet and keep up with the herd within hours of birth. Their coats fade to brown in just a few months.

Summer arrives in a flurry of visitor activity and a game of wildlife hide-and-seek. Animals retreat to higher elevations and

cool forests. Bison roam far into grassy meadows, napping lethargically in the afternoon heat. Quite the relaxed life, until one mid-August day we noticed something amiss. Thunderous rumblings rolled across the pasture, bison bulls pawed the ground, locked horns, charged and grunted threateningly at each other. The bison rut (mating season), one of summer's highlights, was in full swing! Beginning in late July through August, bulls battle each other for females creating high-tension drama.

Autumn feels like a rewind to spring, but with a palette of rich crimson and burnt-orange colors. Animals emerge, weather cools and photographers with monster cameras return to the park. A haunting sound fills the air. Guttural notes rise to a shrill whistle. Bull elk are bugling, voicing the elk rut. This ritual typically peaks in September. Bulls gather as many females as they can into harems while fending off rival bulls. The most popular viewing area is Mammoth Hot Springs, but be cautious, even while driving. Bull elk are known to damage vehicles they perceive as threats.

Safari On

With your toolkit and maps in hand, it's time to scout for animals. We prefer

The park is relatively quiet in spring, before the summer crowds arrive.



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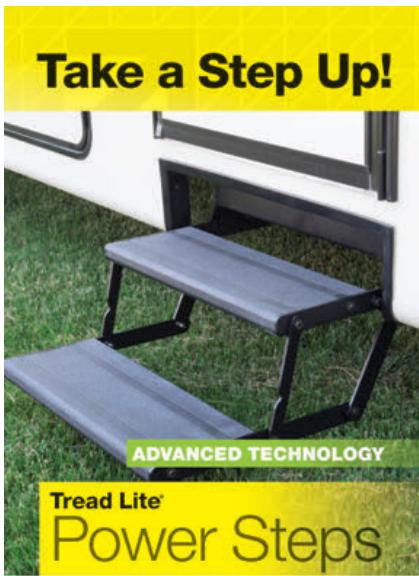
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Clockwise from above: A spotting scope is a handy tool for sighting wolves that tend to hunt in distant meadows. A coyote searches for food in Gibbon Meadows on a cool fall morning. A bull elk sporting velvet antlers relaxes in the shade on a warm summer day.



to safari in our own vehicle, but several companies offer guided tours. Yellowstone Vacations, based in West Yellowstone, offers standard and customized tours plus a specialty "step-on guide" to drive your vehicle or one of its rental cars. For a fresh perspective, we toured the park in our motorhome one day. Main roads, many turnouts and parking lots at popular sites are manageable by big rigs. Full-size tour buses use them all the time, but certain routes can prove challenging, as can the tourist traffic. Our recommendation: Park the motorhome and drive the dinghy.

Be on the lookout. Crowds in party-like moods, rangers and orange traffic cones are sure signs wildlife is nearby. "What are we looking at?" we asked when we happened upon a crowdfest. "Grizzlies on a carcass across the river!" an excited group answered. We hiked through the forest, sinking knee-deep in snow, excited to see our first wild bear. A relaxed camaraderie, almost a bond of sorts, develops with fellow fans at shared sightings. A welcoming bunch, they happily share tips on finding wildlife. That's how we learned another grizzly was heading to the carcass. A spotter down the river shared the news with his buddy via two-way radio and he kept us updated. We waited until the second grizzly arrived, making it a two-bear day! Talk to the park rangers.

Their insight into animal behaviors can sharpen your scouting skills.

Wildlife tends to be more visible in early morning and evening while the animals forage for food. Knowing your favorite animal's nosh makes their locations more predictable. Our heartthrob, the majestic bald eagle, dines on fish, rodents, small mammals and waterfowl near rivers and lakes. The 14-mile stretch from the west entrance along the mighty Madison River is a favored eagle haunt often overlooked by visitors hurrying into or out of the park. Look for the landmark eagles' nest crowning a stick tree on the south side of the road a few miles west of the Madison picnic grounds and scan the surrounding river area. We often found these regal raptors perched on telephone pole-like trees or logs on the riverbank.

Expect the unexpected. Chance animal encounters are one of the greatest joys of wildlife viewing. Such as the solo black bear that crossed a few feet in front of our dinghy, bringing

us to a complete stop while he plodded across the road. Apparently, he was in a hurry to snack in a wildflower-carpeted meadow.

Visit the Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center (GWDC) in West Yellowstone, Montana. Now you may ask, "Why would anyone pay to visit a wildlife habitat right outside Yellowstone National Park?" We wondered the same thing each time we bypassed it on our way to the park. Finally, after several no-show safaris we donned our "when-all-else-fails" hats and went. To our surprise, the center turned out to be a valuable find and we highly recommend it. Grizzlies, wolves and birds of prey call it home. Resident grizzlies, born in the wild, were rescued as "nuisance" bears, having learned to obtain food from people. Wolves came to the center as pups from other facilities. GWDC nurtures the animals' natural wild behaviors in outdoor habitats and its exhibits, movies and educational programs are informative, entertaining and well-done. It is definitely worth the nominal general admittance fee of \$11.50 for two consecutive days.

Planning Your Visit

Yellowstone's website is an excellent tool to use in planning your trip. The park opens for motorized vehicles in mid-April but most services, including visitor centers and campgrounds, unfold in May. Scheduled opening dates are posted on the website. Until then, just one road from the north entrance to the northeast gate remains open and one campground, Mammoth Hot Springs, is open for dry camping. Fishing Bridge RV Park is the sole full-hookup campground. Big rigs are welcome but sites seemed a bit tight for slideouts. Xanterra Parks and Resorts runs five reservation campgrounds and the National Park Service handles seven on a first-come, first-served basis. Grizzly RV Park in the city of West Yellowstone is big-rig friendly and a visitor favorite.

In addition to wildlife viewing, the park offers a smorgasbord of activities including bicycling, day-hiking, back-

packing, swimming, fishing, horseback riding, boating, guided tours, special events and ranger-led talks and walks. Some activities require permits and fees so check the website prior to your trip. Sometime between late March and early April, depending on road conditions, the park may open for spring bicycling and other non-motorized activities such as hiking, jogging and in-line skating before public vehicles are permitted. Information and road maps can be found on the park's website. If you visit in spring, bundle up as it often feels like winter. Starting in September, visitor centers, campgrounds, educational centers, restaurants and roads wind down to the park's closing on the first weekend in November. From mid-December through mid-March, the park transforms into a glorious winter wonderland. Skiers, snow coaches, and snowmobiles head to the park — something we have yet to experience.

Despite living on the park's doorstep for 5½ months we never tired of our explorations, always anticipating some new discovery or experience. And the park delivered without fail, not always what we wanted but oftentimes much more than we expected! From April's snow to September's radiance, it seems like we saw it all, but we know better. So we plan to return to Yellowstone again, because we can't seem to untangle those heartstrings. **M**

For More Information

Buffalo Crossing RV Park
406-646-4300
www.buffalocrossingrvpark.com

Grizzly & Wolf Discovery Center
800-257-2570
www.grizzlydiscoveryctr.com

Grizzly RV Park
406-646-4466, www.grizzlyrv.com

Yellowstone Holiday RV Campground
877-646-4242
www.yellowstoneholiday.com

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The Phantom is Real

It's easy — and fun — to add personal touches when buying a new Nexus Super C factory-direct By Bob Livingston

Buying a new motorhome is a very personal experience. Most people in the market shop diligently, looking for models, floorplans and options that fit their lifestyle. Often, compromises are made because a particular model does not meet all the criteria. Manufacturers gather customer feedback and study market trends when designing motorhomes, but it's virtually impossible to meet everyone's needs with any one particular plan. Those with quirky requirements are even harder to please, but most people are resigned to the fact that there is rarely utopia when choosing a new motorhome.

If you've got big bucks, you can turn to the Newells and Foretravels of the

world and pretty much have a custom coach built. For the rest of us, there's Nexus — a relatively young company that specializes in semicustom Class C motorhomes that are sold factory-direct. The brainchild of industry veterans Claude Donati and Dave Middleton, Nexus encourages potential customers to work with factory representatives during the ordering process to ensure the final product meets or exceeds expectations. While customers can't quite start with a blank sheet of paper, the factory will make design changes where possible, although the lineup of off-the-shelf models will likely appeal to the majority of potential buyers.

Class C's built on the Ford cutaway chassis are the bread-and-

butter motorhomes for Nexus, and the company recently introduced a Class A, but its Super C, built on a diesel commercial chassis, is very intriguing to those who want to step up to a diesel but are not ready to go to a big Class A — or shell out the big bucks. We tested the 2016 Phantom 33SC which, by comparison, has a base price that's lower than most Class C's built on a Sprinter chassis — and offers a whole lot more room inside.

The floorplan and profile of the 33SC is one that is well-established in the Class C community, but the use of the International TerraStar platform puts a completely different spin on this motorhome. This chassis is a purebred commercial rail that melds nicely with the lines of the Phantom body, toning down most of the hardcore appearance of a work truck. Most guys will appreciate the macho look, but the women we surveyed (who tend to focus on the interior design and

ABOVE: The International TerraStar chassis and commercial cab styling give the 2016 Nexus Phantom Super C a macho look.

BELOW: The galley is small, but surprisingly, there's plenty of room for foodstuffs and cookware. The Phantom has a classic cabover sleeping arrangement, which is big enough for one adult. It really comes in handy to stash items when not in use as a bed.



amenities) were unimpressed by the tough profile — but seemed willing to acquiesce to their male partner's fantasy of driving a real truck.

Starting the 300-horsepower MaxxForce 7 turbodiesel will bring smiles to those who relish the sound of a true corn binder. By the same token, the uninitiated might find the sound disconcerting, especially those people who make the comparison to a diesel pusher or one of the newer diesel-powered pickups on the market. Get ready for some engine rattling and exhaust roar. It's obviously an acquired taste, but after a few minutes on the road, the driver and passenger are conditioned to the sound, which is not loud enough to drown out conversations or the stereo.

Climbing aboard this big beast of a cab seems more ominous than it really is. Strategically placed steps facilitate entry and egress, but it takes a few tries to add a little grace to the maneuvers. Having the cab doors will quickly become a can't-live-without feature. Once plunked down on the soft and comfortable seat, the driver will be treated to a commanding view of the road, something expected of a cab that's targeted at commercial drivers. Instrumentation and controls are ergonomically placed, but there's nothing cute about the arrangement, which has an industrial aura. We especially liked the view provided by the Western-style sideview mirrors, something that's given way to more stylish counterparts in most motorhomes. The mirror surface is huge, which makes changing lanes and backing pretty simple, but it does block

visibility a bit when turning into congested areas. Thankfully, it's not an insurmountable acclimation process.

The driving experience is fun and certainly not boring, even after racking up a lot of miles on the road. Handling characteristics are predictable and confidence-building, but the ride is on the bumpy side compared to a typical diesel pusher. It's nothing that can't be tolerated for those who like the macho image, giving way to the inherent long-term benefits of a commercial-grade chassis, but you should probably expect a few rattles and creaking inside on the more bumpy roads.

International's MaxxForce 7 engine is built for the long haul. The company claims that 500,000 miles on the odometer without a teardown is an easy target, which is considerably more distance than the average Nexus owner will travel in the life of the motorhome. It's not a rocket ship, although the 300 ponies and 660 LB-FT of torque do a credible job of propelling the weight of the motorhome.

There's nothing dramatically different about the living arrangement in the 33SC, but the elements are long proven to be a staple in the industry. If sleeping capacity is important, then this motorhome fills the bill nicely, even though it works equally as well for a couple. Interestingly, there are only three windows inside the motorhome, excluding the windows in the cab and entry door. Normally, that would flag our minds to think darkness will prevail, but that wasn't the case. When the cab is open to the interior, the windshield and door windows



From far left: Generous closet and drawer space at the foot of the bed will handle lots of clothing and larger items. An optional TV can be mounted to the flip-up door in the center of the structure, revealing a hidden storage area.

pull in a lot of additional ambient light. And the three shallow slides (two opposing in the living room and one in the bedroom) really open up the interior space. Unfortunately, you're not going to like the curtain that's currently used to block off the cab when privacy is required. The lightweight material is not very easy to position, nor is it pretty. As part of the company's policy on making modifications, potential owners could



Large booth dinette can easily seat four people during mealtime. It converts into a bed for two kids or one adult.

likely have some input here.

Up front, the jackknife sofa on the driver's side faces the large dinette on the opposite side. The sofa is soft and comfortable, but on the short side for those who like to sprawl out for an afternoon nap. Two can sit upright easily and since the TV, mounted on the passenger side wall in the cabover, is bolted to a fully adjustable rack, it can be viewed from the sofa without too much neck craning. Add a couple of ottomans, and the comfort factor rises considerably.

Those who prefer a booth-style dinette will love the one in this motorhome. The cushions are big, as is the table; four people can eat here without crowding or plate clanking. In the sleeping, two kids or one adult can be accommodated. Although the cabover is a great place to stash

stuff used on a daily basis, it can handle another sleeper by folding over a section of the mattress, when access to the cab is not needed.

In this plan, emphasis is given to the living area up front and the rear bedroom. Between the two are the kitchen and bath area. Those who like to prepare elaborate meals will find the galley space confined, but workable with some creativity and neatness. The range/oven share part of the slideout with the sofa and the folding top adds workspace. Adjacent to the stove are the sink, counter and cabinets, which are offset. The cook will be more successful preparing meals if the overhead cabinets and pantry next to the opposing refrigerator are used to stash items during the process. If the kitchen is not your favorite place, then you'll appreciate the additional square footage allocated to the living room.

Occupants who subscribe to the theory that bathrooms are utilitarian only will enjoy using the shower stall and tolerate the cubbyhole dedicated to the toilet and sink. The curved shower, which is part of a split-bath arrangement, has plenty of room and is augmented by the large skylight. When the toilet room door is opened, the area becomes a large, private, uninterrupted bathroom, which worked nicely for towel drying and dressing.

Using the toilet, on the other hand, was pretty comical. The problem lies in the raised platform used to mount the toilet, exacerbated by the general lack of elbowroom. Too much floor space

WHAT'S HOT

Tilt-up front end for easy engine access, spacious living room, comfortable bedroom with plenty of storage, gravity water fill, customer input during factory-direct sale

WHAT'S NOT

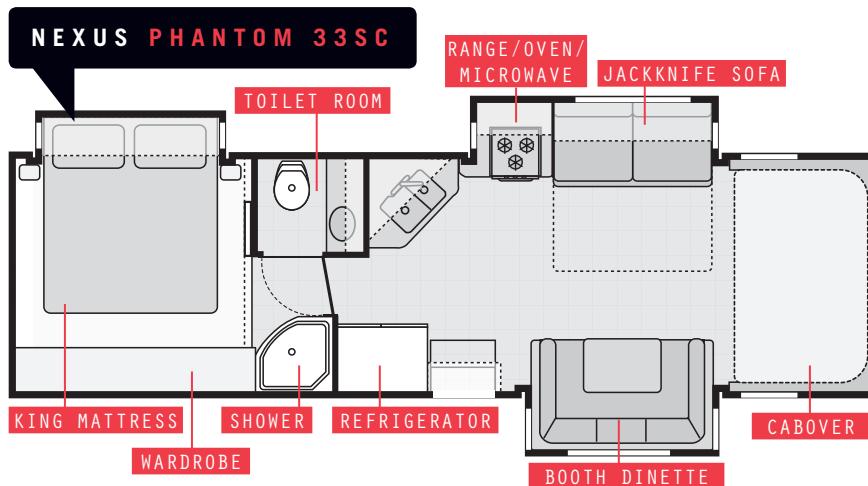
Cramped toilet room, small galley counter, basic privacy curtain, king-size mattress occupies too much space in the bedroom



was devoted to the toilet platform, making it very hard to find a place to put our feet. Getting re-potty-trained at our age was not in the cards but we all had to learn new techniques. We also struggled with the sink because it was placed in such a manner that even brushing teeth was difficult.

We had a conversation about the toilet room with a factory representative and he agreed that improvements could be made. He also made it very clear that the factory can easily respond to modifications requested by potential buyers — part of the custom-build model of being a factory-direct manufacturer. In that case, those who like the overall plan, but feel they need more room in the kitchen and bathroom, can look at possible modifications.

Out back, the bedroom was fitted





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Specifications

Chassis

Model	International TerraStar
Engine	MaxxForce 7
SAE Hp	300 hp @ 2,600 rpm
Torque	660 lb-ft @ 1,600 rpm
Transmission	Allison 6 speed
Axle Ratio	4.30:1
Front Tires	225/70R19.5 LR F
Rear Tires	225/70R19.5 LR F
Wheelbase	246"
Brakes	Hydraulic disc
Suspension	Front leaf, rear air
Fuel Capacity	65 gal
Fuel Economy	10.2 mpg
Warranty	3 years/50,000 miles

Coach

Exterior Length	33' 7"
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height	11' 5" with A/C
Interior Width	8' 2"
Interior Height	7' 0"
Construction	Alloy steel cage, composite side walls, laminated steel-framed floor, seamless fiberglass side walls and roof, fiberglass front cap
Freshwater Capacity	75 gal
Black-water Capacity	43 gal
Gray-water Capacity	43 gal
Water-heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-gas Capacity	20.3 gal
Air Conditioner (2)	13,500 Btu
Furnace	40,000 Btu
Refrigerator	7.5 cubic-foot
Converter/charger	55 amps
Batteries (2)	12-volt chassis, (2) 12-volt coach
AC generator	6 kW
Base price	\$117,999
Factory direct price, as tested	\$130,952
Warranty	1 year bumper-to-bumper, unlimited miles

Wet Weight

(Water and Heater, Fuel, LP-gas Tanks Full; No Supplies or Passengers)

Front Axle	6,420 lbs
Rear Axle	12,320 lbs
Total	18,740 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	7,000/13,500 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	19,500/26,000 lbs
ROCCC	760 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)



Optional full-body paint and LED lighting give the Phantom Super C an appealing profile.

with a king bed that had an innerspring mattress. Although the slide opens up the room some, the bed occupies the majority of the space. There's really not enough floor space to get dressed between the end of the bed and the wall of cabinets, but there was still enough walkaround space to make the bed, and sleeping in that room was heavenly. Visually, the bedroom would work better with the standard queen mattress, but bed size is a personal choice. An LED TV can be ordered for the bedroom. It would be mounted in the center of the cabinet structure on a lift-up door that leads to a concealed storage area. The company did a good job hiding the intent of the door; we actually missed the fact that it opens until about three days into the trip.

Décor-wise, the upgraded flooring, raised-panel hardwood cabinetry, window treatments and pleated day-night shades work well with the nickel cabinet handles and fixtures. LED lighting is used throughout.

The décor of the motorhome is an area where potential buyers will be able to choose the look. The website allows buyers to change the décor using an interactive program and interior images of the various floorplans. The company encourages buyers to spend time perusing the website and brochure when planning the build of their motorhome. There's an extensive list of options that the company feels are good embellishments to the already well-equipped standard package — and all prices are clearly stated.

Outside, the array of exterior storage compartments is arranged in a practical

manner, taking advantage of every open space. Pack rats will need to control their belongings — and for the most part there's plenty of physical space for essentials and recreational items — but the limited weight carrying capacity of this motorhome will seriously restrict the number of items that can be stored (see specifications). Pass-through compartments are not super tall, but can accommodate a variety of longer, flat items. The utility compartment is wide open and the valves and black-tank clean-out port are easy to locate and use. A separate door on the side wall leads to the city and gravity water fills, which is not a very common practice these days. We're big fans of a gravity fill, which seems to simplify the tank-filling process, especially in primitive camping locations.

Full-body paint is a nearly \$7,000 option, but it really upgrades the appearance of the Class C profile. LED lighting, including the taillights, and the rest of the outdoor accouterments are mated stylishly to the International cap, which is representative of today's more modern-looking commercial trucks.

Those looking to be part of the planning and manufacturing process will enjoy working with Nexus when it comes to personalizing a new motorhome. There are some inherent benefits of a Class C motorhome, including sleeping capacity and maneuverability. Add in a commercial chassis with a rugged turbodiesel engine, and the possibilities are extensive. **M**

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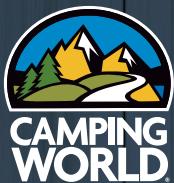
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Time to Re-Tire?

There's a lot to know about keeping the rubber on the road

Tires are a vital asset to any motorhome. Considering the high cost of replacement, the more you know about care and maintenance of tires, the better the chances are you'll realize maximum service life and safe travels.

A flat tire or a sudden blowout can lead to collateral damage that's expensive and inconvenient to repair (not to mention dangerous). Fortunately, many tire problems are avoidable, with a little preparation and care by you.

Design

Truck tires can be less expensive than equivalent motorhome tires, and it is acceptable to use truck tires on a coach, as long as they are the correct size, type, load rating, etc. However, motorhome-specific tires are engineered to deliver a smoother, quieter ride than regular truck tires and they're also made to handle the specific needs of RVers, such as extended storage periods. Many motorhome tires also incorporate extra antioxi-



tion additives in their compounds to minimize dry rot and weather cracking. Tires deteriorate faster when exposed to intense sunlight and ozone, which are found in greater concentrations in polluted city air and near large electric motors, welders, etc.

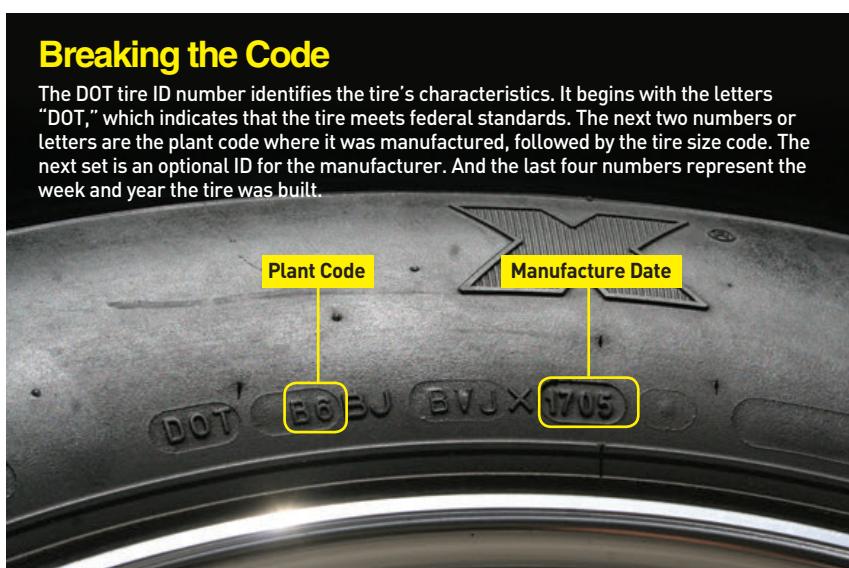
Depending on the type of roads on which you drive and the prevailing weather, you may need tires that have different tread designs on the front and rear. In many cases, a straight-rib highway tire works best on the front, as this type of tread offers the lowest rolling resistance and best wear characteristics. If you only plan to drive in mild weather and on good roads, straight-rib highway tires at the rear will also yield the best mileage and fuel economy. If you intend to drive in muddy conditions and/or winter with some snow, tires with lug or traction patterns should be used on the rear.

Construction

In any given size, the higher the load range, the more weight the tire can carry. How much weight depends on the size and construction of the tire, and also on the inflation pressure. In general, the cumulative maximum load capacity of the tires on your coach should meet or exceed the maximum load rating of your RV (total weight of the RV, plus fuel, cargo, passengers, etc.). Wheels must also meet or exceed this rating.

Motorhomes are notorious for having uneven weight distribution due to slideout rooms, tank locations, loading, etc. That's why it's best to obtain individual wheel weights on the coach so you can keep the weight as balanced as possible. This will ensure that each tire carries a proportionate (or as close as possible) load and can be inflated accordingly.

Older tire designs used diagonal or bias-ply construction, whereas most modern tires use radial con-



struction. Radial inner belts cross the tire tread perpendicularly, and the shoulders tend to have a rounder shape than bias-type tires. Radials also tend to have lower rolling resistance and last longer than bias-ply designs. Belts may be made of synthetic cords such as polyester, or metal. For motorhome use, look for all-steel construction, which is more durable and resistant to impacts and road hazards.

Radials and bias-ply tires have different handling characteristics and should not be mixed. Goodyear, for example, recommends using the same size and type of tire on the same axle — i.e., all radial-ply or all bias-ply, and all should be the same size, tread pattern and tread depth. If you decide to change to radials, do all positions at once. Always choose tires that have the same (or higher) weight rating than the tires you are replacing.

Manufacturers also vary rubber compounds by mixing various components such as silica, carbon black and other chemicals. This allows tires to be designed for different types of vehicles, driving styles and weather, while maintaining a good balance between wear and

traction. Harder compounds wear longer but have less grip, and vice versa.

Sizing

Motorhome tires come in a variety of sizes to fit the various wheel diameters and widths used by manufacturers over the years.

The metric standard of motorhome tire sizing uses three numbers followed by a slash, then two more numbers, then an "R," then three more numbers. Using 295/80R22.5 for an example, this tire would be 295 millimeters wide, with an aspect ratio of 80 (80 percent as tall as it is wide) and the 22.5 is the rim diameter in inches.

The numeric (inch) method is typically listed as two numbers, then a letter and three numbers; for example 11R22.5. This tire is 11 inches wide and has a rim diameter of 22.5 inches, and the "R" indicates the tire is a radial construction. Although not written on the tire, the profile, or aspect ratio in this type is 88. In other words, the sidewall of the tire is 88 percent as tall as the tire is wide.

Sidewall Codes

There are a number of codes

From far left: The Goodyear Unisteel G670RV, which is designed to improve ride and fuel economy and resist sun and ozone, has a four-year warranty. Michelin's XZE all-position tires feature an extra-wide and deep tread for good wet traction and extra-long wear.



stamped on sidewalls. The ones that are of most interest to motorhome owners are date of manufacture and country of manufacture. The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) tire identification number is a combination of up to 12 numbers and letters. The first two are the plant code where the tire was manufactured. (Plant codes are listed online at this website: www.tiresafetygroup.com/tire-dot-plant-codes-sorted-plant-code.) The last four numbers (1999 and earlier codes used three numbers, but these tires should be well out of circulation by now) represent the week and year the tire was built. For example, a tire with a DOT code ending in 2609 was manufactured the 26th week of 2009.

Weight, Loading and Inflation

Tires are designed to carry a certain amount of weight according to inflation pressure, and in the case of tires designed for either dual- or single-mounting configurations, they have different ratings for each type of service. The weight ratings for single and dual applications are printed on the sidewalls.

Inflation pressures printed on tire sidewalls are not maximum pressures; rather, they are the pressures necessary at maximum-rated loads. Never reduce tire pressure just to get a softer ride, as this may lead to catastrophic tire failure. Always carry a quality tire gauge, and if you have dual rear wheels, make sure the gauge has an

From far left: Braided stainless-steel hoses are a popular way to access inner dual-tire valves. Most motorhomes have placards that provide tire load and inflation information. Old, cracked, dried-out tires like this are dangerous and should not be used.

offset double head that can reach both outer and inner dual tire valves.

As a tire's temperature increases, so does the pressure in the tire. Typically, for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit increase, the tire's internal pressure will increase by 0.7 PSI.

Changes in altitude also affect pressure readings. Starting at sea level, pressures subsequently measured at 5,000 feet would indicate about 2-3 PSI higher. Conversely, descending from 5,000 feet to sea level would result in an apparent loss of pressure of about 2-3 PSI. However, the differences above assume tire pressures are measured at the same ambient temperatures. Since tire pressures change about 1 PSI for every 10 degrees Fahrenheit change in ambient temperature, the tire pressure measured at sea level will likely change when exposed to the cooler temperatures associated with higher elevations. This means that in many cases, differences in ambient temperature may come close to offsetting the differences due to the change in altitude. Drivers may want to simply set their cold tire pressures

the morning after arriving at their destination, as well as reset them the morning after they return home.

The proper way to determine how much pressure to run in each tire should be determined by weighing the fully loaded coach (with fuel, water, cargo and passengers) on a truck scale. Each manufacturer provides load-inflation tables specific to its products to help you determine the correct tire inflation pressure for your coach's loading. These may be obtained online at the manufacturer's websites, and at tire dealers for the brand. Tire inflation placards on the coach, if equipped, only reflect typical recommended pressures and



Michelin's XZA2 Energy tire is designed to be fuel-efficient and features an intermediate rib tread that helps provide exceptional handling and combat irregular wear.

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Carrying a 12-volt DC compressor capable of handling the required tire pressure makes it easier to inflate cold tires to proper levels.

tires are mounted, after a flat repair and any time a tire is dismounted and remounted.

Dual Spacing

When tires are loaded and go over bumps and uneven surfaces, they bulge considerably at the sidewalls. To prevent damaging contact and friction, dual wheels must have a certain amount of space between them; this is called dual spacing. When vehicles leave the factory with original-equipment tires fitted, the dual spacing is sufficient. It only becomes a concern when wheels or tires are changed from the original configuration, such as when oversize tires or custom wheels are fitted. Tire manufacturers publish recommended dual-spacing specifications. Check with a reputable tire dealer before changing types or sizes of wheels or tires.

Wheels

Wheel manufacturers stamp the rims with the maximum inflation pressure and maximum rated weight they are designed to carry. Always use wheels with ratings at least as high as original equipment when replacing them.

Some older motorhomes had 16.5-inch diameter wheels, which have become obsolete. Many owners have switched to newer-style 16-inch wheels. This of course requires a change of tires, so it's best done when new tires are needed anyway. Always use wheels and tires that have ratings equal or higher than the originals, and make sure they are compatible with the vehicle as far as offset, width and mounting to the hubs.

Nitrogen Inflation

There has been a lot of talk about

From far left: A special tire gauge is required to reach the inner rear dual tires. Maximum rated load is lower for tires used in dual application than when they are mounted in single applications.

don't take into account individual loading conditions.

Tire Wear

Most states have laws regarding minimum allowable tread depth, and those laws should always be followed. While the law may only require the front tires to be replaced at a tread depth of 4/32 inch (on large vehicles such as motorhomes) and the rears at 2/32 inch, wet-weather braking distances and handling are significantly diminished with tires having less than 4/32 inch of remaining tread. Tires should also be replaced if they show any signs of bubbles, separation, significant weathering or other types of damage.

Rotation

Tire rotation on motorhomes can be expensive, and there is some difference of opinion on when and if it should be done. If the rear tires have

special deep-traction lugs and the fronts have a smoother highway tread, rotation is not recommended. If all of the tires are the same type, it can be done. However, steering tires by law must have more tread depth than rear tires. Front tires should also match each other. Rear dual tires should have similar amounts of wear. The rotation patterns also vary between models and manufacturers. Check the owner's manual for a diagram. If there is a spare tire and it is in good condition and compatible, it should also be rotated.

Balancing

To optimize tire performance, tire and wheels should be balanced. Out-of-balance wheels put excessive force on suspension and steering components, and tend to cup and wear excessively at the heavy spot. You should have wheel balancing performed when new



nitrogen inflation for tires recently. Green tire valve caps denote the use of nitrogen. Nitrogen has some limited advantages over air, although no manufacturer requires its use. Atmospheric air contains about 79 percent nitrogen, and it's impractical to inflate tires with 100 percent pure nitrogen (because the tire contains some air even when deflated). The bottom line is, if your tires have nitrogen in them, leave it in. However, you can use air to maintain pressure if needed; never run low pressure due to unavailability of nitrogen.

Tire-Pressure-Monitoring Systems (TPMS)

Many blowouts occur because of a slow leak that allows tire pressure to drop while the vehicle is in motion, heating the tire to the point of failure. In some cases, drivers are unaware of tire failures on dinghy vehicles and continue to drive, causing the tire

pressure. However, these hoses and fittings are subject to leaks, and if a dual loses pressure while driving it may overheat and fail catastrophically. One solution is to use both the hoses for convenience and a TPMS for safety.

Retreads

Laws prohibit the use of recapped tires on the steering axle. Many commercial trucking fleets prefer recaps for other axles because of their cost savings. However, trucks are typically used daily and rack up many miles in a short time. Motorhomes tend to sit idle for extended periods of time and recaps may already have older sidewalls, so aging is a concern, as is tread peeling. Therefore, retreads are not recommended for motorhomes.

Storage

Except for some full-timers who are on the road almost all the time, many motorhomes sit idle for the majority

Tire rotation on motorhomes can be expensive, and there is some difference of opinion on when and if it should be done.

to catch fire and in extreme cases, result in loss of vehicle control or even igniting wildfires along the road.

Aftermarket TPMS units are available to monitor both the motorhome and trailer or dinghy vehicle tire pressures. These provide peace of mind and greatly reduce the chance that low tire pressure will result in a blowout. (See our TPMS roundup, "Air Apparent," beginning on page 52.)

Tire Valves

Tires that run high pressures require special tire valves, and valves used with dual tires must be accessible for filling and checking pressure. Special hoses are available to extend the reach of the inner dual tire valves and make it easier to check and adjust

of the year. If possible, keep your motorhome in a cool, dry storage area out of direct sunlight and the sun's UV rays.

Most modern motorhome tires are comprised of natural and synthetic rubber, and cords made of steel and fabrics such as polyester. These products tend to oxidize over time with exposure to sunlight, rain and other elements. This causes weathering, or dry rot — typically between the tread elements, or on the sidewall of the tire. Dry rot that extends to the cord, fabric or steel of the tire is a severe safety hazard, and the tires must immediately be removed from service.

According to Goodyear, during storage, owners should inflate tires to normal recommended pressure plus 25 percent (to allow for leakage

Tire Life

Motorhome tires, including spares, should be inspected regularly by a qualified tire specialist to assess the tire's suitability for continued service. Tires eventually deteriorate to the point they are unsafe, and the older a tire, the greater the chance that it will need to be replaced due to deterioration. Michelin recommends tires in use for five years or more should continue to be inspected by a specialist at least annually. Consumers are strongly encouraged to be aware not only of their tires' visual condition and inflation pressure, but also of any change in dynamic performance such as increased air loss, noise or vibration, which could be an indication that the tires need to be removed from service. While most tires will need replacement before they achieve 10 years, if the motorhome is not stored in a covered location, it is recommended that any tires in service seven years or more from date of manufacture, including spares, be replaced with new tires as a precaution, even if such tires appear serviceable and even if they have not reached the legal wear limit.



loss), but should not exceed the rim's inflation capacity. Thoroughly clean tires with soap and water before storage, and move the motorhome at least every three months to help prevent cracking and flat-spotting (but avoid moving it during extremely cold weather). Ensure the storage surface is firm, clean, well-drained and reasonably level. Reset pressures before taking the motorhome out of storage.

Tire Protection

Tire covers can keep the sun off tires and reduce UV damage. They can be obtained from RV dealers and Camping World stores or online. Use them if you must store the coach outdoors. Most tire manufacturers do not recommend the use of tire dressings because some contain chemicals (petroleum distillates) that may contribute to tire deterioration. However, some products such as 303 Protectant have been

noted to provide good protection to tires from sunlight and UV rays.

Dual Matching

Mismatching dual tires can result in rapid, uneven tread wear and overheating and failure. According to Goodyear, duals should be within the following tolerances for tire circumference (measured around the tire at the tread surface): 8.25R20 and smaller — within 0 to 3/4-inch tolerance; 9.00R20 and larger — within 0 to 1 1/2 inches of tolerance.

Before making a final decision to convert to a larger size, contact your local RV tire retailer to verify that the following considerations have been met:

- 1) Check with the vehicle manufacturer to ensure approval of the tire/wheel clearance and fitment.
- 2) Verify that the current rim width is compatible to the new tire size.
- 3) A minimum dual spacing is required and should be confirmed or met.

Due to a tire diameter and static loaded radius, there may be a change in the number of revolutions per mile, which means that the vehicle speedometer and odometer will change. Generally, if the difference in RPM is less than 3 percent, no changes to gearing are required.

Final Thoughts

Every motorhome owner should carry a portable 12-volt DC air compressor or use the onboard air system (diesel pushers with air brakes/suspensions), which can produce enough pressure to top off tires when needed. It always seems like you can never find a fuel station with a compressor when you need one. Having your own is especially handy, since tires should be inflated when cold, before driving.

For best tire life, check inflation frequently, consider getting a TPMS, be careful to avoid hitting potholes, curbs and other hazards, watch for uneven or unusual tire wear, and store your coach properly, taking the time to protect tires. **M**

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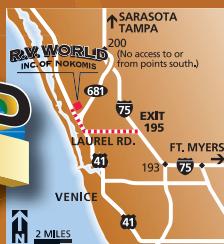
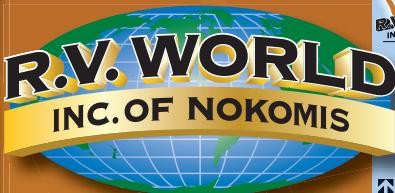
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AIR APPARENT

Monitor your tire pressures and tire temperatures on the road

Most of us do not need to be convinced of the important role tires play on our motorhomes.

They hold up a large vehicle and provide that very important contact patch that is literally where the rubber meets the road. Tires supply the friction we need to get going, and the grip needed to stop. They are an important component of the suspension system, providing a cushion between the harsh realities of uneven road surfaces and the precious cargo riding inside our home away from home.

Tires must meet specific specifications in size, shape, rubber compounds, sidewall structure and nonrubber components to provide grip, strength and durability. All of these tire construction characteristics are designed and built around one all-important specification that gives the tire sufficient load carrying capacity: proper tire inflation.

So much depends on the motorhome and dinghy vehicle tires having the right pressure, but safety tops the list. When tire pressure is out of spec, vehicles do not start, stop, steer or corner properly. An underinflated tire can soon get hot and fail, even come off of the wheel, causing loss of control and possibly a crash.



Fuel economy is another motivation to maintain proper inflation. Under-inflated tires present more resistance to the road surface, which will cost you at the pump. Additionally, out-of-spec inflation pressures (too high or too low) can greatly decrease the life of a tire. It's likely you can think of better ways to spend your hard-earned money than replacing motorhome tires before their time.

Change is the One Constant

There is no such thing as set-it-and-forget-it when maintaining tire inflation. Tire pressure is guaranteed to get out of spec, sometimes suddenly but most certainly over a period of time. There is, of course, the infamous blowout, which is rare if the tires are properly inflated. Then there are the road hazards, stray fasteners, broken glass and vicious potholes that can cause tire damage with a slower leak. Finally, whether you realize it or not, your tires are constantly losing pressure, not because they are poorly



Tire-pressure-monitoring systems typically use sensors that screw on to the Schrader valve in the wheel. Standard-style sensors (top pair) will have to be removed before checking pressure and inflating the tires. Optional flow-through sensors (bottom pair) make this process easier, because they do not have to be removed before using a tire gauge or air chuck. To achieve this convenience, a Schrader valve is built into the housing. While flow-through sensors can be used on most motorhomes, the added length of these devices may not be suitable for dinghy vehicle wheels.

constructed but because of the nature of rubber, which is porous enough to allow a couple of PSI loss each month.

For all of these reasons, it is imperative that owners and operators of motorhomes remain vigilant to make sure that the tires on the RV and dinghy vehicle are at proper inflation pressure. It's usually not possible to identify an underinflated tire until it is dangerously low (particularly the inside duals on a motorhome), so checking tire pressure with a good tire gauge should be part of every pre-trip routine. But what about changes to tire pressure that occur while driving long hours? If periodic visual inspections are not reliable,

do you really need to stop and check pressures? How often? What about the old trucker trick of thumping the tires to check for underinflation?

Not to worry because now we have the option of adding a tire-pressure-monitoring system (TPMS) to our rigs. At a glance we can check tire pressures right along with the gauges monitoring other vehicle systems.

Newer cars and some motorhomes have these systems built in, but for those without, aftermarket upgrades are getting better all the time. A quick read of our TPMS roundup will give you a good idea of the features you can look for in a TPMS.



Doran's 360RV Tire-Pressure-Monitoring System

features valve-stem-mounted tire pressure sensors that consistently transmit tire pressure and temperature data wirelessly to a monitor display mounted in the motorhome. A unique, three-piece seal maximizes valve core depression and minimizes leaks. Programming is simple for up to 36 wheel positions. The 12-volt DC monitor has multiple mounting options, and multiple visual/audible alarms alert for low pressure, high pressure, rapid drop in pressure and high temperature. Monitoring of a dinghy vehicle or trailer is a standard feature. MSRP ranges from \$299 for a four-wheel TPMS to \$899 for a 16-wheel TPMS.

Doran Manufacturing, 866-816-7233, www.doranmfg.com

The EEZ TIRE TPMS 515 system comes with a monitor that can handle up to 22 tires and up to 189 PSI. Sensor batteries are replaceable. The system is very easy to install and users can set their own parameters for monitoring the motorhome or dinghy vehicle. The 3/2-inch monitor operates on a rechargeable lithium ion battery for 60 hours of continuous use, or it can be hardwired. Monitors feature multiple alerts, including an audible alarm, flashing red light and a plain English description of the problem. Theft-proof sensors alert on low pressure, high pressure, rapid air loss (catastrophic failure) and high temperature. An optional transceiver (booster) is available. MSRP ranges from \$279 for a four-wheel set to \$899 for an 18-wheel set.

EEZ RV Products, 510-910-5397, <http://eezrvproduct.com>



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HawksHead's Talon 22 can handle up to 22 wheels with either theft-proof caps or feed-through sensors with replaceable low-cost generic CR1632 button batteries. A drop feature removes the dinghy vehicle from the monitor with the touch of a button to display the motorhome only. The Talon 22 constantly shows pressure and temperature, even when parked, and the monitor has its own rechargeable power pack, which allows it to be removed from the cab and used as a wireless tire pressure gauge when walking around the motorhome. Alarms are visual and audible with parameters that can be customized by the user to display a specific problem, such as low pressure/high pressure and high temperature. MSRP for the Talon 22 is \$339.

HawksHead Systems, 888-321-8767, www.tpms.ca



According to HCI Corp., manufacturer of the **Tire-SafeGuard**, its TPMS has an exceptional sensor signal and monitor reception. External flow-through and cap sensors have user-replaceable batteries and the monitor supports any combination of flow-through and cap sensors. The monitor can be readily reconfigured to support different vehicle applications and supports per-axle pressure-warning-level adjustment. Features also include rapid detection and warnings for low pressure, high pressure, slow leak and high temperature. MSRP varies based on flow-through or cap sensor and number of tires.

HCI Corp., 818-400-9976, <http://tiresafeguard.com>



PressurePro's all-new **PULSE TPMS** features an easy-to-read display, real-time pressure and temperature readings, high- and low-pressure and temperature warnings, fully adjustable reference pressures and alerts, fully configurable vehicle layout, multiple display types (per unit, axle or tire) and data logging with SD card storage. The system can monitor up to 80 tires and up to five stored vehicles. The unit installs in minutes with little to no maintenance. A six-wheel PULSE runs \$705, but call for pricing.

Advantage PressurePro, 800-959-3505, <http://advantagepressurepro.com>



RVibrake makes a TPMS that is integrated in its **RVibrake2** auxiliary braking system for dinghy vehicles. In addition to monitoring tire pressure, the wireless monitor alerts the driver if the dinghy experiences a flat tire, low pressure or high temperature in the tire. Since road feel is not as apparent in a dinghy vehicle, information about the status of the tires is very important. MSRP: \$250 (TPMS upgrade) TPMS/RVi2 combo: \$1,375.

RVi, 800-815-2159, www.rvibrake.com



The **TireMinder TPMS** includes a 3¼-inch screen with portrait layout to mimic the motorhome so you know exactly where an issue is occurring. The system alerts when PSI drops 15 percent below baseline, rises above 20 percent over baseline, loses 3 PSI or more in 2 minutes, loses 6 PSI or more in a 10-minute timespan or if the internal tire temperature reaches 167 degrees Fahrenheit or higher. Features also include Disconnect Mode, Auto-Search Mode, Full Delete, simplified user interface, signal boosters and the ability to add a total of 22 transmitters. The transmitters weigh only 0.5 ounces with the battery installed. Flow-Through Adapters are available. The TireMinder A1A TPMS with four transmitters has an MSRP of \$389; the six-transmitter system runs \$459.

Minder Research, 772-463-6522, <http://minderresearch.com>



Truck System Technologies' variety of sensors are easy to install and very reliable. The easy-to-read monitor has a large display, built-in rechargeable lithium battery and an AC adapter. The system is automatically activated when the vehicle is in motion, and the automatic monitor illumination is adaptable to all conditions. Programmable high- and low-pressure alarms and programmable high-temperature alarm thresholds are coupled with visual warning lights and audible alarms. The system monitors up to 22 tires and can read a dinghy vehicle in tow. Tire pressure and temperature readings are displayed simultaneously. The unit can be configured per axle. The MSRP is \$259 for the 507 Starter System Kit (with four sensors) or the TST 510 System (a base package that can be expanded to monitor 22 tires).

Truck System Technologies, 770-889-9102, <http://tsttruck.com>

The new **TT-500 by TireTraker** features a large, easy-to-read display, continuous pressure and temperature monitoring, automatic updates and the ability to monitor any tire from 0-232 PSI. The TT-500 also features visual and audible alarms for low pressure, high pressure, and high temperature as well as rapid pressure loss. A rechargeable monitor incorporates USB charging. Sensors weigh just 0.5 ounces and have user-replaceable batteries providing lower operating costs. The new system has a lifetime warranty and starts at \$289 for a four-wheel TPMS; additional sensors are \$35 each.



TireTraker, 866-200-9773, www.tiretraker.com

Valor's internally mounted sensor monitors both the tire's temperature and pressure, in real time. The unit displays individual tire and axle position for an easy-to-read interface. Sensors are powered by a long-lasting battery and are installed securely on the wheel rim (tires must be dismantled) where they are safe from damage and theft. Telematics integration options are available. The antenna receives data wirelessly from the sensors. The system can be configured with either a 2-inch-round gauge for an in-dash factory look or with the Valor display that comes with a mounting bracket. MSRP for a motorhome is between \$650 and \$800, depending on the type of display and the number of wheels, but call Valor for exact pricing.

Valor TPMS, 800-568-9188 ext. 106, www.valortpms.com 



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By Bill and Jenn Gehr

REPAIRING DAY-NIGHT SHADES

Adjusting the cord retainers, and even complete restringing, can keep perfectly good fabric in use for a long time

During the last 20 years, day-night shades have become the top choice of window coverings in RVs. The ability to conveniently block unwanted light in the mornings and/or allow in a gentle light throughout the daytime while still blocking some of the heat from harsh sunlight has made day-night shades practical — and they add an element of décor. Unlike the old miniblinds that rattle and shake, day-night shades are lightweight and quiet while driving down the road.

The problem with day-night shades is that at some point they stop working properly, become disoriented and appear unsightly on the windows. The thin cords, which are the heart of the operating system, are usually the first to go. Depending on the brand and how frequently the particular shade is used, you may notice that the cords loosen up and need a bit of TLC to perform optimally. When they break, the shade is rendered useless. Replacing the shades is one option, but it could be difficult finding a close match to the texture and color of the ones used in your motorhome. Repairing the window shade may seem like a daunting task but with a little know-how, day-night shades can easily be brought back to life. The good news is that by simply replacing the strings,

you can keep your existing fabric and save a lot of money when compared to replacing the entire shade.

Maintenance and repairs can be as simple as adjusting the bottom cord retainers or replacing the strings that make it possible to raise and lower the shade. Start by inspecting the shade carefully on the front and back sides. Look for frayed or broken strings and any plastic grommets that may have broken and caused the strings to fray, which will prevent the shade from moving up or down. If the shade simply won't stay put in the up position, a simple adjustment of the cord retainer will likely solve the problem.

To adjust the cord retainers, gently loosen the screw on the right side retainer while holding it firmly to prevent unwinding. Turn the cord

retainer one-half turn and tighten the screw. Repeat on the left side, but for this one you'll have to turn the cord retainer counterclockwise. Repeat the process until the shade stays in the proper position. Use caution to not overtighten the strings, as they will wear much more quickly if under increased tension for long periods of time. If the cord retainer comes loose and the string begins to unwind, simply rewind the string onto the cord retainer until snug, add one-half turn and set the screw. Repeat this process until the shade stays in the proper position and performs as designed.

It is very common for the screw that holds the cord retainer in position to become stripped, thus allowing the string to unwind. An effective way to solve this dilemma is to use a larger screw, but this is not always an option because of the small hole in the center of the cord retainer.

It's also very common for the cord retainers to be installed into a thin piece of wood paneling. A convenient way to fix this problem is to remove the cord retainer and install a self-drilling

➔ TOOLS REQUIRED

Cordless driver, Phillips or square drive bit and extension, wire restring tool, flat screwdriver, rubber bands, scissors, tape measure, shade string and possibly new plastic grommets.

E-Z Ancor drywall anchor into the wall. These drywall anchors are available in many different lengths and may contact the outer wall if you use one that's too long, so be sure to measure the wall depth before installing. Once the drywall anchor is in place it's a simple matter of reinstalling the cord retainer into the anchor that is now flush with the wall. If the wood is solid behind the wall, use a plastic expansion anchor rather than an E-Z Ancor.

If the cords are broken, the repair involves restringing, which is much easier than most people imagine. Once you determine the diameter and the color of the string that needs replacing, log on to www.fixmyblinds.com for materials. This company has everything you need to repair any type of blind or shade, as well as the tools to assist with the string-replacement process. The website provides a wealth of instructional videos and a detailed diagram to assist in the entire restringing process. The end result will look as though you have a new day-night shade.

The process starts by removing the valance above the

window. This step can often be more difficult than restringing the shade itself, because clearance to the brackets can often be restricted. After the valance is removed, the shade is dropped down all the way for full extension. It is important to measure the height as well as the width of the shade to determine the complete length of each string. Only two new strings are needed for most shades; some will need three or four. The string length will be 2.5 times the width plus the height; it's best to add a few extra inches to each string to allow for any errors in calculations — it is easier to cut off excess string than start all over again.

Although this day-night cord replacement may seem complicated at first glance, rest assured that after completing just one new string replacement you will have the skill and the confidence to care for your day-night shades in the future. Figure on about 90 minutes to get the job done the first time, but the time to complete the process will get shorter with subsequent restringing projects. Here's how the cord retainer repairs and restringing are done:

[1] As shown here, one simple broken string on a day-night shade can cause myriad problems when opening and closing the shade. [2] Before loosening the cord retainer, make sure that the blind is secured to prevent it from falling to the bottom and causing minor damage. [3] Adjusting cord retainers can be challenging at best. Make only half-turn adjustments at a time. [4] Be careful when removing the end caps, as they are plastic and easily broken.



[5] When removing the shade fabric from the top rail pay close attention not to snag and tear the material. [6] Use high-quality scissors when cutting the cord from the spring at the top of the shade. [7] Pay close attention to cord routing before cutting the old cord attached to the retainer.

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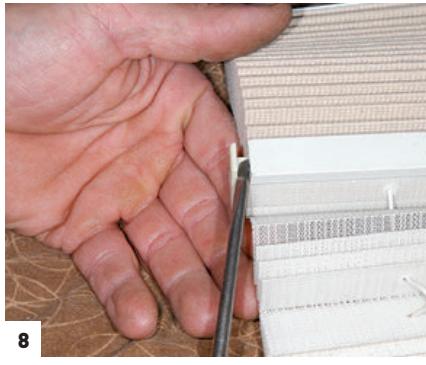
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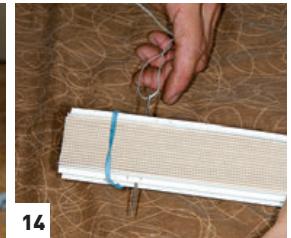
[8] Use a flat-blade screwdriver to remove the remaining end caps. Pry the plastic gently to prevent breakage. [9] Gently pull the string as you slide the two sections of fabric apart. If the string gets bound up, it will be difficult to remove. [10] Note the routing of the strings (for use later) after separating the two sections of fabric. [11] At this point it should be very easy to remove the strings entirely.



12



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16



17

[12] Make sure the shade is gathered tightly and use rubber bands to hold it together. This will eliminate the need for two extra hands during the restringing process. [13] Be sure to use a secure knot when tying the string to the spring in the top section of the shade. This will ensure that the strings will not let go during normal operation. [14] Using a wire restringing tool or a large needle, pull the string with an even pressure through the top and bottom sections of the shade. This will prevent any snagging during the process. [15] It may even be possible to route the new string without using any tools, as shown here. [16] Carefully place the string in the rail section so that it doesn't bind. [17] While sliding the sections of the shade together, check for flaws that may be in the slide rails preventing the completion of the process.

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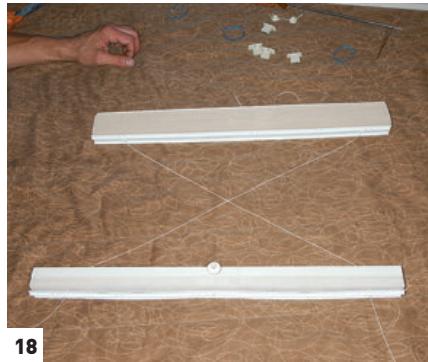
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SHADE REPAIR



18



19



20



21



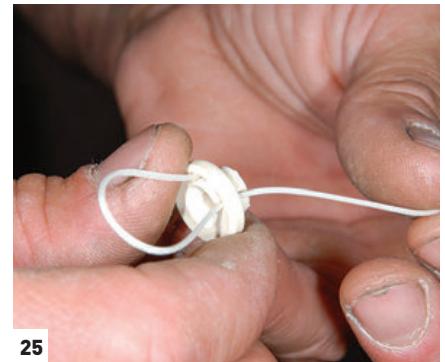
22



23



24



25

[18] Before the two sections are mated together, double-check the string orientation. [19] If the two sections are difficult to slide back together, use controlled doses of silicone spray to smooth out the process. [20 and 21] Gently slide the top into place, making sure that the strings do not get bound up or twisted. [22] Sliding the fabric through the rails may require an extra set of hands to keep the material from binding. [23] Carefully reinstall the end caps before final assembly. These caps can become brittle over time, so use even pressure when seating. [24] Before inserting the end cap in the lower rail, pull the string tight to prevent binding inside the lower channel. [25] Pay close attention to the direction the string is threaded through the cord retainer before reinstalling on the wall. **M**

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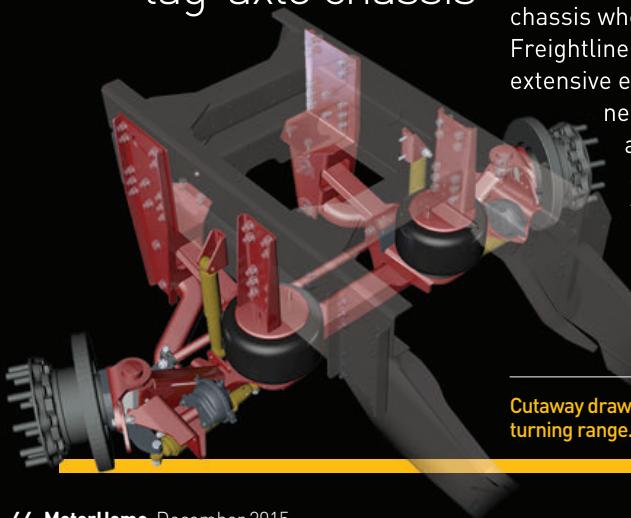
 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER



UltraSteer option on Freightliner diesel pusher improves the maneuverability of coaches with tag-axle chassis

Owning a highline, tandem-axle motor coach in the 40- to 45-foot range has its privileges. Ultraluxury living is a given, and proven suspension designs and high-output diesel engines result in superior road manners. They are truly the kings of the road when it comes to motorhome travel. But there are inherent maneuverability challenges, especially when trying to shoehorn one of these beasts onto narrow roads in an RV park not specifically designed for big coaches. Then, of course, there's always those tenuous moments when the co-pilot or GPS makes a navigational error and sharp turns are necessary to get back in the right direction.

Turning these coaches "on a dime" is rarely possible, even with modern chassis wheel cuts in the 60-degree range that help tighten the turning radius. Freightliner, the leading chassis builder in this segment of the market, has extensive experience in steering geometry design and boasts surprising maneuverability with all of its chassis, including those fitted with tandem axles. To improve on those achievements, the company recently added a new element to chassis design, which reduces the curb-to-curb radius of its tag-axle chassis by 17 percent, for a claimed 140 percent improvement in turning characteristics over the competition — or a 20 percent tighter turning angle. Called the UltraSteer, the tag axle employs fully integrated componentry



Cutaway drawing of B-Series UltraSteer shows forward-mounted tie rod that enables optimum turning range. Outboard-mounted shocks and wide-track suspension arms help to improve handling.

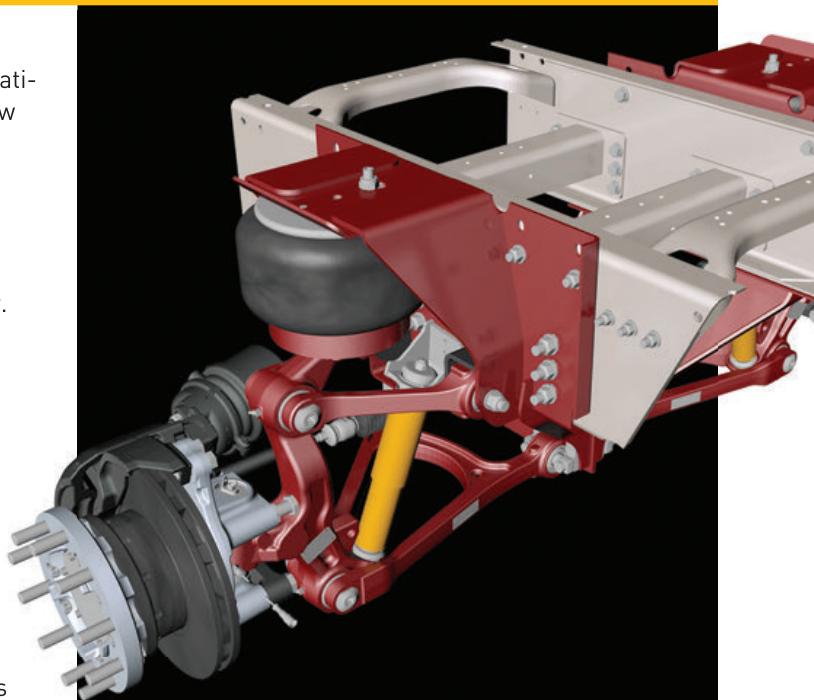
that turns in concert with the steering axle. While dramatically shrinking the turning radius is certainly an eyebrow lifter, another big benefit of such a system allows the tag-axle wheels to follow the ideal turning path of the coach, which significantly reduces tire scrubbing. This is achieved, in part, by using tie rods that are mounted in front of the axle, rather than the rear, resulting in a 12-degree turning axle and improved steering accuracy. Since it's no secret that these tires are expensive, the savings realized by reducing premature tread wear/damage can be substantial.

Helping to improve ride and handling are outboard-mounted shocks that are designed to be more reactive to roll input. This relates to better handling in turns and during quick lane changes in response to traffic conditions.

Make no mistake, these are ultra-heavy-duty components reserved for the coaches in the 44,320- to 51,000-pound gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) range. Freightliner offers two versions of the UltraSteer; one is built around a straight-beam axle and the other features an independent suspension.

The straight-beam-axle model is called the B-Series, and it has a wider application for tandem-axle coaches currently on the market. While the B-Series can be fitted to more coaches in this category, it doesn't give up the ultimate turning specs. It does, though, play second fiddle to the independent suspension version in ride quality and stability. But that's expected of any straight-axle configuration when compared to an independent suspension.

Beyond the use of the aforementioned outboard shocks, the B-Series tag axle has inherent design benefits that bring handling to a higher standard. For one, the suspension arms have a wider track, which provides increased lateral stiffness over similar tag axles that use a narrower track for the suspension arms. Air springs, of course, are integrated into the design, and the utilization of maintenance-free rubber bushings help increase suspension life. There's also a Quick-Align feature that simplifies the wheel-alignment procedure, and the system



Fully Independent ☺

Above: Manufacturers of luxury motorhomes have the option of using independent suspension shown in the cutaway drawing of the I-Series UltraSteer. Independent components offer enhanced ride quality and improved roll and side-to-side stability over the B-Series version. Both tag axles offer maximum GVWR and turning angle. Below: The system was tested on a 45-foot Newmar London Aire.



A



B



C

A) Large steering stabilizer is used on the UltraSteer B-Series tag axle. B) Air-actuated Auto-Lock straightens and locks the tag wheels at speeds greater than 20 MPH and when reverse is selected on the transmission shifter. C) Drive and tag axles are mounted on the Freightliner SL chassis. This particular chassis has a 25,000-pound-rated Meritor drive axle with a Neway ADL suspension (rated at 20,000 pounds) and UltraSteer B-Series tag-axle system. Both axles are equipped with Bendix air disc brakes.

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FREIGHTLINER ULTRASTEER

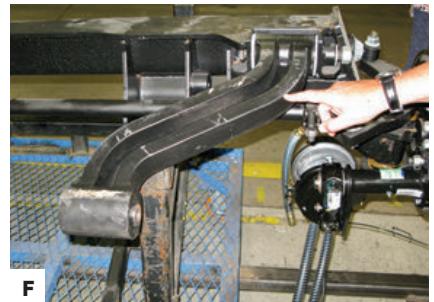
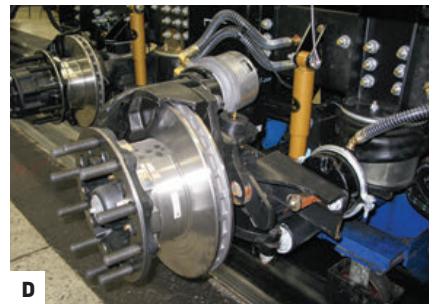
is available with disc or drum brakes.

Those manufacturers looking to optimize ride quality and handling will look to the I-Series model, which uses an independent-suspension configuration without sacrificing weight capacity. The UltraSteer I-Series will likely be reserved for super-high-end coaches. At presstime, Newmar, American Coach, Monaco Coach and Forest River were offering the UltraSteer on certain models.

Both UltraSteer versions have an auto-locking feature that activates when the coach reaches 20 MPH and when in reverse. Chassis with the UltraSteer have also been configured to offer manufacturers packaging flexibility for maximum storage-compartment utilization. In this arena, the B-Series has the edge since the componentry is less complicated.

Although the factory tour reveals impressive manufacturing skills, capitalizing on the expertise and precision expected of a Mercedes-Benz-owned company, the road test was the real eye-opener. We drove a 45-foot Newmar London Aire equipped with the B-Series system to confirm whether the turning tag axle will perform as expected. Steering response and maneuverability were excellent. U-turns in simulated end-of-road situations were easily taken in stride and in many cases we had more steering capability than needed. That was especially true while making turns at intersections and into driveways and parking lots. As a sidebar, the Comfort Steer feature on the Newmar made the steering process effortless and to a point where we were actually more comfortable tightening up the steering wheel response.

Where the UltraSteer really shined was in a parking lot designed for cars. We maneuvered the coach up and down the rows of parked cars, making tight turns into the aisles with no trepidation. Amazingly, the big coach cleared the allocated space turning into the rows designed for parked cars with no maneuverability issues. In other words, jockeying back and



D) UltraSteer tag- and drive-axle suspensions are installed on chassis using Sachs shocks and air bags. Air disc brakes are used on this model. E) Wide-track suspension arms, Sachs shocks and Meritor brake assemblies are integral parts of the UltraSteer B-Series steering tag axle. The outboard-mounted shocks (rather than placed inboard) are more reactive to roll input, which improves handling in turns and during sudden lane changes. F) Wide-track suspension arms used on the B-Series tag axle increase lateral stiffness, which contribute to improved handling.

forth in order to negotiate tight turns was a thing of the past.

At the end of the day, we realized that we would no longer automatically scoff when a 45-footer with a tag axle wanders into an RV park with narrow roads. UltraSteer is definitely a game changer when it comes to big motorhome maneuverability.

Of course, not everyone can step up to a highline coach built on a chassis using UltraSteer. For those looking for a luxury motorhome with a single rear axle, Freightliner offers its V-Ride



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Steering tag axle is designed to reduce curb-to-curb turning radius by 17 percent, improve handling and limit tire scrubbing.

Rear RV Suspension System that has a first-ever rating of 24,000 pounds. The purpose of this componentry is to offer coachbuilders more versatility in interior design as well as the use of premium accessories and appliances, additional storage capacity and to present a more comfortable ride.

To get there, Freightliner uses a V-rod connection that's bolted to the frame rails and terminated at a bracket mounted in the center of the drive axle. According to Freightliner

engineers, this type of connection dissipates the suspension forces and reduces stress, leading to improved durability and chassis longevity.

The system uses a U-shaped assembly that's formed by integrating a transverse beam with a trailing arm. The result is a component configuration designed to enhance stability — think body roll — at all speeds. Body roll can become more prevalent as heavy items are stored in higher cabinets, and from taller body profiles used by many manufacturers to increase interior spaciousness and the capacity of pass-through exterior storage compartments.

The use of frame-mounted air springs and high-quality Sachs shock absorbers smooth out the ride. The Quick-Align feature allows technicians to make wheel-alignment adjustments without the use of shims.

Freightliner's offerings to improve handling, comfort and maneuverability for chassis designed to support diesel pushers gives potential owners additional resources that make the driving experience even better. **M**



Smooth Turning

As long as speeds are slower than 20 MPH and the coach is traveling forward, the steering axle will turn up to 12 degrees. Tires and wheels easily clear the wheel well during turns.

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Sound ad-Vise

When trying to install the cover on my motorhome, I had a hard time passing the straps with the plastic buckles under the coach. My solution to the problem is to attach small locking pliers to the buckle and throw the buckle under the rig. The weight of the pliers makes it easier for the buckle to travel the width of the coach. I then repeat the process for each buckle.

Neil Brown | Anaheim, California



Filling the Gap

We have a large pass-through exterior storage compartment in the rear of our motorhome. It is cumbersome, however, to access the middle of the compartment. We found the most convenient way to utilize this space is with a large plastic storage bin on wheels. We can easily load the bin — then wheel it into the middle of the compartment; almost anything small can be used as wheel chocks to prevent it from moving while the coach is in motion. When we need anything packed into the bin, it's an easy matter to wheel it back out. — **Brenda Guetthoff | Elburn, Illinois**



Take Command

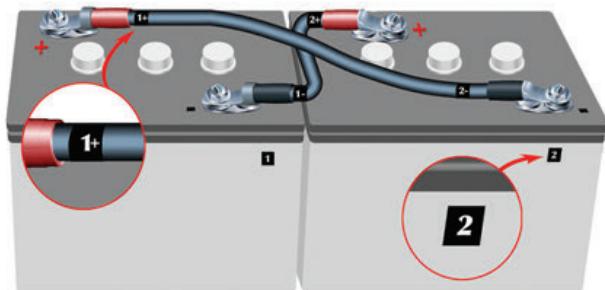
To help quickly find reward cards while traveling, and to reduce clutter, I mounted a business card holder in our motorhome's cockpit on the dash face using 3M Command Strips. Now, when we stop for fuel, the reward cards are easy to locate.

Joe and Darlene Torrez | Santa Maria, California

Label Linking

Replacing the house batteries and/or cables can be a daunting task. To make the job easier, I grabbed my Brother P-Touch label maker and did some labeling. Going from left to right, I affixed a numerical label to the side of each battery. Then I placed a label on each battery cable, near the end of each terminal connection. For instance, a cable marked 1- would mean that end of the cable goes to the negative terminal of battery No. 1, and so on. I leave the labels on all the time. P-Touch labels are very resilient and stand up well to grime as well as periodic cleaning.

Craig Post | Upland, California



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A Straight Path



Safe-T-Plus Steering Control helps drivers keep their cool when experiencing hazardous conditions

By Bob Livingston

SUSPENSION

Cost: \$500

Time: 1 hour

Difficulty: 4/10

When driving a motorhome it's always best to stack the deck in your favor. Balancing the load within weight limits, inflating tires properly, maintaining the brakes, etc., all lead to safer travel. But not all driving hazards can

be predicted. Drops in pavement at the shoulder transition, a front-tire blowout and unexpected rough roads can lead to situations that require optimum driver attention. Adding a Safe-T-Plus Steering Control is the extra insurance drivers can rely upon to calm nerves while behind the wheel.

The Safe-T-Plus is essentially a gigantic shock that stabilizes the tie rod by returning the steering to center with less driver input. Inside the large cylinder are heavy-duty mechanical coils that improve center-point tracking, which is set for the individual chassis. High-quality plating on internal and external components is designed for long-term use, and the company backs its products for the life of the vehicle. The hydraulic shock-absorption component of the Safe-T-Plus is also maintenance-free.

Installation is not complicated, and the steering control is specific to the chassis. We installed a Model 41-230, which is the company's big blue stabilizer, on a 2005 35-foot Winnebago motorhome built on a Workhorse chassis with a 22,500-pound GWR. It really doesn't take a lot of mechanical expertise to install the steering control, but be prepared to break loose tight bolts and muscle a torque wrench to 200 FT-LBS.

The first step is to make sure the front wheels are in a straight-as-possible position. This will simplify the adjustment process later on. It will take a large breaker bar to remove the two nuts on the leaf-spring U-bolt that's on the passenger side and toward the rear of the motorhome. We sprayed the nuts

with WD-40 beforehand to make it easier. The anchor bracket is then put in place and the bolts torqued to 200 FT-LBS.

Once the location of the tie-rod bracket is determined, it's installed using two U-bolts and four nuts. At this point the nuts are tightened so the bracket can still be moved by hand. The ends of the stabilizer are bolted to their respective brackets and the nuts torqued to specifications before asking a helper to turn the steering wheel from full left to full right positions to verify clearances under the motorhome.

The company provides very concise instructions for centering and adjusting the stabilizer, which is done during the first road test. There's even a video on the company's website to help walk users through the process.

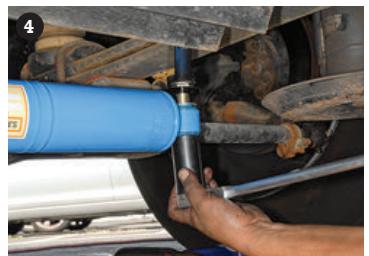
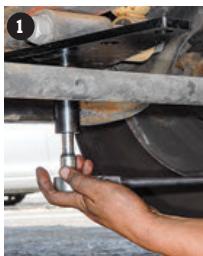
The subject motorhome was then loaded for a trip and driven 200 miles to check out the results of the Safe-T-Plus installation. We immediately noticed the ability of the stabilizer to self-center the steering wheel while changing lanes and turning. Ride quality over the concrete road's expansion joints improved, which was expressed through a more comfortable steering feel.

To test emergency maneuvers, we drove over uneven pavement between the highway and shoulder and found it easier to control the motorhome in all instances. Not only did steering comfort improve, but having the Safe-T-Plus installed made for a more relaxing drive and the confidence to know that in extreme, unexpected conditions control won't be compromised.

The big blue Safe-T-Plus sells for around \$500 at Camping World and other online outlets. Plan on spending about an hour for installation and some road time for the adjustment. **M**

Safe-T-Plus, 800-872-7233, www.safe-t-plus.com

[1] The anchor bracket is installed on the leaf-spring U-bolt on the right side, toward the rear of the motorhome. [2] A bracket is installed on the tie rod, but the U-bolt nuts are not tightened until final positioning has been established. [3, 4] The steering control is bolted into place on its respective brackets before the tie-rod bracket is tightened. Final adjustment will be made on the road.



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BADLAND

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\$299.99 comp at \$752.99

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

PITTSBURGH 9 PIECE FULLY POLISHED COMBINATION WRENCH SETS
SAE

LOT 69043/42304 shown

METRIC
LOT 42305/69044

YOUR CHOICE

\$5.99 comp at \$17.97

24380887

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

RAPID PUMP® 3 TON LOW PROFILE HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

• Weighs 73 lbs.

PITTSBURGH

LOT 61282 shown
68049/62326
62670/61253

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

SAVE \$85

\$84.99 comp at \$169.99

24383484

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WOW SUPER COUPON

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER
drillmaster

LOT 60625 shown
69645/95578

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

SAVE 62%

\$111 ~~\$149.99~~ **\$29.97**

24375375

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

CENTRAL PNEUMATIC 3 GALLON, 100 PSI OILLESS PANCAKE AIR COMPRESSOR

LOT 60637/61615/95275 shown

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

SAVE 55%

\$39.99 comp at \$89

24380516

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

ADJUSTABLE SHADE AUTO-DARKENING WELDING HELMET
ELECTRIC WELDING

LOT 61611
46092 shown

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

SAVE 50%

\$39.99 comp at \$79.99

24416640

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WOW SUPER COUPON

PREDATOR GENERATORS 8750 PEAK/7000 RUNNING WATTS 13 HP (420 CC) GAS GENERATORS
CALIFORNIA ONLY

LOT 68530/69671 shown
LOT 68525/69677

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

SAVE \$459

\$540 ~~\$999.99~~ **\$999**

24433000

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SCISSOR SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating **★★★★★**

MOVER'S DOLLY
HaulMaster

LOT 60497/93888 shown
61899/62399

• 1000 lb. Capacity

\$8.99 comp at \$19.97

24448460

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On Second Thought ...

At odds with their service-contract provider over claims, two readers asked for the assistance of Hot Line. They wrote:



“ In July 2012, we purchased a 2002 Winnebago Brave Class A from US Adventure RV in Davenport, Iowa. The dealer also sold us a 36-month StarRV Motor Home Service Contract (administered by Interstate National Dealer Services) as part of the sale. Two years later, on our way home from a trip, the starter failed at a fuel stop. Good Sam Road Service sent out a mobile mechanic. When I called Interstate for authorization, I found that its office was unstaffed on Sundays. The starter was replaced for \$388.24 at our expense.

After returning home, I called for authorization and was told that I had to write to the claims resolution department for reimbursement, which I did. Several days later, I drove to nearby Lowden State Park to use the pump-out facility and found that the engine again would not start. Good Sam Road Service sent a truck to tow the rig to Harden's Truck Repair in Dixon, Illinois.

Unfortunately, Harden's was backlogged and unable to diagnose our problem until July 25, 2014, a week before our contract expiration. When Gary Harden, owner of the repair facility, called for authorization, he was told to start diagnosis and then call back when the problem was identified. The park/neutral safety switch was eroded from electric burning and the ignition switch had failed from overload and was electrically shorted.

Four days later, Harden called Interstate for repair authorization and was told that the safety switch was disqualified because "rust" was not covered, and the contract does not cover ignition switches because only "manually operated" switches are listed as a group. This left me no choice; I had the repair made at our expense for \$1,521.54.

I called Interstate's contract resolutions department to ask how to contest the denial and was told to write to them for review. I then received claim status memos denying both repairs. The starter was denied because our contract had expired on July 31, and the ignition switch was denied because they are not covered under the terms of the contract.

We are asking Hot Line for help in obtaining reimbursement minus our two \$100 deductibles for the repair claims.

James and Carol Brown | Dixon, Illinois

Hot Line sent the Browns' letter to Interstate National Dealer Services and we received the following response from the company:

After reviewing the Browns' letter and the details of their claims, we have determined that the starter and ignition switch they paid to have replaced are listed components under their coverage. However, the neutral safety switch is not a listed

component and does not fall under the Manually Operated Switches category.

We have sent the Browns a reimbursement, less the two deductibles, in the amount of \$279.80 for the replacement of the starter, and \$286.29 for the ignition switch. These amounts are based on the parts billed and reasonable labor amounts.

David Harding, Claims Specialist
Interstate National Dealer Services
Atlanta, Georgia

Loose Screws

A reader asked Hot Line for help with an aftermarket system installed on his coach and dinghy. He wrote:

“ I have a 2013 Coachmen Prism and I tow a 2005 Honda CR-V. In July 2014, I had a Blue Ox towing package installed. Two months later, I was on a trip to the Pacific Northwest when I found that the motorhome's brake light and turn signal on the passenger side weren't working. I took the coach to Poulsbo RV in Everett, Washington, and they found the problem — it was the blue connecting cable from the coach to the dinghy. Inside the housing, the screws were loose and it wasn't making contact. The shop charged me \$192.89 to fix it. Can Hot Line help me?

John Kowalyk | Chicago, Illinois

Hot Line's letter of inquiry to Blue Ox elicited the following reply:

Thank you for your letter concerning John Kowalyk. I contacted Kowalyk and addressed his concerns. Blue Ox will be reimbursing him for his additional expenses. We appreciate your service to our mutual customers.

Deanna Wendte, Information Specialist,
Customer Relations
Blue Ox Products | Pender, Nebraska

Take Action

Contact Hot Line for Help

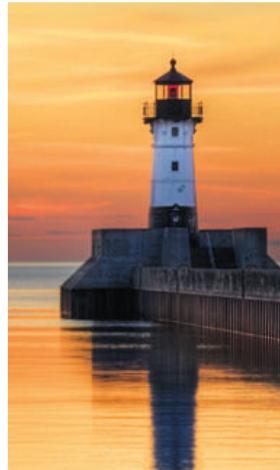
Hot Line assists in mediating conflicts between consumers and RV dealers and manufacturers, accessories suppliers and service providers. After exhausting all other resources, send typed letters to *MotorHome* Hot Line, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 and enclose copies of appropriate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



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By Ken Freund

Electric Shocks

Q We have a 2010 Winnebago View and I occasionally get electrical shocks when I touch metal parts (the door frame, hatch frame, wheel rims, etc.) when the ground is wet. We haven't had any electrical modifications made to the motorhome other than a backup warning beeper installed (but I cannot remember if the situation arose after that installation or if it was present before). Do you have any idea what could cause this, and how I can fix it?

Yvan Jerome | Laval, Quebec, Canada



A A backup beeper runs on only 12-volt DC power and would have nothing to do with electrical shocks. It is likely caused by an incorrect or faulty ground connection in the main 120-volt AC circuit. Have an RV electrician check it out as soon as possible for safety.

Cargo Compartment Condensation

Q I have a 2012 Coachmen Frelander Class C motorhome. The storage compartments have a terrible condensation problem, which makes it impossible to store anything in them. At first, I thought that the water was due to leaking at the compartment doors, so I had them caulked. After that, I pulled out my folding chairs only to find that they were ruined again. After I pulled out the chairs, I saw huge water droplets that were on the upper section (the dining-room table is above this compartment) dripping down the rear wall. I took a picture and sent it to Coachmen in Indiana. They responded back that they had spoken with two owners and another manager and confirmed that it was condensation.

I had inquired if there was anything that I could do to minimize the issue and have not heard back. Any assistance you can provide would be greatly appreciated as the storage units are currently unusable and I have also been unable to remove the horrible odor.
Dot Benak | Tobyhanna, Pennsylvania

A Most people don't have this much trouble with condensation unless they are in the tropics or some extreme climate with wide swings in temperatures and high humidity. Condensation occurs inside a coach due to people's breath, LP-gas cooking (which releases moisture), wet clothes drying and so on. In a storage compartment, there are just inanimate things stored, so why that much condensation occurs is a puzzle.

First you need to verify if it is water leaking in from somewhere, or actually is just condensation. Take a garden hose and direct the stream around the outside of the closed compartment. Then look inside for signs of leakage. Pressurize the motorhome's water system and see if you are getting any dripping from that. You can check for tightness of the seals around the compartment by clamping a dollar bill in the gap as the door is closed. Then try pulling it out. Do this all around. If you don't find any leaks, consider putting one or more ventilation grilles in the compartment to allow for the movement of air. You might consider using a dehumidifier, like Dri-Z-Air, which uses special crystals to capture moisture. The Dri-Z-Air requires no power to operate.

Once the source of the moisture is found and corrected, scrub out the compartment with hot suds and a bit of bleach on a sponge. Be sure to wear rubber gloves and leave the compartment open on a sunny day to fully air it out.

Generator Capacity

Q I just read the "Power Trip 101" article in the September issue. It was very informative, but now I am a little confused. A while back I read an article about generators that said that only units producing 10,000 watts and above will produce 240-volt AC, two-phase power. If a coach requires 50-amp, two-phase power, how does an 8,000-watt single-phase generator provide enough amperage to support the power requirements?

Lorrin Walsh | Bremerton, Washington

A The vast majority of motorhome appliances and other electrical devices are designed to run on 120-volt AC power. Only a very few items such as clothes dryers, which are not found in most coaches, require 240-volt AC. Therefore it simply becomes a question of how many

watts you need at 120 volts AC. With 8,000 watts there's enough power to operate two roof air conditioners plus a number of smaller items. Only heavy power users would be likely to need more power than that, and for them, 10,000-watt gensets are available.

Sprinter Manuals

Q I have a 2015 Winnebago 24-foot ERA built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis with a V-6 3.0-liter diesel engine. I like doing my own oil changes (more frequent than

required) and would like to drain the fuel filter and even change the fuel filter, but I can't locate a how-to video or manual. Can you point me in the right direction? Everything I can locate is for pre-2006 models.

Paul K. Scharf | Via email

A Unfortunately most manuals and CDs and downloads are for the earlier models as you have discovered. There is some information available at www.sprinter-rv.com/resources. Some manuals on CD for older Sprinters are available at <http://>



Dometic PowerChannel

"The PowerChannel eliminates cord clutter that can be unsightly and hazardous: No extension cords are necessary to get light, music and a cool breeze while enjoying outdoor space. RVers can pull up to a campsite, flick a switch to open up the power awning and quickly snap on a fan, Bluetooth speaker or extra light," said Dave Schutz, vice president of Dometic's OEM sales and marketing. "Within minutes of arrival, RVers can be sitting out under their awning, relaxing with friends and family."

The Dometic PowerChannel provides power through the 9100 PowerChannel Awning's roller tube and provides a place to connect and run Dometic's range of new PowerChannel accessories, such as the PowerChannel Bluetooth Speaker, PowerChannel Fan and PowerChannel LED Spotlight. The accessories attach, cord-free, to the awning roller tube. Just insert an accessory's power base into the PowerChannel, then twist and click it to stay in place wherever you want it positioned.

The PowerChannel awning also includes LED lighting that runs the length of the awning, and is independently controlled with an on/off switch. The PowerChannel draws 12 volts of DC power and can run multiple and different types of accessories up to 15 amps.

The Bluetooth speaker is compact yet powerful, and connects to any Bluetooth-enabled device. The fan, which has a safety grille, provides fixed or oscillating operation with an adjustable angle.

PowerChannel technology can be used indoors as well as outdoors. Dometic is also introducing the PowerChannel Rail, an easy-to-install track that delivers the same 12-volt DC power for indoor use. Just snap on a fan, speaker or extra light to cool down, listen to music or read. The rail also serves as a place to store those appliances when not in use. The PowerChannel Rail comes in 2- or 4-foot lengths.

Dometic, www.dometic.com/usa

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AGM Batteries Versus Wet Cells

Q I am thinking of upgrading from a gas motorhome to a diesel and going full time. Are absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries worth the differences in the price in battery life and power?

Mac Vaughn | Houston, Texas

A The reason there are both types is because each has its advantages. If you live in the coach full time, will you spend most nights in RV parks with shorepower, or will you be dry camping a lot? How long do you plan to keep your motorhome before you sell or trade it in? AGM batteries tend to last longer than wet cells, and they

won't corrode battery connections or require the addition of distilled water. However, wet-cell, golf-cart batteries tend to provide the most bang for the buck. If you dry camp regularly, I would recommend that you install solar panels on the roof to charge and condition the batteries.

Diesel Additives

Q In the September issue a reader asked about using propane as a performance enhancer for his diesel-powered coach ("Diesels on Propane"). Propane was in vogue several years ago, but has mostly fallen by the wayside for various reasons. The current top add-on without going the high-performance route is to use water- or water/methanol injection. This is injected into the air intake with one or more nozzles controlled by a digital controller. This serves a dual purpose in that it does provide moderate increases in power and

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torque and in the case of a diesel it also serves to lower exhaust gas temperatures (EGTs). The primary suppliers of the system that I am aware of are Snow Performance and Banks Power; a Google search may turn up others, but these are proven suppliers. Note that this system can be used on either gas- or diesel-powered motorhomes. Expect to pay around \$1,000 for the equipment plus installation if you are not handy around engines and wiring.

Ron Hill | Via email

A Thanks for writing, Ron. I have written about these systems in my Performance Corner column in our sister publication, *Trailer Life*. I like the idea of these systems because they can reduce the thermal stress in the engine while providing measurable, low-emission power increases. I do have some concerns about using a second fuel (LP-gas) and the hazards of mixing fuels and metering them properly and safely.

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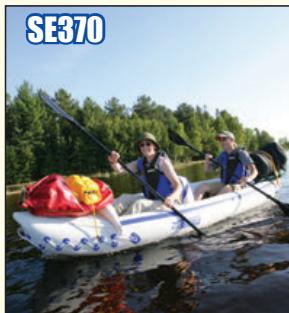
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Air-Horn Tip

We have a fantastic Tiffin Phaeton motorcoach. Recently we incurred an air-horn problem and want to share some information with our fellow magazine readers.

Before you start to replace parts such as a solenoid switch, new horns, etc., check to be sure the diaphragms are clean. Next check out the inside of the horn(s) to see if it is clean. Debris or spider webs can create a blockage causing the horns to sound like a flute.

George Sparks | Lake View, New York

Thanks for the tips, George. It's always best to check for the simple stuff first. I've even seen a dead bird in an air-horn trumpet before!

Fuel-Saving Devices Comment

This is in reply to the "Fuel-saving Devices" letter in the September issue. I've learned the best way to boost fuel mileage is to have the valves adjusted.

This is a tune-up to **(continued on page 81)**

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(continued from page 78)

a diesel engine. The fuel mileage on my 2002 Winnebago Journey DL with a 330-horsepower Caterpillar went up approximately 1 MPG on average. I also had an aftermarket air filter with better airflow installed. I have talked to other owners with Caterpillar or Cummins engines who had the valves adjusted, and they all experienced better fuel mileage and increased overall performance. I had the valve adjustment done at a Caterpillar shop and they also hooked up a mainframe computer and looked at everything and gave me a copy of the readout.

James Gregg | Florence, Oregon

Many people who have only owned cars and motorhomes with gasoline engines tend to overlook valve adjustments when they get a diesel coach because most gas engines have hydraulic lifters, which don't need adjustment. Diesel

readout. I am not complaining! It has a Cummins ISB 340-horsepower turbo-diesel and an Allison 2500MH transmission, and who knows what else.

Randy Harwick | Birmingham, Alabama

I have been unable to find any additional information on the drivetrain of your coach. However, hybrid drives must have some kind of propulsion combination such as an electric motor with storage batteries and a gasoline or diesel engine. Hopefully the cost, weight and size of such systems will come down, enabling them to be more economically feasible for motorhomes.

Slideout Seals

Q What's the best way to clean and lube slideout seals, and what lubricant would you recommend?

Tim Rodkey | Clearfield, Pennsylvania

“AGM batteries tend to last longer than wet cells, and they won't corrode battery connections or require the addition of distilled water. However, wet-cell, golf-cart batteries tend to provide the most bang for the buck.”

engines do indeed respond better and last longer if the valves are properly adjusted. A 1-MPG gain may not seem like much, but it's about a 10 percent improvement for many large diesel coaches. However, if they are already adjusted correctly, you won't see any gains. Careful driving techniques and limiting cruising speeds can produce mileage gains with any coach.

Hybrid Motorhomes Comment

Your September answer to "Hybrid Motorhomes" mentioned Winnebago and another manufacturer as having had concept models with a diesel hybrid system. I have one of the other manufacturer's motorhomes, a Coachmen Pathfinder 405S that I purchased used. No one can tell me what is hybrid, but there is no electric motor, such as Winnebago tried. With just under 14,000 miles, the overall MPG is 11.1 according to the digital

A The type of cleaner needed depends on what type of dirt is getting on the slide seals. If it's just dust, a universal cleaning product would be sufficient, but if it's tree sap, for example, you'll need to get a stronger cleaner to remove the pitch. I'd start with Simple Green or another mild spray-on product. For slideout-seal lubrication, avoid any petroleum-based product. Protect All, Camco, 303 Aerospace and a number of other companies offer slideout care kits and sprays, which are available at Camping World and other sources. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

Email tech@motorhomemagazine.com or write to **MotorHome**, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 (please include your name, city and state). Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

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Dodging the Doldrums

Suffering from the privations of winter? Find the color and warmth you seek at the National Quilt Museum

By Alan Rider

Now begins the season of my motorhoming discontent. Or more to the point, let's just say that I hate winter. I know this time of year makes some folks think fond thoughts of the upcoming holidays but, for me, December's short, gray days and long, cold nights are nothing less than the icy hand that wrings both the color and warmth from the world outside.

The good news is that I've found a place in America's heartland where these two attributes I consider so vital to my overall well-being come together in a dramatic and unexpected form. Located in an unassuming brick building not far from the banks of the mighty Ohio River in Paducah, Kentucky, they call it the National Quilt Museum (270-442-8856, <http://quiltmuseum.org>).

Inside is the very antithesis of winter. In a roundabout way, you might say the entire building is literally all about the battle between the drab and the dazzling.

You see, the walls of this 27,000-square-foot space are covered in quilts the likes of which I can virtually guarantee you've never seen before — a veritable kaleidoscope of bedcovers that surpass the definition of craft to become true works of art.

Which speaks to the real mission of the National Quilt Museum: Since it opened its doors in 1991, it's been presenting and promoting an art form you may have thought died out with your grandmother's generation.

Its three galleries showcase the

most talented fabric artists currently out there who have patiently pieced together masterpieces that can take up to 10 years to create. We're talking comforters far too breathtaking to even consider hiding them away in a dimly lit bedroom.

As for the breadth and depth of the museum's collections, there are more than 500 items with no more than 60 on rotating display at any one time. Add its two flanking galleries dedicated to traveling exhibits and you have as many as 180 explosions of brilliant hues awaiting you inside.

To put the experience of visiting in perspective, I took my son — who was a fidgety 14-year-old at the time — and I was expecting a constant barrage of eye-rolling and complaining. The

morning couldn't have turned out more differently, however.

The moment we stepped inside the main gallery we were both stopped in our tracks by a huge and incredibly detailed tapestry-like storytelling quilt called "The Hobbit," by Sue McCarty. It was more or less the same story as we went around the main room, where we were floored by the brilliant "Birds of a Different Color," by Caryl Bryer Fallert.

Just as with traditional artists, these quilting superstars develop their own styles and techniques that make their work as distinctive as the difference between a Picasso and a Rembrandt. In much the same way as with a painting, you think the beauty is in the big picture until you get close enough to notice the fascinating details, right down to intricacies of the actual stitching.

In the end, we spent half the day in the museum, and likely would have been there longer if it weren't for our hunger pangs. For an adult and a child cursed with attention spans too short to even successfully thread a needle, this, my friends, was saying something.

As impressed as I am with the National Quilt Museum itself, however, my ultimate takeaway from this experience was a good bit broader: That the cure for the winter doldrums is out there, just waiting for us all along The Road Ahead. **M**

“ Inside is the very antithesis of winter ... the entire building is literally all about the battle between the drab and the dazzling. ”

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From right: My son and I were stopped in our tracks by "The Hobbit," by Sue McCarty. Caryl Bryer Fallert's "Birds of a Different Color" demonstrates an entirely different style.



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