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Heading to the Southwest for the winter? RVing options abound near Parker, Arizona, where RV parks line the shores of the Colorado River [see page 28].



You have arrived at your destination! Top Rand McNally and Garmin GPS devices for motorhome owners go head to head in our in-depth electronics showdown. **Pg. 36**

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Onward

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### ON THE COVER

The Forest River Berkshire XL 40D is a luxury diesel pusher that benefits from the company's buying power to keep the price at a reasonable level (see test on page 32). Photo by Shawn Spence.





# MotorHome

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## Which holding tank products do you use? Do you notice a difference in performance between products with formaldehyde and those without?

Those are the questions we asked in the September issue, and here are some of the responses we received.



### Think Blue

We've tried a good half-dozen or so "green" and natural products, but have returned to, and will stay with, our true-blue Thetford Aqua-Kem. Yes, it contains formaldehyde and methanol, but we're not drinking it we're ... well, you know how it's used. Bottom line, it was created by the maker of our toilet and is recommended by them. Aqua-Kem is biodegradable, and we think it works the best.

**Brian Gilbert** | via email

### A Unique Solution

After more than 30 years of RVing, I've tried nearly every holding tank product on the market. Years ago, on a trip through Colorado, a campground owner suggested RV Digest-It from Unique Natural Products. It's super! No odors; it totally liquefies everything, and it's environmentally safe. In the last few years, we've been spending more time stationary, and RV Digest-It still does its job. I wouldn't use anything else.

**Maureen Blum** | via email

### Flush It

I quit using holding tank products about 15 years ago. When I was using them they really didn't suppress the smell that built up over time. At an RV rally in 2003, a vendor was selling and installing tank flushers. I had them installed and now I wouldn't be without them. I have a clear adapter on the discharge connection so I can see when the tanks are running clear water. No chemicals to deal with and no smell.

The one thing we do that some may not like is not using paper in the tank. Paper is too much trouble to flush out. We just line the bathroom wastebasket with a disposable plastic bag.

**Jim Evans** | Magnolia Beach, Texas

### What's the Big Deal?

We don't use holding tank products for the following reasons:

1. It's only a holding tank; we're not storing anything in there for long.
2. Formaldehyde is bad for RV park septic systems, and therefore it's rude to use them — it's just plain bad

economics. The more RV parks that close because they can't afford to keep repairing the septic systems, the fewer places RVers can stay.

3. With the washout attachment, it's pretty easy to keep the black tank clean enough to not stink.

4. Simple septic-safe household cleaning products, such as Dawn dish-washing liquid, can clean the tank and the sensors therein. Even dumping in some ice and going for a drive will clean the black tank.

It's not nearly as big an issue as some folks believe.

**Regan Smith** | via email

### Tank Prescription

I use TankTechs Rx in both black- and gray-water holding tanks and I'm surprised that this product has not been mentioned in previous articles on holding tank chemicals. It is a natural, probiotic tank treatment that, from my experience of using it over the past four or five years, has good odor control and really keeps the tanks clean, i.e., the sensors show empty after draining.

## Featured Letter

### Pet Safety

I've been at this for 14 years and I've said that I could mix water, a pretty color and a pleasant smell, sell it and make lots of money. What goes on in that tank is a mystery to most of us, but I do have an important tip. Look at the bottle and see if there's a number to call in case Fido decides to drink from the stool when you have a bowl cleaner in there or any other product you put in the toilet between trips. Call and find out if it's safe. I had an issue and called poison control, and even though they deal with humans, they were able to help me out.

**Gary Lewis** | Brooklyn, Wisconsin



That was not the case when I used other chemicals in a previous RV. The specs call for a half-ounce of product per tank regardless of tank size; in hot weather I double that dose. It's available on TankTech's website (www.tanktechsrx.com), on Amazon and at some RV dealers. I have not seen it widely advertised, which might explain why it was not mentioned in previous articles. It is pricey — the 33.8-ounce container runs about \$40 on Amazon and on their website, but it does a good job and a little goes a long way.

**John Lutton | Phoenix, Arizona**

**Blue Streak**

Over several years, and a couple motorhomes, we have used the Blue Streak dispenser system. It automatically releases a small amount of product with every flush. It took me less than 10 minutes to install. No worries about how much to add, having too little to do the job, or wasting product by using too much. It has

a pleasant baby powder scent, and seems to work very well for us. It's economical, effective and convenient.

**Rick Boldman | via email**

**Formaldehyde-Free**

I've been RVing for more than 30 years and, in my experience, the formaldehyde products work the best for odor control and breaking down waste. However, several years ago I discovered that many campgrounds that have septic tank systems ask that formaldehyde products not be used, as it kills the useful bacteria in septic systems. Since that time, I've used the non-formaldehyde products, primarily the toss-in packs, from Thetford and Walex, with acceptable performance.

**Rob Graves | Aransas Pass, Texas**

**Class is in Session**

I would suggest, having 120,000-plus miles on my second Class A coach, that dumping your tanks properly is likely more important than the type of

product used in the tank.

In my experience, dumping the tank is primarily dependent on whether you are camping in one spot for an extended period of time or moving regularly on a trip. The second factor, and to some the primary factor, is the quantity needing to be dumped.

If you are camped in one spot, the worst thing you can do is to dump your black tank too quickly or too often. The reason being that the "heavy stuff" will not likely be flushed regardless of the product used.

So, when in camp, check the tank gauge and try to dump when the black tank is at least two-thirds full. And allow the gray-water tank to fill to at least half on the day you want to dump the black tank. Yes, this will require some practice.

At the appropriate time, first dump the black tank, then dump the gray tank. This sequence allows the cleaner water in the gray tank to flush the dumping hose, as well as push the

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heavy matter farther into the drainage system. This helps to make dumping odorless.

The same procedure works for dumping while traveling, but because of the motorhome's movement, building a pile of heavy material in the tank is not as much of an issue.

When we are traveling, where we plan to overnight next becomes a significant factor in dumping the tanks. At 80-plus years of age we still boondock quite often. Having a full freshwater tank and empty holding tanks prior to our planned boondocking becomes most important. If we anticipate being with full hookups for a few days, we decide based on "fullness."

Yes, a long answer to what might have been thought a simple question. But I believe the above to be very important to new RVers.

**Ernie Maier | White Lake, Michigan**

### **Just What the Doctor Ordered**

We tried a variety of cleaners and

none of them really worked; they were kinda like a lemony smell that washed away in an hour. Enter the savior: TankTechs Rx Holding Tank Treatment and Cleaner. It has actual probiotic bacteria that munch away on whatever is left behind in the gray tank. It really works, and it's quite amazing. No more funky smell.

**Tessa Miller | via email**

### **Past Pages**

My first read each issue is "Pages From the Past." I edited *Motorhome Life* in the late 1970s when it was published nine months a year. Art and Denis Rouse, Alice Robison and Bill Estes were industry leaders and valued mentors. Back then, we used rotary phones, carbon paper and four-month lead times (because our printer was in Chicago and overnight shipping hadn't caught on). Magazine production was more labor-intensive in those days, yet very fulfilling. Happy 50th!

**Rand Christensen | Anaheim, California**

### **Fun in the Not-so-hot Sun**

Have you ever given thought to those of us RVers who live in the Sun Belt year-round, but from April to October live in what we refer to as the "Heat Belt," where summer temperatures range from the mid-80s to triple digits? Perhaps you could ask where to find cooler places to spend those months in locations where the high temperatures might be in the mid-70s (and without mosquitoes), and consider the title and contents to be about places where it is "Fun in the sun ... under 90 degrees."

**Bruce McLaren | San Angelo, Texas M**

### **Question of the Month**

**Where do you travel in search of a moderate climate during the hot summer months?**

**Send your comments to:**

*MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com)

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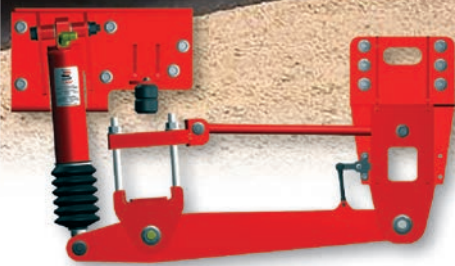
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# ESCAPES

**More Bars**   
The weBoost Connect RV 65 from Wilson Electronics improves cellular coverage while in camp. [pg. 12](#)



12 WHEELS & GEAR | 14 CROSSROADS



## North Carolina Mountain Farm Museum

Preserving the heritage of Appalachian life in Great Smoky Mountains National Park

By A.M. Murphy

**L**ying low in a mist-filled valley, against a backdrop of stately Appalachian mountains, a cabin made of ruddy, hand-hewn chestnut logs stands at the front of a sprawling mountain farm. In the early 1900s the rustic dwelling was the home of John Davis and is today part of the Mountain Farm Museum in the Oconaluftee section of the Great Smoky Mountains.

The open-air campus includes preserved cabins, barns, tools and gardens that collectively represent a typical Appalachian mountain farm around the turn of the 20th century. The site also has a smokehouse, blacksmith shop, livestock barns, an ash hopper and a springhouse,

where water could be collected and products like home-churned butter were kept cool.

The gardens are packed with seasonal vegetables you would find on a farm at the time, including corn, tomatoes and greens. Demonstrations are offered on period-correct methods for harvesting and processing (including the sorghum molasses presentation I watched).

The Mountain Farm Museum, which is adjacent to the Oconaluftee Visitor Center, is located about 10 miles from the Blue Ridge Parkway on U.S. 441 in Cherokee, North Carolina. For more information, call 828-497-1900 or go to [www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/mfm.htm](http://www.nps.gov/grsm/planyourvisit/mfm.htm)

Above: The Davis House was originally completed around 1900 near Deep Creek, North Carolina, and is built using hand-split chestnut logs.



## Fit for a Titan

Thetford has introduced two new useful fittings for its popular Titan Sewer Hose system. The new wye adapter (\$15.99) allows users to empty two waste tanks into a single dump port, while the straight adapter (\$12.99) will lengthen the RV sewer outlet for easier reach. Thetford says the fittings are designed for owners who are constantly faced with a variety of dump-station configurations. The new fittings are translucent, offering users a visual confirmation of the dumping status. Seals are made from EPDM for increased reliability in prolonged hook-up connections. The fittings are compatible with the entire Titan lineup.

**Thetford | 800-543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)**

## Movie Magic

When it comes to movies, the bigger, the better. The new Cinemood Portable Movie Theater takes it to the next level, providing up to a 12-foot display — and audio — in a small package. Cinemood is a rechargeable ultralight standalone projector housed in a 3-inch cube. It comes preloaded with more than 120 hours of content, including Disney ebooks, cartoons, additional readers and educational videos. But it's the Cinemood's ability to stream movies and videos from Netflix, Amazon and YouTube that makes it a must-have for on-the-go cinephiles. Cinemood connects to Wi-Fi and pairs with a smart device, which then acts as the remote control. Once set-up, select a flat surface for image projection, log in to your favorite streaming service, dim the lights and settle in for HD movies on demand. The unit is virtually noiseless, which makes hearing the integrated audio easy, although it is much improved by pairing with a Bluetooth speaker. It also features 16GB of internal memory so you can enjoy personal photos or music, or download a movie and watch offline. MSRP: \$399.

**Cinemood | 800-350-6107, [www.cinemood.com](http://www.cinemood.com)**



## KING Me!

Viewing satellite TV in a remote area is wholly dependent on the antenna. KING introduces two Tailgater antennas that offer 100 percent nationwide coverage for DISH Network subscribers. The new DISH Tailgater and DISH Tailgater Pro have been designed to improve reception in previously poor-signal areas by adding in support for a fourth satellite, which broadens the range of the antennas from coast to coast, according to the company. Like their predecessors, the new Tailgater antennas are portable or can be roof-mounted, are easy to setup, are available in single- or multi-TV configurations and are backed by a two-year warranty on parts. Plus, the Tailgater Pro features a clear cover so users can see where the dish is pointed to help with troubleshooting and to ensure the best signal. The DISH Tailgater (model DT4400) antenna has an MSRP of \$299, while the DISH Tailgater Pro (model DTP4900) has an MSRP of \$379.

**KING | 959-922-6889, [www.kingconnect.com](http://www.kingconnect.com)**

## Gimme a Boost

Wilson Electronics announces the weBoost Connect RV 65, a cellular signal booster designed to provide a solid signal while your motorhome is in camp. The

Connect RV 65 is compatible with all wireless carriers in the U.S. and Canada, providing RVers with strong call quality, fewer dead zones and faster data upload/download speeds, according to the company. The Connect RV 65 utilizes an omnidirectional antenna on a 25-foot telescoping pole mounted to the motorhome's exterior to receive signals from nearby cellular towers. Connect RV 65 comes complete with the amplifier, antenna, telescoping pole and mount assembly, inside panel antenna, low-loss RGB coaxial cables, an adapter and a power supply. MSRP: \$689.99.

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## ESCAPES CROSSROADS

Tucson, Arizona

### Wild and Woolly Museum

The International Wildlife Museum in Tucson, Arizona, has a collection of more than 400 species of mammals, birds and insects from around the world, all revealed in interesting and educational exhibits. The museum is “dedicated to increasing knowledge and appreciation of the diverse wildlife of the world as well as explaining the role of wildlife management in conservation.”

A woolly mammoth and a giant deer, both extinct for thousands of years, are displayed in individual dioramas. Massive teeth on a skull of a killer whale leave no doubt that it could, indeed, devour a shark for dinner. We were fascinated by the butterfly display.

The ornate and colorful plumage on the various birds of paradise from the New Guinea forests nearly caused their extinction. In the late 1800s their feathers adorned hats and clothing, but today the birds enjoy legal protection. **For more information**, call 520-629-0100 or visit [www.thewildlifemuseum.org](http://www.thewildlifemuseum.org) — Mary Zalmanek



Photo: Mary Zalmanek

Hutchinson, Kansas

### Salt of the Earth

Originally known as the Kansas Underground Salt Museum, Strataca offers a unique adventure — a journey 650 feet below the Kansas prairie to explore the eerie and exotic environs of a cavernous salt mine.

The mine, one of 16 salt mines in the U.S., is still in-part active, operated by the Hutchinson Salt Co. to provide more than 500,000 thousand tons of rock-salt annually.

Your visit begins with a brief safety video and, after donning hard hats, up to 30 guests board

a double-decked elevator for a 90-second, 650-foot ride down to the salt deposit. Visitors then board a tram for a 30-minute narrated “Dark Ride” that leads into mined-out areas to view geological formations dating back some 275 million years. A stop near the end of the ride allows the opportunity to view exhibits and to probe a pile of rock salt for a souvenir. A 15-minute train ride aboard the Salt Mine Express through part of the mine that was active during the 1940s-50s is a great way to finish the day.

**For more information**, call 620-662-1425 or visit [www.underkansas.org](http://www.underkansas.org) — Dave G. Houser M



Photo: courtesy Strataca



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# Pages From the Past

Retracing *MotorHome's* December issues over the years

**T**his time of year can really bring out the kid in all of us. And so it was in the December 1973 issue, when "Let's Play Camping" declared: "Time was when little boys played with trucks and cars; little girls played with dolls. Now little boys play with recreational vehicles — and so do little girls!"

The tongue-in-cheek "review" on these toys does tug on the heartstrings of youthful nostalgia, and acts as a reminder that we're never too old to play with toys. It's just that the toys become bigger, more sophisticated and, naturally, more expensive.

A new set of snow skis is always a great discovery underneath the tree. And, you might as well test them out while using your motorhome as a basecamp, as we did in 1983's "Colorado's RV-and-Ski Country," and again in the '84 feature "Skiing the Winter Sun," the latter of which examines a cool baker's dozen ski areas in New Mexico.

Or, perhaps you're on a tight budget, and want to remain closer to home. "Stocking Stuffers Under \$50" in the 1990 issue included dozens of affordable gifts for the traveling gourmet, the shade-tree handyman, the motorhome hobbyist and the RVing outdoorsman.

Spending a few dollars more could get you a laptop, a CB radio, an inflatable dinghy or a portable grill. At least it could in 1995's "Gifts to Go," which covered all the red-and-green bases.

"Key Presents" in 2004 was touted as "A Christmas gift list for RVers with an active lifestyle," and it lived up to

its billing with a wish list including a mountain bike, a jet ski, a snowmobile and a four-wheeler. Outdoor adventure, here we come!

Home theater is always changing, which likely makes many of the components discussed in 2010's "Big Screen Attraction" a bit behind the times. But we bet the A/V receiver, Blu-ray player, speaker systems and 40-inch LCD TV installed on the author's 2008 Tiffin Phaeton continue to steal the show at the RV park.

If you want to go really big, nothing says "Happy Holidays" like a new motorhome. We tested a Forest River Charleston diesel pusher in 2013; check out page 32 in this issue for Forest River's latest pusher, the Berkshire XL 40D.

And this is always a good time to ask Santa for new dinghy equipment. "Towing Safely," in 2017, skipped the naughty and went straight to the nice in terms of new dinghy-braking systems.

We at *MotorHome* wish you the happiest of holidays. We have savored every moment of our yearlong celebration of the magazine's days gone by, and raise our glasses to you, our readers, for a bright future together. **M**







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1. National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, 2015. 2. Daylight only. 3. Optional, not available for all vehicles.  
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Anastasia Island offers picturesque sunset views of the Old City and sailing ships on Matanzas Bay.

## The Other St. Augustine

Anastasia Island awaits with inviting white-sand beaches, vibrant history and eclectic eateries

By Ann Eichenmuller

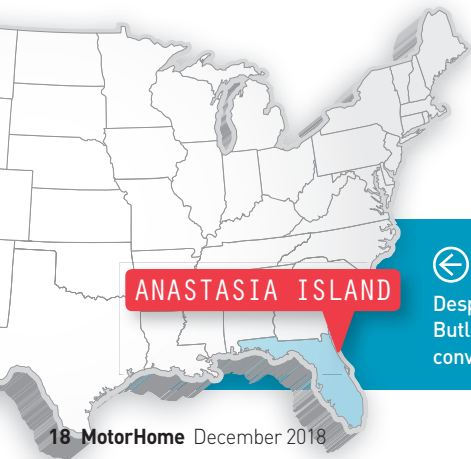
**P**ristine. That's the first word that comes to mind as I stare out across the broad expanse of white sand that stretches north to the horizon. Biking this unspoiled Atlantic shoreline, it's hard to imagine that just to the west lie the bustling streets of historic St. Augustine, Florida. That's the magic of Anastasia Island. Part funky little beach town, part natural wonderland, it's a quietly popular migratory getaway for all types of snowbirds, from plovers and ospreys to RVers like us.

Everyone is familiar with the Bridge of Lions that crosses Matanzas Bay, but only a small percentage of the tourists who flock to

America's oldest city make the trip across to Anastasia Island. A Florida barrier island a little more than 14 miles long with an average width of only 1 mile, Anastasia does not offer the

high-rise beachfront condos or familiar restaurant chains of places like Daytona. But looks can be deceiving. In addition to unparalleled beaches, this island also offers history, entertainment and world-class cuisine in unexpected places.

On our visit we were fortunate to snag one of the 139 campsites in Anastasia State Park's beautiful wooded campground. The maximum RV length at the campground is 40 feet, and all sites offer water and electric hookups. Even if you stay elsewhere (there are several full-service campgrounds on the island), this park is worth a day trip — and not just for its 4 miles of windswept dunes and undeveloped beach. For birders, it's one of the sites on the Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail, boasting a list of more than 200 bird species, including rarities such as the ruff, Franklin's gull and glaucous gull. If you want to watch the wildlife from the water, paddlers can launch from a dedicated area on the sheltered water of Salt Run, a long lagoon that stretches behind the dunes to the St. Augustine Inlet. There



### Getting Around

Despite its small size, Anastasia Island consists of five communities: St. Augustine Beach, Coquina Gables, Butler Beach, Crescent Beach and Anastasia. The communities offer Red Trains and Old Town Trolleys for convenient public transportation and Anastasia State Park has RV parking near the beach for day-use visitors.

Photos: Eric Eichenmuller



Above: The year-round Saturday Farmers Market (left) at the St. Augustine Amphitheatre is only a short walk from scenic beachfront parking at Anastasia State Park (right).

are picnic tables, a covered pavilion, restroom facilities and a boathouse to rent equipment on-site. The area was under renovation when we visited, but access was still available, and I was able to launch my inflatable stand-up paddleboard there. Wear water shoes or check the tides before you go — the Run is shallow and you might find yourself wading through some mud to get out to knee-deep water.

Visitors can also spend an afternoon hiking the self-guided nature trail through the park's maritime hammock, experiencing what early Spanish settlers must have felt when they first landed here. One trail from the campground leads to the remains of a Spanish Coquina quarry, where the sedimentary limestone consisting primarily of coquina (small clam) shells was mined as early as 1565. You can still see where the long blocks were excavated to build the Castillo de San Marcos in St. Augustine, a project started in 1669. Non-campers can access the remains through a shorter trail near the park entrance.

Another bonus of staying in Anastasia State Park is the proximity to the St. Augustine Amphitheatre, within walking distance of the campground. Outdoor concerts are usually scheduled during spring, summer and fall months, but the Amphitheatre hosts a year-round

weekly Farmers Market on Saturdays, where we found everything from goat cheese, organic honey and farm-fresh eggs to local artwork. Entrance to the market is free of charge, and we were able to enjoy live acoustic music while perusing the vendors' tents.

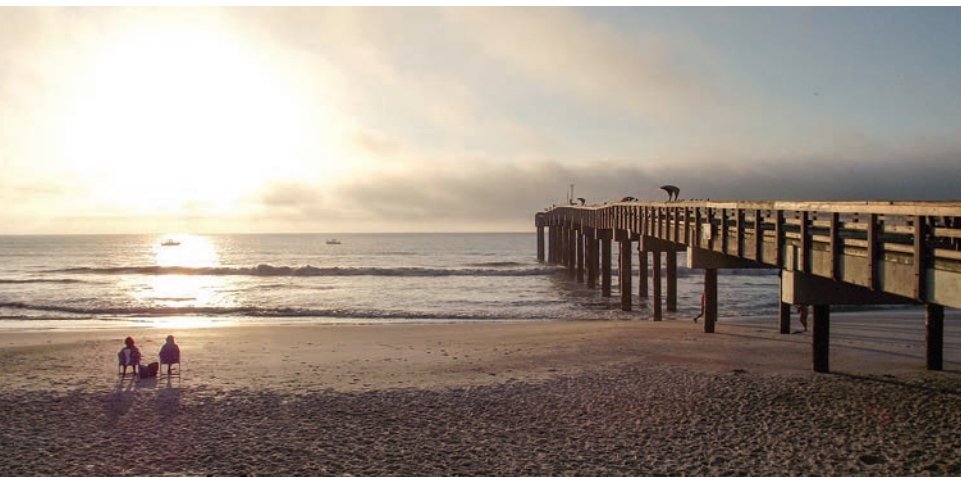
Many of the shops and restaurants of Anastasia Island can be found on Beach Road, just a bike ride down the beach from the state park. Salt Life Food Shack ([www.saltlifefoodshack.com](http://www.saltlifefoodshack.com)), one of only two locations of the restaurant behind the Salt Life brand, provides a true beach experience with second-story deck seating, an outdoor bar and live music. The menu here is an eclectic mix of Caribbean-inspired dishes featuring fresh seafood. Like most of the restaurants on the island, there is no dedicated parking here for oversized vehicles,

but Salt Life will provide transportation to campers in the area. There are several other choices nearby, serving everything from pizza to crab legs, but our personal favorite was Café Eleven ([www.originalcafe11.com](http://www.originalcafe11.com)). A local hangout on 11th Street, the Café serves breakfast, lunch and dinner, and specializes in quesadillas and tacos served with some incredibly delicious fried plantains. For music lovers, Café Eleven also has a large stage and presents live music several nights a week.

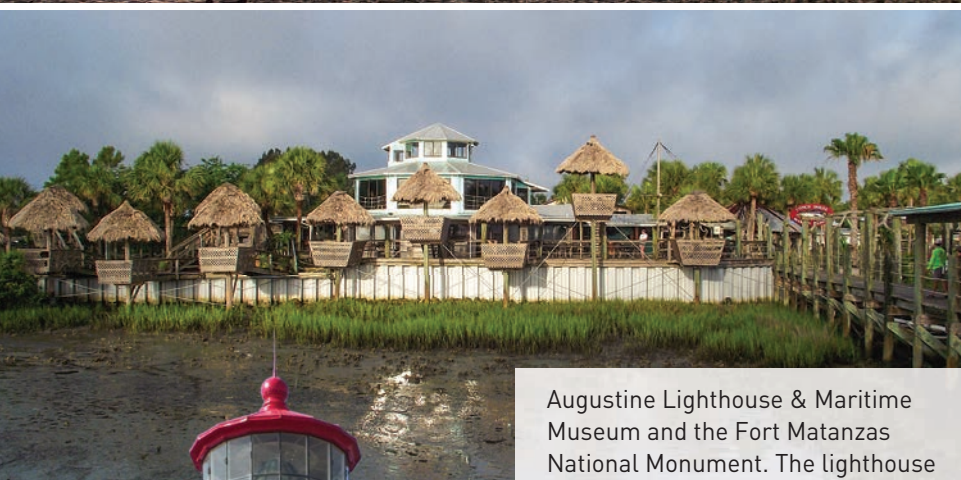
As if beautiful beaches, birding, biking, boating and food weren't enough, we didn't even have to leave Anastasia Island to do some sightseeing. While nearby historic St. Augustine is the most well-known tourist destination, the island offers two notable historic sites, the St.

An osprey winters over on Salt Run, one of Florida's most popular birding sites.





Left: Watch the sun rise over St. Johns County Ocean Pier, followed by an island-inspired lunch and drinks in a private Tiki hut at the famous Conch House Marina Resort (below).



Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum and the Fort Matanzas National Monument. The lighthouse and its accompanying museum were within easy biking distance of the state park. Rising 165 feet above sea level, the lighthouse is St. Augustine's oldest surviving brick structure, and its first order Fresnel lens still serves as a beacon for mariners. Visitors can tour the museum and walk the 219 steps to the top for a breathtaking view. If you feel the need for more recreation, the lighthouse is also adjacent to a public park, which includes tennis courts, a playground, picnic area and a boat ramp.

The only time we even needed to get in a car was for our trip to Fort Matanzas National Monument, a short drive south on Highway A1A. Built by the Spanish in 1742, the fort takes its name from Matanzas Inlet, famous for the executions, or matanzas, of

St. Augustine's working lighthouse stands 165 feet above sea level and also serves as a museum to teach visitors about the island's rich past. Special guided tours are available.

the last of the Fort Caroline colonists there by the Spanish in 1565. While the visitors center is on Anastasia Island, the fort itself is on nearby Rattlesnake Island. Visitors must obtain boarding passes from the visitors center on A1A for a quick ferry ride to the fort. Admission and the ferry ride are free. Unfortunately, we didn't check the website before making the trip. During our visit, the ferry landing and docks were still being repaired from the damage caused by Hurricane Matthew, but repairs have now been completed.

Of course, any visitor will also want to spend a day in old St. Augustine browsing through the shops and museums, and visiting the Castillo de San Marcos National Monument. The city offers a public parking lot for oversized vehicles within a few blocks of the bustling downtown waterfront, but the trolley company will also pick up campers who purchase historic district tour tickets.

With all that Anastasia Island has to offer, it's no wonder that most of our campground neighbors were repeat visitors. One RVing couple from Michigan told us they have made it an integral part of their annual snowbird migration, staying two weeks on their way into Florida and again in March as they head north from the Florida Keys. It wasn't one thing that kept them coming back, they said. It was everything. We had to agree, and we will definitely cross the Bridge of Lions to visit "The Other St. Augustine" again. **M**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Anastasia State Park**  
904-461-2033, [www.floridastateparks.org/anastasia](http://www.floridastateparks.org/anastasia)

**Castillo de San Marcos National Monument**  
904-829-6506, [www.nps.gov/casa](http://www.nps.gov/casa)

**Fort Matanzas National Monument**  
904-471-0116, [www.nps.gov/foma](http://www.nps.gov/foma)

**St. Augustine Lighthouse & Maritime Museum**  
904-829-0745, [www.staugustinelighthouse.com](http://www.staugustinelighthouse.com)

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# 2018 RV OOPS AWARDS

## WHAT'S THE DUMBEST THING YOU'VE DONE WHILE RVING?

Once again, it's that time of the year when we acknowledge that RVers — even smart ones like you and me — do some really dumb things. "I never do anything dumb," or "I do lots of dumb things," are the typical responses I get when I ask the question, "What's the dumbest thing you've done while RVing?" Most often with further probing, the first group of RVers confess, "Well,

there was this one thing ..." and out comes a tale of woe.

Here's the Top 10 of this year's dumb things, rated from "Dumb" to "Dumbest," that RVers have reported to me, some with further probing. As always, dumber mishaps are more traumatic and costly, which is why you definitely don't want to make them yourself. So, read on, learn from the mistakes of others, and save yourself some serious grief and cash!

### DUMB THINGS

**#10 Life is Not a Beach** The Oregon coast has a number of access points for driving onto beautiful, sandy beaches. Harry decided to do just that with his Class B motorhome to check out the possibility of camping for free with a view of the ocean. He drove on the beach for about 10 minutes when he noticed a little cove that might be a good spot to tuck in for the night. As he approached, he decided to stop and check it out. Unfortunately, when he got back in to move farther into the cove, his rear tires dug into the sand. The more the tires spun, the deeper he sank, until he was up to the rear axle. Without a shovel, he used a leveling board to scrape the sand away

in front of the rear tires. No luck ... he was firmly stuck below the high-water line, about two hours away from the ocean filling the inside of his van.

Not having a cellphone, Harry frantically ran to a nearby house to see if he could phone for a tow. The owner had a 4WD SUV and said he would pull him out. That didn't work, so he called a friend who also had a 4WD vehicle. Together, they pulled the van onto hard sand, stopped, and disconnected the towlines. Harry offered to pay, but they said they were just happy to help. After a big "thank you," Harry drove back to the entrance where he came onto the beach and, without stopping, continued onto the blacktop. After driving off to a nearby parking lot (free, but without an ocean view), Harry said, "I will never again look for a campsite on a sandy beach."



It's just as well: while it may be legal to drive and get stuck on an Oregon beach, overnight camping is prohibited, which is a good thing considering that high tides and sneaky waves could put a damper on your RV experience.

# 2018 RV **OOOPS** AWARDS

## #9 **Black-and-blue Toad**

While driving their older motorhome across Canada, Mike and Debbie stopped for fuel and topped up the oil. Four hours later, at a rest stop, Mike did a walk-around. Oops! The back of their coach and their once-blue Jeep dinghy vehicle were blanketed with oil. Opening the engine cover, he noticed that the oil-fill cap was missing. None of the local truck stops and RV dealers he phoned had a proper cap.

Being a handy kind of guy, Mike fashioned a cap by cutting an aluminum can in half and attaching it over the fill hole with a 2-inch gear strap. He then spent hours cleaning off a gallon of oil that had sprayed out of the fill hole. Unfortunately, the next leg of their trip resulted in the same outcome ... another gallon of oil covering their toad and back section of the motorhome. Upon inspection, engine vibrations had worn out the aluminum can, allowing oil to again spray out of the fill hole.

Undeterred, Mike folded a plastic sandwich bag into quarters and attached it with the gear clamp. Even though the bag pulsed with the pressure, it held for the remainder of their six-week trip, when he was able to get a replacement cap. But the saga continued. On their annual trip south, Mike topped up the oil and a few hours later, another shower of oil. This time, Mike found the cap lying on the inside of the engine compartment. "I'm sure I replaced it after adding oil. On a positive note, after three baths in oil, we have a Jeep that will never rust!"

As a preventative measure, Mike drilled a hole in one of the cap handles and attached a plastic zip tie, so the cap would hang near the fill hole as a reminder to replace and tighten it.



**Helpful hint:** Always replace and securely tighten the oil-fill cap after adding oil.

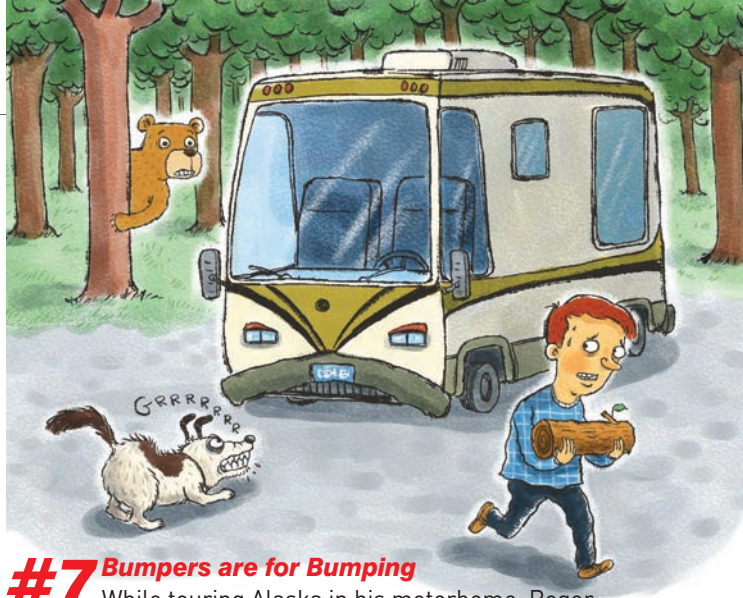
## #8 **Seeing Black Spots**

Fred and Marla bought a 4-year-old motorhome, which came with an outside carbon water filter that attached to the water intake hose. They often boondocked after filling their freshwater tank through the filter. One day, Fred noticed that the water pressure was quite low and thought that maybe it was time to replace the filter. He did so, but even with a new filter, the pressure remained low.

Fred dismantled the water pump and found the filter screen clogged with black carbon. Apparently, the old filter, which had been used well beyond its replacement date, had ruptured internally, allowing carbon to escape into the water. Cleaning it made some difference, but not for long, since bits of carbon in the freshwater tank continued to clog the pump screen. After repeatedly filling and emptying the tank, water pressure was back to normal, even though black spots occasionally showed up in their drinking water for weeks afterward.



**Helpful hint:** To ensure clean drinking water, follow the manufacturer's suggestions for replacing water filters, at least annually, if you use the motorhome regularly.

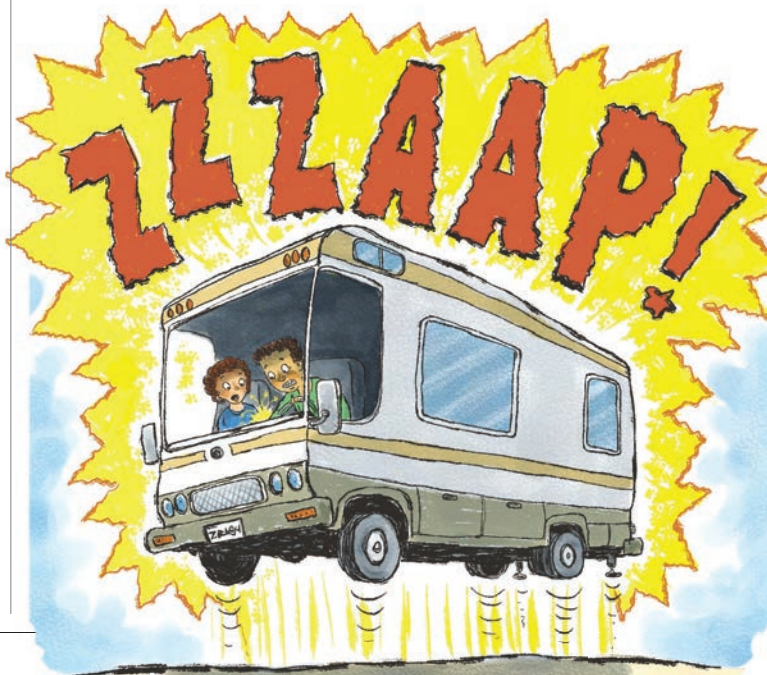


## #7 **Bumpers are for Bumping**

While touring Alaska in his motorhome, Roger missed a turnoff and continued on until he found a small gravel parking lot. It looked big enough to turn around, so he made a tight U-turn in the lot and powered up a steep incline to get back on the highway. Unfortunately, because of the small lot, he was angled slightly off to one side of the exit. Crunch! The bottom right corner of his bumper caught the gravel and broke a weld, causing the bumper to hang low on that side. Had he been able to approach the exit straight on, the bumper would have cleared the gravel. Roger said he continued on his journey for a few more weeks with the front end "looking like it was permanently scowling!"

## #6 **Mr. Sparky**

Dick had stored his motorhome over the winter with the leveling jacks in the "down" position. Come spring, he and his wife were all packed and ready to hit the road for a weekend of camping. When it became time to raise the jacks, he pushed the "retract" button but nothing happened. After pushing the button about a dozen times, Dick decided to increase the fuse amperage from 15 to 30 amps. "Maybe

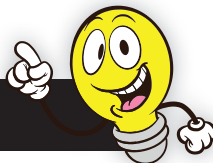




a heavier fuse would make a better connection.” This time when he pressed the button, he saw sparks and heard a loud Zzapp! The circuit board had multiple burned components but the jacks were still down.

Instead of camping, Dick used the weekend to track down a new circuit board and talk to an RV mechanic about his jack problem. The mechanic diagnosed it as most likely “faulty solenoids.” Sure enough, replacing the jack solenoids and the new circuit board (with a 15-amp fuse) resulted in the jacks retracting.

**Helpful hint:** Always use the proper size fuse in appliances; oversized fuses can potentially result in blown circuit boards and electrical fires.



## DUMBER THINGS

### #5 Curbs, Posts and Martinis

After purchasing some groceries and gin for his favorite drink, David was maneuvering his motorhome through the parking lot and cut a corner with a raised concrete curb. His right rear wheels went over the curb and into a recession, followed by a crunch! The rear stabilizer jack, just behind the wheels, had gotten caught on the outside of the curb and was bent backward at a severe angle.

The story gets better ... or worse, depending on your perspective. After disengaging the jack from the curb, David proceeded to a campground where I was camped in an adjacent site. While backing into his site, he hit a 12-inch-diameter wooden post, used to protect the electrical box. While showing me a broken sidelight, scraped paint and a crack in the fiberglass, his wife insisted, “I hollered for him to stop but he didn’t hear me.” David took me aside and quietly remarked, “I swear she never said a word, but two screw-ups in one day definitely justify two martinis, don’t you think?”

**Helpful hints:** Use extra caution when driving through parking lots, as they are typically designed for automobiles rather than large RVs. And use a walkie-talkie system (with the volume turned up!) when backing up.

### #4 Just Don’t Back Up

Doug had just packed up his motorhome to leave the campground.

After pulling out of his site, he moved over to the side of the road to hook up his dinghy vehicle. After doing so, he realized that he didn’t have enough room to make the sharp turn in front of him, so he decided to back up. When he had gone about 10 feet, he saw in his rearview camera that the front wheels of his car were turned almost sideways. However, they straightened out as he pulled forward to leave the campground.

**TAKE A MOMENT TO THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN RVING EXPERIENCES ... HAVE YOU NEVER DONE ANYTHING DUMB, OR HAVE YOU DONE LOTS OF DUMB THINGS? EITHER WAY, PLEASE SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES AROUND THE VIRTUAL CAMPFIRE ...**

After arriving home and disconnecting his car, he noticed a warning light “Service All-Wheel Drive” on his dashboard, which came on each time he drove the car. His local dealership found that the “Steering Wheel Position Sensor” needed to be replaced, likely a result of the front tires being turned an excessive amount when he backed up in the campground. The cost of a new sensor (more than \$600) impressed on Doug an important lesson: “Never back up the motorhome when the tow car is attached, even for a short distance.” Although he did add, “If my wife had held the steering wheel

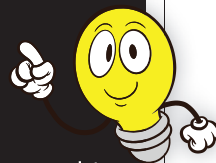
while I was backing up, none of this would have happened!”

### #3 Look Out Above!

Alex and Doris were the proud owners of a new 33-foot Class A. After driving home from the dealership, Alex parked it very carefully on their short driveway as close as possible to the garage. After examining some of its features, they decided to test the auto-level function. Alex was outside to watch, but an inquisitive neighbor distracted him as the motorhome began leveling. The back end went up ... and up ... and still more up, tipping the front end closer to the garage. Smash!

The front windshield had collided with a nail protruding from the roof overhang, punching a hole and fracturing an area more than a foot in diameter in the glass. Alex said, “We were devastated, so much so the damage was difficult to see through our tears!” Two weeks and \$2,800 later, they were able to use their motorhome on their first trip, where the leveling system worked just fine.

**Helpful hint:** As we’ve seen in previous RV Oops Awards, a friendly well-meaning neighbor can distract us at exactly the wrong time. “Can we talk later? I need to pay attention here,” would be appropriate comments to make when you should be focusing on the task at hand.



### #2 A Muddy Road Ahead

Nate and his family were traveling cross-country in their Class A with a Jeep Cherokee in tow. In North Dakota, because of road construction, they were stopped by a flag person and advised to take a detour to avoid about 25 miles of rough gravel road ahead. To do so meant an additional 50 miles to reach their destination. The flag person was allowing travel on the road, but indicated, “Neither the state nor the company would be responsible for damages.” After a quick calculation of the additional fuel and time required for the detour, Nate decided to “Go for it! How bad could it get if other cars and trucks were heading down the

# 2018 RV **OOPS** AWARDS

road?" He was about to find out.

After a few miles, the road got muddy and construction crews were spreading gravel in the slippery spots. It was definitely a white-knuckle drive, with several delays allowing for one-way traffic. Two hours later they were back on paved highway and shortly thereafter, pulled into a rest stop to check out the rig. The motorhome was a bit muddy but the Jeep looked like it had gone through a war zone. The entire front end was pock marked from stones thrown

up by the rear tires of the coach. The repair bill, including a new windshield, grille and headlights, came to over \$5,000. Nate's hindsight assessment: "Taking the detour would have saved me both time and money."

**Helpful hint:** Yogi Berra's quote "When you come to a fork in the road, take it" can be paraphrased for RVers: "When you come to a detour in the road, take it."



## DUMBEST THING

### #1 One Cool Trip

Roy and his wife had recently retired and decided to pursue the RV lifestyle by purchasing a large motorhome. Their first major adventure would be to drive across Canada, beginning in May, from British Columbia to Newfoundland. A complete lack of pre-trip planning resulted in a number of problems ... five to be exact.

Their first problem was not towing a dinghy vehicle. Very early in their trip, they discovered that "seeing the sights, especially within cities, meant taking long walks or busses and cabs after

parking the coach some distance away."

By mid-October, they had arrived in Ontario, where they encountered their second problem. Because of occasional below-freezing temperatures, most campgrounds had already closed for the winter, so they found themselves staying overnight in various parking lots. Fortunately, their furnace kept them reasonably warm.

Their third problem, related to the closed campgrounds, was dumping their black- and gray-water tanks and filling their freshwater tank. Instead of seeing the sights, they spent hours trying to find a dump station and freshwater outlet.

Quite unexpectedly, they encountered their fourth problem in the


province of Prince Edward Island (PEI), which Roy described as "a bunch of small towns all boarded up." Many businesses in PEI thrive on tourism and close for the winter. The same holds true for New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

Their fifth, and biggest, problem occurred when Roy and his wife had to fly back to British Columbia for a few weeks, putting their motorhome in temporary outdoor storage. When they returned, they discovered the freshwater tank had frozen solid and split open, and the water lines had also broken, costing more than \$3,000 for repairs. Roy forked out additional money for three days in a motel while the repairs were being completed. They headed south the very next day, and also bought a dinghy vehicle at their first opportunity.

All in all, this was an expensive, frustrating and eye-opening experience for these newbie RVers ... one that definitely warrants our Dumbest Award for this year.

**Helpful hints:** When planning an extended RV trip, do some research on your intended campgrounds and local weather conditions, especially for a cool-weather trip! And don't forget your dinghy vehicle!



So there you have it, another year of mishaps that teach us what NOT to do while RVing. Now, take a moment to think about your own RVing experiences. Have you never done anything dumb, or have you done lots of dumb things? Either way, please share your knowledge and experiences around the virtual campfire with fellow RVers in the comments section at [www.motorhome.com/lifestyle/rv-oops-2018/](http://www.motorhome.com/lifestyle/rv-oops-2018/) 



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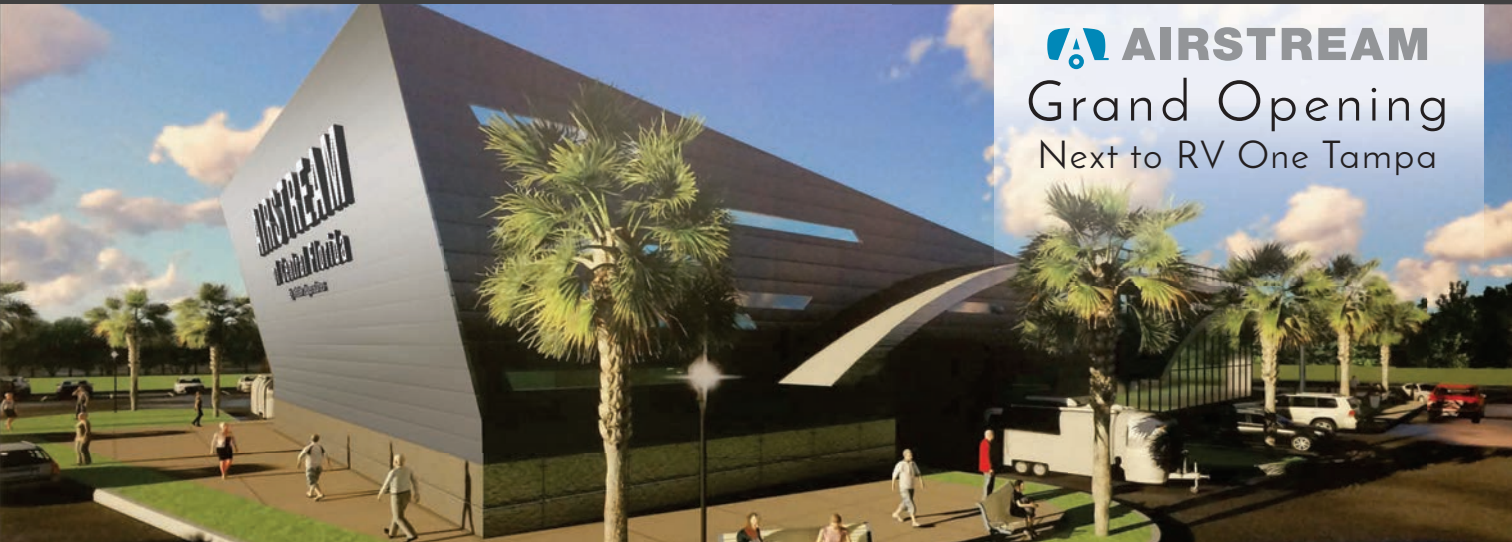
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# SOUTHWESTERN SURPRISES

## Yuma and Parker: A tale of two Arizona cities

**P**leasant temperatures, plenty of sunshine, outdoor recreation, tasty food, musical entertainment, local history, and natural and man-made wonders make Yuma and Parker, Arizona, popular destinations for winter visitors. Just be aware that one visit might not be enough. Almost everyone we met there during our stay has been coming back for years.

After my husband, Jim, and I settled in at the Westwind RV & Golf Resort (a Good Sam Park with a 10/10\*/10 rating) in Yuma, we perused its activities schedule and circled several options. Then we went to the Yuma Visitor Information Center to find out what else to do during our eight-day stay. The women there made so many suggestions, we wondered if we'd have enough time to do them all.

Because Yuma is located near the confluence of the Gila and Colorado rivers in the southwest corner of the state, it's no surprise that Yuma County's top industry is agriculture. Yuma grows more than 90 percent of

the country's leafy vegetables from November through March. There are several factors why the area has the nation's longest growing season. According to [www.currentresults.com](http://www.currentresults.com), Yuma is "the only place on Earth confirmed to bask in more than 4,000 hours of sunshine a year." The area also has fertile soil from sediment deposited by the Colorado River over millions of years.

### Sweet and Spicy

Agritourism allows visitors to see farms and sample the foods. Since Yuma is one of the world's top producers of gourmet Medjool dates,



### Getting There

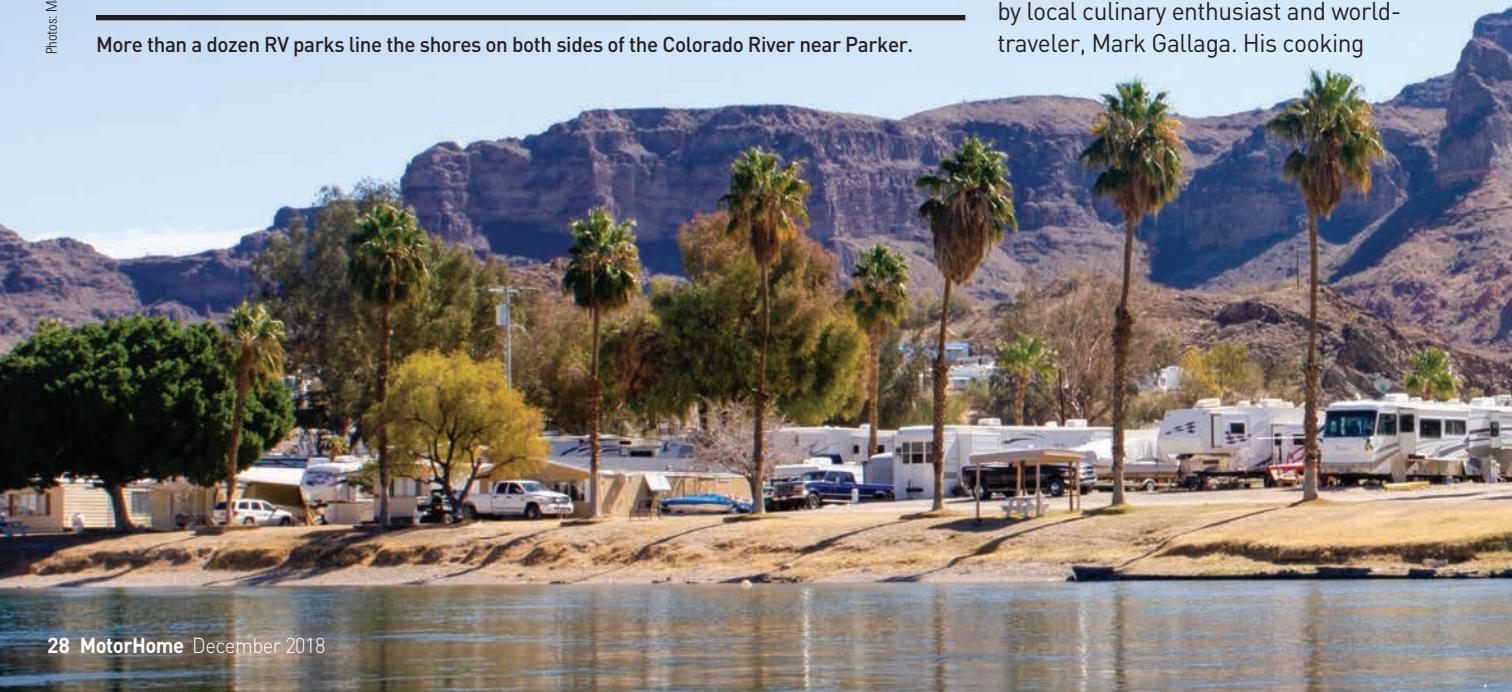
Yuma is located approximately 185 miles west of Phoenix. From Phoenix, take Interstate 10 west for about 31 miles, then take the right ramp at Exit 112 for Arizona State Highway 85 toward San Diego/Yuma. After nearly 35 miles, keep straight onto Interstate 8 west for approximately 111 miles. Turn left on Arizona State Highway 280 south and follow the signs to Yuma.

we took a tour at Martha's Gardens. In 1990, Nels and Martha Rogers bought a parcel of previously unused desert, cleared the land, drilled wells and installed a drip irrigation system. The original planting of 300 Medjool date palm offshoots thrived. Today the farm has around 8,000 palms. Only 250 of the trees are males since it's the females that produce the fruit. The labor-intensive process of date farming includes hand pollination of female trees with pollen from male trees. After the tour ended, we returned to the farm store for a delicious date milkshake, and we simply had to purchase a box of jumbo dates.

At the Sanguinetti House Museum and Gardens, we attended "A Taste of Times Past," a cooking presentation by local culinary enthusiast and world-traveler, Mark Gallaga. His cooking

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More than a dozen RV parks line the shores on both sides of the Colorado River near Parker.



expertise came from his grandparents, who raised him in New Mexico, and from street vendors around the world. In Peru, the Philippines, Japan and Europe, he watched them make their specialties, then replicated the dishes at home. Gallaga demonstrated how to make pork chili verde, starting with grilling the Anaheim chilies and hand-grinding the spices.

After the cooking presentation, Yanna Kruse, the Rio Colorado division director of the Arizona Historical Society, showed us around the Sanguinetti House Museum, which was once the home of E. F. Sanguinetti, also known as the Merchant Prince of Yuma. In addition to the permanent collection, a seasonal exhibit changes every year so that there's always something new for winter visitors. The exhibit we saw was titled River Lore, with tales about the steamboats

that navigated the Colorado River from 1852 to 1916. At the start of the tour, Kruse gave us name tags — The Troublesome Physician for Jim and The Memory Weaver for me — and promised to tell us more about our characters as we explored the house. It turns out that the physician was indeed troublesome; Dr. Taggart prescribed cigarettes for asthma, heroin for diarrhea and cocaine for teething babies. The Memory Weaver made a lovely mourning wreath from hair of a deceased family member. Tours by storytellers are hosted hourly from 10:15 a.m. to 2:15 p.m. By the time you read this, the featured exhibit is scheduled to be Clues: History Mysteries of Yuma.

Visit Yuma, the local visitor center, offers four specialty tours for a farm-to-table experience. A local grower leads Field to Feast Tours at the

University of Arizona research farm. Participants are given a list of ingredients needed for lunch and sent out into the field to pick them. Culinary students from Arizona Western College then use these fresh veggies to make lunch. Other popular foodie tours include Date Night Dinners served in a date grove where every course features the "fruit of kings;" Savor Yuma, a progressive dinner that stops at three local restaurants; and the Farmer's Wife Dinners, which celebrates fresh produce and farming traditions. I called to make reservations but they were booked during our visit. If you want to go, book early.

### Concerts and Classic Cars

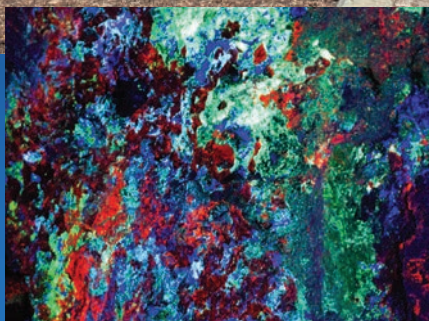
Music fans will be impressed with the many high-quality entertainment options. In eight days, we went to four performances. We especially enjoyed

Wild burros roaming free in the desert and on the roads are frequent sights across the river from Parker near Earp, California. The Emerald Canyon Golf Course in Parker is an 18-hole championship course with greens and fairways in great condition.





Castle Dome Mine Museum has more than 50 buildings in the ghost town filled with furniture, tools, clothing, dishes and bottles. The Castle Dome Mine Tour includes a visit to the recently discovered fluorescent mineral wall at the Hull Mine, which glows with 11 vivid colors under ultraviolet lights. Agritourism allows visitors to see farms like Martha's Gardens, which has around 8,000 palm trees producing gourmet Medjool dates.



the Spotlight on a Country Star dinner show at the Golden Roadrunner Ballroom that was playing during our stay. "Country Gentleman" Jack Jackson sang and shared stories of country music's most beloved legends. We saw the Johnny Cash show and enjoyed our meal at a table with six diehard fans. Not only had they seen most of Jackson's shows, they also

attend his Cowboy Church Service at Caravan Oasis RV Resort Sunday mornings. For upcoming events, visit <https://goldenroadrunner.events.com>.

The Sunday edition of the "Yuma Sun" lists events that are open to the public in more than 35 RV parks. In addition to bingo, craft fairs, yoga, dances and karaoke, there are tribute shows to musical greats like Elvis,

ABBA and the Eagles. "Homeward Bound," a Simon & Garfunkel tribute, was playing at Westwind RV Resort during our stay.

Howling at the Moon is a free concert in the desert every full moon from October to April. The music starts at 3 p.m. and stops about an hour after moonrise. It's not widely advertised; we heard about it from friends, then found details on their Facebook page. Concertgoers bring their own chairs, food and drinks. When we arrived around 4 p.m., the party was in full swing. The regulars were easy to identify, wearing T-shirts with Howling at the Moon logos. When the moon came up over the mountains, everyone stopped dancing and howled.

Midnight at the Oasis is an annual four-day event featuring classic cars



"Signatures" in the Valley of the Names on 1,200 acres of public land range from simple initials or names to more complex designs. Remember to BYOR (bring your own rocks) if you plan to leave your personal mark.

during the day and concerts at night. It starts on a Thursday night with a car rally on Main Street in downtown Yuma. On Friday, Saturday and Sunday, more than 1,000 classic cars are on display at the Ray Kroc Sports Complex (2019 dates are March 1-3). On Friday and Saturday, eight bands entertain the masses.

## Hard Rock

On the Castle Dome Mine Tour, we discovered both natural and man-made wonders. (The last 8 miles to the Castle Dome City Museum are on a gravel road; driving your dinghy vehicle is recommended.)

Modern prospectors found silver in the 1860s. By 1878, more people lived in Castle Dome City than in Yuma. The last mine closed in 1979. Allen and Stephanie Armstrong bought the abandoned Castle Dome City in 1993 and opened the museum five years later. That same year, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which manages the nearby Kofa National Wildlife Refuge, announced plans to remove all mining remnants. Allen was granted permission to salvage all the buildings and artifacts he could. The result is more than 50 buildings in the ghost town filled with furniture, tools and paraphernalia from that era.

The museum was fun to see, but the tour of the Hull Mine was even more amazing. The highlight was the recently discovered fluorescent mineral wall. Under ultraviolet lights, the walls glow with 11 vivid colors. In a different part of the mine, we explored a desperado's hideout, with a Wells Fargo Stagecoach strong box safe from the 1880s and a newspaper from 1919. If you have any qualms about going into a mine, you may be comforted to know that one OSHA inspector called it "the safest mine I've ever been in."

The Valley of the Names is a man-made wonder in nearby Winterhaven, California, with an interesting history. During War World II, soldiers who trained in the area spelled out their names with rocks on what was then called Graffiti Mesa. Since then, thousands of others have left their

mark across nearly 1,200 acres of public land. What amazed me was the durability of these designs. While most of the "signatures" we saw weren't dated, several were from the 1980s and '90s. Desert etiquette requires that you bring your own rocks rather than raiding existing signatures, so we picked up some dark rocks prior to our arrival and created a simple "M + J" for our initials. We took lots of photos, and, for the first time ever, I wished I had a camera drone to capture an aerial view. We used the following GPS coordinates to get there in a 4WD vehicle: 32.8732685, -114.6844447.

## Parker Bound

Our time in Yuma flew by, and soon we moved to Parker, 120 miles to the north. More than a dozen RV parks line the shores on both sides of the Colorado River. We chose to stay at Emerald Cove Resort, a membership campground, across the river in Earp, California. We had signed up for a free two-night stay in exchange for attending a 90-minute tour of the facilities. While we were there, we met lots of RVers who were thrilled with their resort-membership purchase.

One advantage — some might call it a hazard — of staying on the California side is the herds of wild burros roaming free in the desert and on the roads. We came around a blind corner on the Parker Dam Road and found them smack-dab in the middle of the highway.

At a visitor center, we met Teri and Tim Kral, who offered to lead us to some little-known rock art mosaics. From Parker Dam Road, we entered Copper Basin Dune Off Highway Vehicle Area. You'll need a 4WD vehicle to get there (GPS coordinates 34.265626, -114.180534). Tim told me this was started in 2010 by a Canadian couple, Vicky and Gary, from Penticton, British Columbia. They carried in 5-gallon buckets of rock and dirt to create the art. I counted about 25 circular stone mosaics with images of a butterfly, scorpion, hot air balloon and other items. They built the last one in 2014. Since then, other people have helped

maintain this man-made wonder.

Parker's number one attraction on TripAdvisor is only open from noon to 6 p.m. on Saturdays and Sundays from October through April. The Desert Bar and Nellie E Saloon is located about 10 miles northeast of Parker. It's a popular place. When we arrived around 1 p.m., the parking lot was nearly full. We had to wait in one line to get a beer, and another to get our meal. This was all part of the fun since we listened to the band, chatted with other visitors and watched people on the dance floor while we waited.

The Emerald Canyon Golf Course looked like a fun course, so I called to get a tee time for the next day. The nice reservation agent told me most tee times were booked weeks in advance, but she managed to find an opening for nine holes at 7 a.m., which was one minute before sunrise. That's no big deal for some people, but for me that was a huge effort. I'm happy to report it was well worth giving up an hour of sleep. The 18-hole championship course was even more beautiful close up than it appeared from a distance, with greens and fairways in great condition.

In this tale of two cities, it was simply the best of times. **M**

## For More Information

### Castle Dome Mine Tour

928-920-3062  
[www.castledomemuseum.org](http://www.castledomemuseum.org)

### Desert Bar and Nellie E Saloon

[www.thedesertbar.com](http://www.thedesertbar.com)

### Emerald Cove Resort

866-217-8111  
[www.emeraldcoversort.com](http://www.emeraldcoversort.com)

### Martha's Gardens

928-726-8831  
[www.marthasgardens.com](http://www.marthasgardens.com)

### Sanguinetti House Museum and Gardens

928-782-1841  
[www.arizonahistoricalociety.org/museums/yuma](http://www.arizonahistoricalociety.org/museums/yuma)

### Westwind RV & Golf Resort

866-440-2992  
[www.westwindrvandgolfresort.com](http://www.westwindrvandgolfresort.com)

### Yuma Visitors Bureau

800-293-0071  
[www.visitumayuma.com](http://www.visitumayuma.com)



# Berkshire XL 40D

Forest River's luxury diesel-pusher line benefits from tremendous buying power that leads to an unexpected sticker price **By Bob Livingston**

**F**orty feet used to be the gold standard in luxury motorhome circles, but that number keeps inching closer to the 45-foot mark limited by federal highway regulations. It's not uncommon these days to find a good selection of coaches at maximum allowable length, but for those who still want a reasonable amount of maneuverability and the option to visit RV parks without advertised "big rig" status, 41-42 feet seems to be a comfortable place to be.

To get there, potential owners need to shell out close to \$400,000, which typically buys highline appointments, two bathrooms, lots of slides, and a chassis that can handle a great amount of weight and exhibits spirited road manners. Diehard luxury coach fans might sneer somewhat at coaches built by companies that specialize in towables — especially entry-level models — but in the case of the Berkshire XL, prejudging might be a thing of the past.

The Berkshire is built by Forest River, a company that owns a huge share of the towable market, and its value pricing is easily misconstrued as a cheap pathway to a luxury coach. The fully loaded MSRP of \$344,803

could encourage potential buyers to look for missing features that allow the lower sticker price, but Forest River's tremendous buying power makes it possible to produce a serious contender in the luxury space with all the required bells and whistles.

First impressions are critical, and the handsome lines, complemented by a striking paint job, send a strong message that this coach may have something unexpected going for it. Freightliner's XCR raised-rail chassis provides the underpinning, and it's plenty stout to handle weight carrying and drivability chores. The Cummins 380-hp engine is not a barnburner, but certainly can handle just about any road, even with

a dinghy tagging along. Forest River hangs its hat on chassis strengthening with Tru-Brace-branded reinforcements upfitted by MORryde, a company that specializes in chassis-improvement products. The effort to reduce chassis flex and smooth out the roads is appreciated from behind the wheel. The coach handles less-than-sterling roadways graciously and the interior noise, other than the banging window shades, does not compete with conversations and music from the stereo.

Inside, the 40D floorplan is new for 2019 and is a cookie-cutter arrangement that offers exceptional livability. The dark woods contrast dramatically with the white polished tile flooring and beige ultraleather upholstery; light-colored window shades, offering sun diversion and blackout capabilities also stand out against the darker décor. Valances are nice looking, even though maybe a little conservative when compared to more modern approaches to interior design.

**ABOVE:** Pleasing body styling and handsome graphics project a distinctive aura that will appeal to high-end buyers.



**BELOW:** Flush-mounted induction stove makes it easy for cooks to spread out on compact galley counter. The couch in front of the retractable TV is comfortable for two; the dinette booth is practical and can seat four with decent elbowroom. Freestanding table and chairs are optional.



Nevertheless, those who appreciate darker woods will enjoy the hominess of the interior from stem to stern.

It's hard to imagine a 40-foot-plus coach without two bathrooms these days, and the accommodations in this department work well. The center-positioned powder room is nicely configured, equipped with a smaller-size porcelain toilet and oval sink with a designer faucet. There's plenty of counterspace, but some owners will have to remove the toilet-paper holder to make room for essential movement on the throne; it's best to let the owner place it after the sale.

While the master bathroom in the rear is primping central, the half-bath will likely be used exclusively while on the road. The king mattress in the bedroom blocks floor access when the slides are retracted.

It takes a step-up to get into the rear bathroom, which has all the necessary amenities to pamper the occupants. The residential-size vacuum-flush toilet is very close to the adjacent wardrobe and another poorly placed toilet-paper holder amplifies the restriction but, again, this should be an easy fix.

On the other side of the bathroom door opening is a garden shower with glass doors that's plenty roomy for any body size. Shower fixtures are well chosen and the small seat and shelves for the shampoo and soap work well. This might be one place where a plain-Jane

approach helps regulate the price, but unless you're a bathroom snob, you'll be satisfied; especially considering the motorhome is outfitted with a Truma AquaGo instantaneous water heater, which supplies endless hot water. A small skylight brightens up the shower.

There's plenty of room in the bathroom for linens and essentials, and counterspace is good. The backsplash, large medicine cabinet, oval sink and decorator faucet enhance the bathroom experience. A stacking washer/dryer can fit into a compartment next to the sink.

When the forward sliding door to the bedroom is closed, the area becomes a master suite, which can be kept private from the rest of the coach if guests are invited. The king bed rides in the slideout and has small nightstands on both sides with charging stations. Cubbyhole compartments in the nightstands are a welcome touch for stashing bedside items. A padded headboard and windows in the sides of the slide are appreciated features. Sleeping on the mattress, which is not fancy, is subjective, but we found it plenty comfortable. Overall, the bedroom environment projects a home-like aura, a theme continued

throughout the interior.

An opposing slide houses well-designed cabinetry for storing clothing and related items above and below a shelf that can double as a makeup table (mirror excluded). One of four TVs hangs on the wall on the forward section of the cabinet structure and is easily viewable when lying in bed; all the TVs are Samsung — a departure from using cheap counterparts commonly found in value-priced RVs. Reading lights are also well placed, and a low-profile ceiling fan keeps the air moving. Three air-conditioners can be called into service at the same time and worked without any hiccups in hot, humid weather while hooked up to 50-amp power.

Interior climate is controlled by the Precision-Plex monitor panel mounted on a wall adjacent to the half-bath. This panel can be used to operate the slides, HVAC and monitor tank levels, and is tied into a multiplex switching system. The Precision-Plex can be paired to a smartphone or tablet using a downloadable app. Controls for the 2,000-watt pure sine inverter and the wireless remote for the MAXXAIR power roof vent are conveniently mounted next to the Precision-Plex panel.

From right: Precision-Plex panel controls HVAC, slideouts, awning and tank monitors. Downloadable smartphone app adds remote versatility. Well-organized utility center is easy to access; water manifold takes some study.





## FOREST RIVER BERKSHIRE XL 40D

The inverter powers the stainless-clad, double-door residential refrigerator (drawer freezer below) when traveling. Operational readouts are built into the refrigerator door, and ice and cold water can also be dispensed from the front. A screw-down knob for securing the refrigerator doors while on the road seemed a little funky, but it worked perfectly.

Opposing slideouts in the front living parlor open up the area tremendously and the aforementioned white tile floor adds to the visual spaciousness. Both front slides are fitted with support bars that must be removed before extending. We haven't seen these for a while and would prefer a built-in latching system in lieu of manually positioned bars.

Not a lot of space is devoted to the galley, which is across from the refrigerator, pullout pantry and booth dinette, but it works, in part due to the flush-mounted induction cooktop. When the stove is not being used, there's additional room on a solid-surface countertop for food prep, but in reality, unless you are a culinary aficionado, the galley works fine. Double stainless-steel sinks serviced by a high-rise faucet; a large assortment of cabinets below and above the counter; a residential-sized microwave convection oven; and an optional pullout dishwasher give the galley user-friendly status. A mosaic backsplash classes up the kitchen counter.

A booth dinette is standard, and even though the choice of a freestanding table and chairs can be debated all day

Pull-out pantry is mounted adjacent to the 23-cubic-foot, stainless-steel-clad residential refrigerator. Water and ice dispensers are built into left door; the travel latch is not beautiful, but does the job. Half-bath is relatively roomy and has plenty of counterspace.



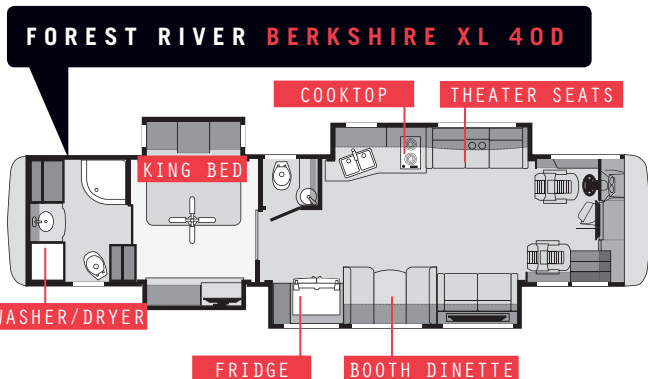
Nightstands on each side of king bed are fitted with a charging station compartment for stashing nighttime items. Rear master bath is roomy and offers generous storage for linens, sheets and clothing. Stackable washer/dryer butts up to sink with solid-surface counter.

long, it works well within the 40D's floorplan. It's big enough to seat four adults comfortably without plate clinking, and offers storage below the seat cushions.

The remainder of the front living area is devoted to plenty of seating and entertainment. On the patio side, a small couch in front of the retractable TV compartment seats two people who can retire snugly at night on the flip-out bed. Across from the 49-inch TV is really wide optional theater seating within perfect eyeshot of the screen. The two seats don't recline all the way, but they are still comfortable enough to lounge in front of the TV; cup-holders and a small storage compartment make it easy to hang out for long periods of time, even though the seat cushions are on the firm side. A JBL soundbar enhances audio.

Owners who enjoy entertaining will like the expansive living area and the abundance of seating. When the cockpit seats are turned toward the rear, the living room easily handles six people, with four more at the dinette. The TV mounted above the dashboard in the cockpit seems superfluous since it can't be viewed from the living room seating positions without neck craning, but it could be worth the expense for two people hanging out on the rear dinette seat. For those who enjoy satellite TV, the company can mount an optional Winegard HD TRAV'LER antenna to the roof.

While the décor seemed a little late-retro at first, the darker cabinetry grew on us. The inside had a more traditional feel, combatting any movement toward to the more modernistic look that's been popularized lately. Cabinetry workmanship was indicative of higher-priced coaches and even though the valance styling was a little old-fashioned, it looked nice. Dimmable lighting generously placed throughout the interior complemented the windows to brighten things up. Forest River offers other décor options



## WHAT'S HOT

Full-body paint and graphics, exterior storage, Precision-Plex/multiplex systems, TV quality, Truma AquaGo, utility center

## WHAT'S NOT

Front pillar blindspot, non-adjusting cockpit seat arm rests, slideout stabilizer bars, toilet-paper holder placement



to suit customer tastes.

The driving quarters can be multi-tasked for additional sleeping by deploying an electric bed lift/mattress that can sleep two smaller people in relative comfort. This is an expensive option (\$3,200), so potential owners need to evaluate their needs to host overnight company if the couch and dinette won't suffice. The mechanism is rock-solid, and the platform can be locked out with a key switch.

Down below, the cockpit is well organized with ergonomic controls and a 10-inch screen for entertainment, navigation and to project images from the rear and side-mounted cameras. Driving comfort is supported by the high-backs in the cockpit, and long stints on the road are possible without complaint. The armrests are not adjustable, which could impact some people; a production change here would be appreciated. While the view through the expansive windshield provides excellent road visibility, the large pillar on the right does block some visibility when turning right. Also, the right mirror is partially obstructed, but the driver can acclimate quickly.

Outside, the Berkshire gets gold stars for being fully equipped. Lateral compartment doors are well fitted and function without struggling. Storage space is abundant, augmented by sliding trays in the pass-through compartments. Shelving in a couple other smaller compartments makes the best use of the space.

The utility bay is well organized and the water manifold system looks impressive, although somewhat confusing without spending some time reading the instruction paperwork. Hooking up is a breeze; there's no room to store the sewer hose in the utility, which promotes more sanitary conditions. A sewer hose container is mounted in another compartment and is easy to access.

Four wet-cell 6-volt batteries are stored in a compartment that allows excellent access to the filler caps — eliminating any excuses for not keeping the water topped off. There's no reel for the power cord (which would be a nice addition), but owners will not have difficulty coiling it up inside the compartment. Clear access to the built-in vacuum cleaner makes it a cinch to change bags.

Of course, a TV is mounted behind an access door on the patio side and all the slides are equipped with toppers, which blend in nicely with the flush-mounted, heavily tinted windows. Out back, a large door provides good access to the engine, and the ladder to the roof can be removed and stored in one of the compartments — preventing uninvited "guests" from climbing aboard. In a nutshell, all the expected exterior elements are provided to make outside living comfortable.

Over the years the Berkshire has evolved into a much more refined machine, and there is an extensive list of standard goodies that make this coach highly attractive. The economy of scale allows Forest River to produce a luxury coach at a lower price point and opens the field to a greater demographic segment. While we're not able to critique coaches over a long period of time, we suspect that the Berkshire, in its current iteration, will be subject to the normal repair sequence experienced by owners of just about every new coach built.

In the long run, with judicious care and maintenance, the Berkshire XL will likely serve its owners well, and exude pride of ownership, bolstered by the coach's handsome profile. **M**

### Forest River Inc.

574-522-3693, [www.forestriverinc.com](http://www.forestriverinc.com)

# Specifications

## Chassis

Model	Freightliner XCR
Engine	Cummins ISL
SAE Hp	380 @ 2,000 rpm
Torque	1,150 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	Allison 3000MH 6-speed
Axle Ratio	4.78:1
Tires	275/80R22.5
Wheelbase	266"
Brakes Front/Rear	Air Disc/Drum S-cam
Suspension Front/Rear	Neway Air/V-Ride
Fuel Capacity	100 gal
Fuel Economy	8.6 mpg
Warranty	3 years/50,000 miles drivetrain 5 years, 100,000 miles frame rails

## Coach

Exterior Length	41'
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height with A/C	12' 5"
Interior Width	7' 11.75"
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Aluminum frame, laminated walls, block-foam insulation, vacuum-bonded fiberglass roof
Freshwater Capacity	103 gal
Black-water Capacity	42 gal
Gray-water Capacity	66 gal
Water-heater Capacity	Truma AquaGo instant
LP-gas Capacity	24.6 gal
Air Conditioner	(2) 15,000 Btu; (1) 13,500 Btu
Furnace	(2) 20,000 Btu
Refrigerator	23 cu-ft residential
Inverter/Charger	2,000 watts/50 amps
Batteries	(2) 12-volt chassis; (4) 6-volt house
AC Generator	10kW
MSRP	\$329,233.50
MSRP As Tested	\$344,803.50
Warranty	1 year

## Wet Weight

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

Front Axle	11,380 lbs
Rear Axle	20,200 lbs
Total	31,580 lbs

## Chassis Ratings

GGAWR, F/R	12,400 lbs/24,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	36,400 lbs/46,400 lbs
ROCCC	4,820 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)

# MOTORHOME GPS

## Top RV-friendly models from Garmin and Rand McNally go

**W**hen GPS devices first became popular for automotive and RV travel they were little more than crude navigational tools that would sometimes get you where you wanted to go. Today, things are very different. Not only do these wonderful devices provide routing assistance, they offer a wide range of other features that augment a smartphone and, in some cases, can even double as a full-featured tablet with Bluetooth, Wi-Fi connectivity and other nice additions, like a dash camera.

As we approached this review, we wrote down a few things that we felt were important for a good GPS to offer a motorhome user. Since operating a large motorhome is very different from driving an automobile, the GPS has to be different as well. For example, because of a motorhome's dimensions, not every road will be accessible. Some roads have height and weight restrictions, and nothing ends a nice vacation faster than trying to fit a 12-foot, 6-inch coach under an 11-foot, 8-inch bridge. That's why we tested each of these GPS units to see what happened when traveling on a road with a known low-

clearance underpass.

Most RV-specific GPS devices require profile programming to define weight, number of axles, height, etc., so that the unit can match specified routes safely. When driving the dinghy vehicle, the GPS should allow for an easy profile change and route accordingly, which could likely be shorter and faster.

Another difference between driving an automobile and a motorhome is the difficulty in changing lanes, especially when approaching splits and exits that require you to be in certain lanes. During our testing process, we specifically evaluated the graphic presented

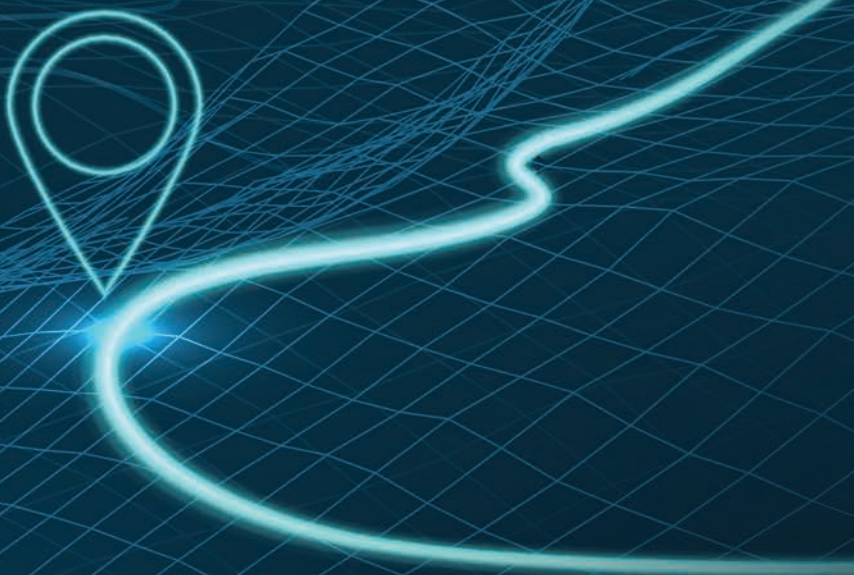
when approaching an interchange, just to make sure it offered a clear, easy-to-see image that safely navigates the driver to the proper lane.

One important aspect of any GPS is the ability to upgrade maps and the operating system. A few years ago, updating a GPS required downloading a program to a computer. This was usually done by using a memory card to download the new maps or by plugging the GPS into a computer for the upgrade. With a Wi-Fi-enabled unit, it's a simple click of a button, and the maps and software are updated as new versions become available.

Many states now have laws that prohibit distracted driving, which in some cases means that you have to use a hands-free device when talking on a cellphone. Professional/commercial truck drivers have been subject to this law for years and since operating a large motorhome is similar to a big rig, hands-free cellphone use is something we should practice as well. Many of the GPS devices now feature Bluetooth pairing with a smartphone, which allows placing and receiving calls without handling the phone. Hands-free phone operation is therefore another important feature to consider when searching for a suitable GPS unit.

Traveling offers enough challenges without having to worry about where to get fuel, or how far away the next rest area is, or where to eat or camp for the night. Many of these RV-specific GPS units offer an easy search function with destinations that are (in some cases) specific to motorhome travel. Some models have a specific button, so the user can look at the amenities offered at the next exit.

Another important thing to look for is the ability to store previously



# FACE-OFF

## Head to head in a hands-on evaluation

searched destinations or current location in the event you want to come back. The ability to program and edit various warnings is another recent development in GPS technology that we really like. Some units have detailed user-definable settings that will warn of upcoming or current features on the route such as toll roads, sharp curves, hills, state lines,

time-zone changes and speed limits. Most GPS units have the ability to display the current speed, and some even offer a color-coded display to indicate when traveling above the speed limit.

If you already have an automotive-based GPS and plan on using it in the motorhome as well, we advise you rethink that strategy. Unless your

current GPS allows vehicle profiling, it will specify routes that may not be suitable for motorhomes. One mishap involving a low underpass, or a road/bridge that is not suitable for your coach will cause far more problems than the purchase of a GPS designed specifically for motorhome use. This is not to mention all the other functions — and larger screens — that these units offer when compared to an older automotive GPS. As you can see in the chart on page 39, the list of features offered on these RV-specific GPS units is nothing short of amazing. In order to help you decide which model to choose, we rounded up five of the top models from Rand McNally and Garmin that are aimed specifically at RVers. Happy trails!



**GARMIN RV 660LMT**  
MSRP \$329.99

Ⓢ The RV 660LMT is Garmin's entry-level GPS, but when paired with the Garmin SmartPhone Link app on a smartphone, it gives the GPS many of the functions of a more expensive device. The SmartPhone Link (available on both Garmin devices) opens up some really powerful functions, such as weather (current or other cities, weather radar, weather alerts) and road conditions. There is also a tool called photoLive that allows you to locate Department of Transportation (DOT) traffic cameras (in some states) within 100 miles of your current location and save them. Drivers can look at actual traffic conditions live on the screen. The 660LMT with SmartPhone Link also provides access to Foursquare, which is a social networking program that finds businesses/attractions, etc. The advanced weather and photoLive services require an in-app purchase, but it's only \$5 for each one, so the cost is not major if you value those services. In general, we liked the SmartPhone Link, but we did find it to be quirky at times. On several occasions, we had to unpair the phone, turn off the Bluetooth connection and start over again.

Both Garmin units offer huge databases of RV-specific points of interest including campgrounds, service centers, towing, tire stores, etc. This is one of the features we like best about the Garmin models.

This GPS can define motorhome type, length, weight, etc., and will route around potential obstacles that are not suitable for your setup. It also has an elevation profile to advise the driver of potential issues with upcoming grade changes.

The 660LMT has a one-touch feature on the screen to change from a motorhome to a dinghy vehicle, which is great for those planning on moving it between vehicles. When searching for a campground, both of the Garmin units provide detailed information on each park, such as number of campsites, maximum length, type of electrical hookups, internet access and lots more. This alone gives the Garmin units a huge advantage over the Rand McNally models. The voice-activated navigation allows the driver to keep hands and attention where they belong and simply speak the address or location. The voice navigation isn't perfect, but it works pretty well if you speak clearly. The lane change/intersection popup screens on these Garmin units were very easy to follow and offered plenty of notice to allow time to get in the correct lane. This is the smallest screen of the group, and it has fairly low resolution since it does not double as a tablet, like the more expensive Rand McNally units.

Since it is not Wi-Fi based, it will be necessary to connect to a computer for map updates, but doing so once a year should not be a major problem. The mounting bracket is a simple suction cup for the windshield and a bracket that connects to the GPS. It offers a good range of adjustability and is not so heavy that it causes the mount to easily come off the windshield.



**GARMIN RV 770 LMT-S**

MSRP \$349.99

⊕ This model is only \$20 more than the Garmin RV 660LMT model we tested, and in our opinion it's worth the small upcharge. First, it has a bigger screen with higher resolution. When paired with a smartphone you can also receive notifications that would normally show only on the phone. So, if you have various notifications (from apps) enabled on the phone those will now flow through the GPS while driving, allowing the driver to keep focused on the road ahead without having to handle the phone. In addition to Foursquare, the 770LMT-S also has TripAdvisor, which adds even more points of interest (POI) to the database. It even has a feature in SmartPhone Link called LiveTrack that allows the user to share locations with friends or family. This model also has Wi-Fi that allows map updating without connecting to a computer. If you want a GPS only (no tablet), this is



The Garmin RV 770 is a thin and lightweight unit. As a result, the bracket can be smaller because it doesn't have to support the weight of a heavy tablet-style GPS. This also means that the rear-facing speaker is smaller than the Rand McNally tablet models and the Garmin's audio suffers.

the best unit here as long as you don't need some of the other functions offered by the tablet-based units. Just like the other Garmin unit, it has an extensive library of POIs (more than 14,000 RV-specific locations) for just about any situation or service needed. The voice-activated commands on this unit are usually pretty good. When voice commands are called out, the unit wakes up and is ready for instructions. Commands such as Find Place, Find Address, Go Home and several more are available, and in most cases, the voice system worked well.

We also tested this model for hands-free phone use and our

impression is that it is only fair in this regard. Since the device is so thin, there simply isn't enough room for a large speaker and therefore it doesn't work that well when traveling with road noise. When parked — with no road noise — it works pretty well, but if you plan on using this as a main hands-free phone device you may need to look at the Rand McNally tablet models or a headset. The on-screen menus are also super easy to use and, like all Garmin units, these are reliable and really sorted out. Both of the Garmin units also offer the ability to add a backup camera or a Garmin babyCam to monitor other views within or behind/beside the motorhome.



**RAND McNALLY RVND 7**

MSRP \$249.99

⊕ This is Rand McNally's entry-level GPS, yet it still offers a 7-inch screen. This model has preset RV types such as Class A, Class A with tag axle, Class B, etc., and then it allows setting customization of length, weight, height, propane tank, width, etc. It includes lifetime map updates, and a warning menu that is user-defined that allows both voice and visual on-screen warnings for things such as narrow roads, state borders, toll roads, construction areas, speed-limit warnings and over-speed warnings. You can even program how long the warnings appear on the screen.

This device also has a "Road Atlas Information" feature for

The base model RVND 7 from Rand McNally has a full 7-inch screen and includes free lifetime maps. If you are on a budget, this is a great choice for a GPS.

the USA, Canada and Mexico with information about each state, such as the state capital, total land area, largest city, total population, highest and lowest point. This is the only model tested that includes a stylus. Most of the time we simply used our fingers on the touch screen, but when we tried the stylus it really did improve the reaction time and it stores easily on the adjustable mount. This unit does not offer Wi-Fi or Bluetooth connectivity, so in order to update the maps you have to download a "dock" program from Rand McNally. This free software allows you to create an account for the device and update it as needed with a USB cable. The dock program offers

some nice features as well, such as a device backup, custom POI import and Good Sam Club trip planner access.

The Rand McNally RVND also offers a nice lane-guidance screen at turnoffs and has a large database of POIs such as campgrounds, service centers, dump stations, restaurants, shopping, etc. Another feature that is very handy is the ability to search for POIs near the current location and route, in a specific city or at your destination. It also displays what is available at the exits along the route, which is a feature we use a lot. The mapping software also allows the user to compare two routes based on preferences saved in the setup menu. The comparison will show the route

on a map and specify the miles and time on each route. It even shows if tolls are on the planned route.

This base model also includes some RV checklists for use before starting a trip, and they are user programmable, so list items can be deleted or added. Also included is a fuel log that can be saved on the GPS device and summarized by quarter and year. There is also a built-in calculator and a screen to easily convert units from metric units. The mount is a basic clip-on mount with a suction cup that offers a reasonable, but not great, level of adjustability. Battery life is pretty short, so plan on having this one plugged in all the time. For its price, this is a good, economical unit.

MANUFACTURER	GARMIN	GARMIN	RAND MCNALLY	RAND MCNALLY	RAND MCNALLY
<b>Model</b>	<b>RV 660LMT</b>	<b>RV 770 LMT-S</b>	<b>OverDryve 7 RV</b>	<b>RV Tablet 70</b>	<b>RVND 7</b>
<b>MSRP</b>	\$329.99	\$349.99	\$449.99	\$349.99	\$249.99
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://buy.garmin.com/en-US/US/p/524447">https://buy.garmin.com/en-US/US/p/524447</a>	<a href="https://buy.garmin.com/en-US/US/p/570074">https://buy.garmin.com/en-US/US/p/570074</a>	<a href="http://www.randmcnally.com/product/overdryve-7-rv">www.randmcnally.com/product/overdryve-7-rv</a>	<a href="http://www.randmcnally.com/product/rv-tablet-70">www.randmcnally.com/product/rv-tablet-70</a>	<a href="http://www.randmcnally.com/product/RVND-7">www.randmcnally.com/product/RVND-7</a>
<b>Display</b>	6.1" Touch Screen 800 x 400 Resolution	7" Touch Screen 1024 x 600 Resolution	7" Touch Screen 1280 x 800 Resolution	7" Touch Screen 1024 x 600 Resolution	7" Touch Screen 800 x 480 Resolution
<b>Dash/Backup Camera</b>	Sold Separately	Sold Separately	2 MP forward, 8 MP rear	0.3 MP forward, 5 MP rear	No
<b>Memory Card Slot</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Wi-Fi</b>	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Bluetooth</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Lifetime Maps</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Lifetime Traffic</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Weather</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Phone Integration</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Text Messaging</b>	No	Display Only	Yes	No	No
<b>Web Browser</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Fuel Prices</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Apps and Games</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Streams Music</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<b>Trip Meter</b>	2	2	3	3	3
<b>Virtual Dash</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Programmable Warnings</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<b>Voice Commands</b>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No
<b>Headphone Jack</b>	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

## RAND MCNALLY RV TABLET 70

MSRP \$349.99

➔ The next step up in Rand McNally's product line is the RV Tablet 70 with GPS. This is another 7-inch GPS, but it performs a lot more functions than the base model. Since this GPS is also an Android-platform tablet, there is a lot to like here for the additional \$100 over the RVND 7. It also includes lifetime maps and, because the unit is Wi-Fi enabled, you can connect the GPS to a smartphone, hot spot or Wi-Fi, performing map and other system updates without any cords.

This model also includes a dash cam with up to six hours of video storage. This one also has weather, a camera, fuel prices and traffic in its feature list and has Firefox as a built-in browser plus a calendar, as well as a link to receive email. You can also store music for playback through the built-in speaker. In order to access the advanced features, such as weather,



Drivers wanting built-in options like a dash cam will have to consider either of the two Rand McNally tablet models. Shown is the RV Tablet 70 and it includes two cameras; the rear-facing camera is 5 megapixels, while the forward-facing is 0.3 megapixels.

live traffic, etc., it is necessary to link this device to Wi-Fi or to a smartphone and use its data plan. There is even a menu that shows how much data has been consumed and which of the programs on the device are using the most data. This will allow the user to keep an eye on data consumption if the phone doesn't have an unlimited data plan. Along with the functionality of a tablet, Rand also included several RV-specific tabs, such as an RV-leveling app, and a tab for RV park reviews, plus all the other functions found in the base model. One thing the Rand models don't offer is detailed information on each campground, which can be found on the Garmin units.

This model also has a huge database of POIs for just about anything along a specific route. The RV Tablet 70 also includes the TripMaker

app from Rand that is a very powerful tool for planning a trip. Also included is a virtual Road Atlas, which allows users to look at a map of the USA or select a specific region/state; it includes Canada as well.

The RV Tablet 70 has a very strong magnetic mount between the bracket and the GPS, which makes removal easy for use as a tablet. Since this is a tablet, it is heavier than the GPS-only devices, so naturally the bracket and suction cup is bigger. Another thing we noted is that because the tablet-based models are larger, the speakers and battery are larger and in general the audio reproduction — such as phone calls or music streaming — is much better than the smaller Garmin GPS-only models. Overall, this is a solid performer that is very easy to use and full featured.

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## RAND MCNALLY OVERDRIVE 7 RV

MSRP \$449.99

➔ This is Rand McNally's top-of-the-line tablet with a built-in GPS. In addition to all of the above features on the other Rand McNally units, this one adds voice commands that allow the user to dial phone numbers, send text messages and route to



The Randy McNally OverDryve 7 tablet GPS is thicker and heavier than the GPS-only units. This additional weight means it needs a bigger, heavier mount to support it. The magnetic mount shown here makes removing the GPS fast and easy, and the back of the mount has built-in speakers that produce the best audio of the group. Phone calls and streaming music are easily heard while driving.



new addresses, etc. On an Apple iPhone, this voice function works through SIRI and you do not have to touch the phone. Once the route is created, the user can follow the map, a highway view or see an overall trip summary. Every item displayed on the screen can be modified, and edited, by just tapping the screen. For example, tapping on the upper right will change the display from 3D to 2D view; tap it again and go to a true north facing up display, etc.

Live data on traffic, fuel and weather can also be displayed at the touch of the screen, as can arrival time, remaining time on the trip or the current elevation. The mount for this tablet features an adjustable suction cup for attaching to the windshield and a magnetic base to hold the tablet in the bracket. The mounting bracket on this model is very large and has its own built-in speakers, which makes it the best performer for audio streaming and hands-free use when making phone calls. We also really liked the voice navigation and found it surprisingly easy to simply speak the address or attraction and the GPS would find it and route us there. Those accustomed to an Apple iPad might be a little disappointed in the performance of the tablet-part of this model, but it's still not a bad tablet. If used on occasion to surf the web, etc., it will be perfectly acceptable. We really like this model and if you need a full-featured tablet and a GPS, this is our favorite. The only real shortcoming is that neither this nor any of the Rand McNally GPS units offer detailed information on RV parks, which is pretty important for motorhome owners.



The large Rand McNally OverDryve 7 high-res screen is another reason we like it so much. The integration of the Bluetooth phone connectivity, plus a full-featured tablet and lots more, makes this one of our favorites.

All of the GPS units we tested are available online or at Camping World. Although we have attempted to point out the major features of each of these units, there are still many aspects that we didn't cover. As with any electronic device, there are multiple layers of menus and features that will have to be explored to realize their fullest potential. All of these units are very good at providing directions to destinations — the biggest differences being features such as voice commands, Bluetooth, Wi-Fi connectivity, audio and voice quality, and the ability to run apps. Look carefully at the chart on page 39 and determine what you want in terms of features and price, and then choose the one that suits your needs. Overall, our favorite is the Garmin RV 770 LMT-S as the best GPS (only) model. If you want a tablet with a GPS and don't mind spending the extra money, then the Rand McNally OverDryve 7 RV is a great choice, too. **M**

### Sources

Camping World, 888-857-6630, [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)  
 Garmin International Inc., [www.garmin.com](http://www.garmin.com)  
 Rand McNally, 877-446-4863, [www.randmcnally.com](http://www.randmcnally.com)

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# High Marks

REGENCY RV'S NATIONAL TRAVELER RAISES THE PROFILE OF CLASS B MOTORHOMES

By Bruce Hampson

**T**he Class B motorhome market is something of an anomaly in the RV industry. That's not a reflection on the motorhomes, mind you; as reported by Statistical Surveys Inc., a data-driven company that documents industry registrations, the Class B segment saw a sales increase of 26.5 percent for all of 2017 and is on pace for an even bigger upswing once the 2018 numbers are in.

The true picture, though, is a bit more opaque.

Looking to capitalize on a market segment that offers all the features of a motorhome at a price that, in many instances, costs about the same as a high-end luxury SUV, a number of Class B manufacturers are introducing new, sportier models aimed at new demographic groups.

Originally designed by Dolphin Motor Coach and recently acquired by Fort Worth, Texas-based Regency RV, the National Traveler line also offers a bit more space than provided

by the factory van shell, but it quite literally goes in another direction. Like a typical van conversion, the Elkhart, Indiana-built National Traveler will fit in any space you'd be comfortable parking, say, a half-ton pickup — but unlike its counterparts, the RAM ProMaster-based motorhome offers a lot more space. This is courtesy of a new roofline that maintains the aerodynamic profile of the stock RAM 3500 ProMaster, while increasing ceiling height by about a foot; head room measures up to 7 feet, 4 inches in the front of the motorhome before

stepping down to a still-impressive 6 feet, 11½ inches through the rear.

"A ProMaster is a smaller vehicle to begin with," said Don Emahiser, Regency vice president for sales and marketing. "So, we cut it at the roofline, raised it to add substantial space inside, then cleaned up the looks of what was really designed to be a commercial vehicle. We followed the lines of the vehicle but still made it look different. And along the way, we made a lot of little changes, like replacing the original commercial-sized clearance lights with smaller LED units. It's not just about the space, it's about the look."

That "look," by the way, also includes color-matching the front bumper and wheel wells and a three-dimensional graphics treatment that arches up over portions of the side windows of the top-of-the-line DLX test motorhome (National Traveler also offers the SPT and TVL models).



Top: The fold-down table is ideal for under-the-awning meal prep and dining al fresco, and stows conveniently away. The rear TV relocates easily to a bracket for outside viewing. Above: Storage space is adequate with the wide-opening, double-decker cabinets above the rear bench seats.



More than vinyl add-ons, the cladding allows residents to see outside while screening prying eyes from what's going on inside. The DLX also included optional fiberglass running boards, which didn't so much as groan under the weight of a 300-pound passenger, as well as color-coordinated wheels.

Still, while few people who buy a Class B motorhome are as tall as a player for the National Basketball Association, we discovered that the raised roofline also provides other benefits. Not only does it create a larger, more airy space inside, but it also lends itself to creating a lot of additional storage, overcoming one of the biggest drawbacks to Class B ownership.

For example, virtually every Class B motorhome built today includes bulkhead storage cabinets. With its raised roofline, the National Traveler is able to double up on them: Stacked cabinets are mounted onto the upper interior side walls on either side of the rear dinette/bed, with a third, somewhat smaller pair mounted above a shorter bench seat just aft of the driver position. Nor are these insignificant storage units. The rear cabinets, for example, stretch nearly 50 inches in length and, stacked, are 2 feet high and 10 inches deep.

In fact, storage might be one of the National Traveler's prime selling points. In addition to the bulkhead cabinets and ample storage beneath the opposing rear benches and the forward street-side bench, the motorhome features three decently sized drawers below the abbreviated curbside galley. A microwave,

deep-basin stainless-steel sink with cover, True Induction cooktop, 3.0-cubic-foot Norcold 12-volt DC/120-volt AC refrigerator and a flip-up counter for additional meal prep are among the galley hardware. Between the galley and rear dinette/sleeping area is a pullout pantry and a narrow cabinet with removable shelves that can be put to use as a small wardrobe closet. The raised roofline, by the way, also yields substantial open space above the cockpit. And, while the Traveler uses a typical fiberglass shower insert in its amidships, porcelain toilet-equipped bathroom (meaning that anyone taller than about 6 feet, 2 inches will need to tilt their head a bit), there's yet more storage between the bath stall and ceiling.

With more weight mounted higher, it would be easy to assume that the National Traveler behaves a bit top-heavy when under power, but that's simply not the case. Granted, any Class B is considered a "high-profile" vehicle and should be driven as such, but the National Traveler nonetheless exhibits surprisingly deft road manners courtesy of its stability control and roll mitigation. It's also quiet, a testament to its original Fiat design and the integration of the new roofline; there's minimal wind noise created by the front end or extended mirrors at highway speeds. Even with the onboard 2.8-kW gas generator running to keep the house cool, front passengers can converse easily.

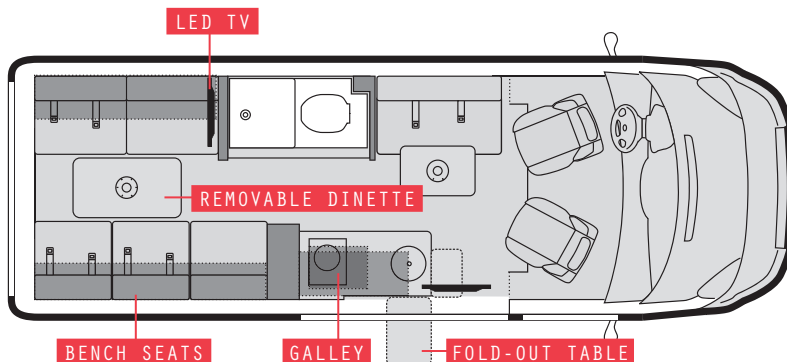
What's more, the additional weight on this Class B conversion seems to have little effect on the ProMaster's performance. Many folks



**Top:** The efficient galley includes a single-burner True Induction cooktop, Dometic glass-top stainless-steel sink, 3.0-cubic-foot Norcold refrigerator and overhead microwave. **Above:** With the table removed, the bench seats fold down easily to create a large and comfortable sleeping surface.

who have been around for a while always associated power with cubic inches, making the throttle response of the motorhome's 220-cubic-inch, 3.6-liter gas V-6 all the more impressive. Backed up by a 3.86:1 rear axle ratio and 62 TE six-speed automatic, it doesn't take much to push the National Traveler to, well, as fast as you need to go. You will, in fact, need to temper your enthusiasm until you became familiar with the touchy throttle.

When set up in camp, a few more of the National Traveler's benefits become apparent. Virtually everything in the interior that's not countertop, flooring, appliances or wood has





## Smart Control

The Firefly Integrations Multiplex system with Vegatouch panel allows convenient control of all the motorhome's systems like lighting, HVAC, window shades and more via the touch pads or smart-device apps.

been covered in a padded off-white soft-touch ultraleather material. That includes the front seats, benches and backrests, interior walls and doors, the ceiling — even the back of the cabinets.

"It's just very durable and it's easily cleaned," said Emahiser. A slight misadventure with a can of soda hammered home this point.

The DLX also includes a Furrion entertainment center. There's a Bluetooth exterior speaker with LED lighting mounted high curbside along with a Firefly Integrations Multiplex system, on-demand water heater, 13,500-Btu Coleman-Mach air conditioner, exterior shower, 12-foot Carefree of Colorado lighted power awning, 2,000-watt inverter and 16,000-Btu Suburban furnace. A half-dozen 120-volt AC electrical outlets are interspersed throughout the interior.

The test motorhome also came equipped with an optional second 32-inch Samsung LED TV above the entry door, but one may very well be enough. The sightlines of the second TV aren't the greatest, and the standard screen can be removed from its rear position near the dinette/bed and set into a mount on a lower cabinet for outside use along with a small drop-down outside table. Additionally, two removable power pads control various operations, from the awning to lights and the generator.

The DLX tested here was the first of its kind, and Emahiser noted that the builder plans to make a few changes in addition to dropping the second "L" in Traveller (as seen in the photos). As shown, the DLX sports a rear dinette, with the 32-by-18-inch table stowing securely in an integrated pouch on one of the rear European-style doors. Production units will have

two eating locations: one to the rear and the other utilizing the front swivel seats. Another planned floorplan will incorporate a second drop-down rear bed. "You'll sacrifice some of the storage capabilities," said Emahiser, "but you'll have a Class B that will sleep four adults. That's unheard of."

As noted earlier, the National Traveler was initially designed by Dolphin Motor Coach, a builder of high-end Class B coaches on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter platform. It's a market that Regency shares with its Xalta Class B. It's also a market that demands quality design and construction and those same attributes are evident throughout the National Traveler. Realistically, the only drawback we noticed was the questionable mating of the new rear spoiler — home to the rear backup camera — to the fiberglass roof. As in front, the replacement top also sheds the rather ugly commercial clearance lights with smaller and sleeker LED counterparts.

The National Traveler DLX also features two items that Dolphin pioneered on its Sprinter lines: an automotive-style wiring harness to simplify manufacturing and, if necessary, repair, and the optional NDW water-filtration system. An ozone-based water filtration and purification system that combines a 5-micron filtration system with Ozotech's proprietary activated oxygen/ozone generator, the NDW is said to create clean water no matter what the source.

Whether it's used for camping or a replacement for an SUV with a lot more capability, the National Traveler is among a growing number of gas-powered Class B's that have made the platform a lot more affordable and virtually eliminated the segment's

## Manufacturer's Specifications

### Chassis

Model	RAM ProMaster
Engine	3.6-liter gas
SAE Hp	280 @ 6,400 rpm
Torque	260 lb-ft @ 4,400 rpm
Transmission	62 TE 6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.86:1
Front Tires	LT225/75R16C
Rear Tires	LT225/75R16C
Wheelbase	159"
Brakes	Disc
Suspension (F/R)	Independent/Leaf spring
Fuel Capacity	24 gal
Fuel Economy	12-18 mpg
Warranty	2-year/unlimited powertrain

### Coach

Exterior Length	20' 10"
Exterior Width	6' 8"
Exterior Height	9' 9"
Interior Width	6' 1"
Interior Height	7' 4"
Construction	ProMaster van body, fiberglass raised roof
Freshwater Capacity	20 gal
Black-water Capacity	8.5 gal
Gray-water Capacity	27 gal
Water-heater Capacity	On-demand
LP-gas Capacity	4.7 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Refrigerator	3.0 cu-ft
Inverter	2,000-watt
Converter/Charger	60 amps
Batteries	(1) 12-volt chassis, (1) 12-volt AGM house
AC Generator	2.8 kW
MSRP	\$120,393
MSRP as Tested	\$125,975
Warranty	5 years, 60,000 miles

### Weight

UVW	8,260 lbs
GVWR	9,350 lbs
GCWR	11,500 lbs
OCWC	1,090 lbs
UVW	Unloaded Vehicle Weight
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
OCWC	Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (no water, no passengers)

perception of high-end exclusivity. And speaking of perceptions, there's no denying that when you are inside the National Traveler, the raised ceiling creates the perception of being in a larger motorhome. **M**

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# ON CLOUD NINE

A 2002 TIFFIN ZEPHYR 43 CHECKS OFF ALL THE BOXES FOR THIS FLORIDA COUPLE

**T**he quality is remembered long after price is forgotten." Those are the words attributed to Aldo Gucci, whose family name is synonymous with Italian luxury goods, but they apply equally well to the search for a used motorhome. In more than two years of scoping out classic rides, we have found that the most satisfied owners were those who considered quality over price, or even age, when choosing their RVs. Russ and Maryann Erdman, with their 2002 Tiffin Zephyr 43, are proud members of that club.

"I've been a contractor for 30-plus years," Russ said. "I appreciate quality and I recognize great workmanship."

The couple originally owned a 35-foot Bouncer, but on a trip to Colorado they found themselves

"driving with white knuckles" as they navigated the mountains. Tired of being passed by every truck on the road, they decided that what they really needed was a diesel pusher, or as Maryann put it, "a big, heavy coach." Determined to make an informed choice, they spent two to three years researching their options. Because buyers "take a big hit on new motorhomes," Russ wanted to forego the initial depreciation in favor of a used model. They narrowed their focus to motorhomes produced between 2000 and 2006. Their wish list items included a large, powerful engine; tag axle; and a manufacturer with a reputation for quality and customer service.

The couple found their 2002 Tiffin Zephyr in storage at a North Carolina campground in 2014. It had a "For Sale" sign in the window and the door



Russ and Maryann Erdman enjoy the cool breezes and the quiet of the RV lifestyle.

was unlocked, so they took a peek inside.

"We just loved the woodwork and the colors," Maryann said, enthusiastically.

The light flooring, white upholstery and solid-surface counters created a bright, contemporary interior and perfectly set off the solid-walnut cabinetry. The Erdmans saw the interior attention to detail as a clear



The Cummins 500-hp diesel makes towing a trailer easy, even in mountainous terrain.

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## The Classic Ride



The white upholstered Flexsteel furnishings and light-colored tile flooring brighten the interior.

mark of the coach's overall quality.

With a Cummins 500-hp diesel engine, Allison six-speed transmission and a Spartan chassis, there was no question that the Zephyr could handle any challenge on the road. The motorhome had been lightly used, with only 46,000 miles on the odometer, and was in excellent condition inside and out. Equipped with two slides, the coach had been a top-of-the-line model in 2002, ordered with every available option except the rear ladder, and came in at just under \$400,000. The Zephyr's seller, who purchased the unit from the original owner, had never even used the coach due to the unexpected death of his wife. The Erdmans were able to "work a deal and a trade" that satisfied the seller and allowed the couple to purchase the Tiffin for a reasonable price.

That is not to say everything was perfect, but Russ and Maryann stress that anyone buying a used RV should realize that "you don't have to

do everything at one time." In terms of maintenance, in the first year the couple had most of the fluids changed, and in the second year they replaced the coolant and had all belts, hoses and filters checked. Other initial costs included new front tires, a refrigerator cooling unit and an inverter. Russ credits Tiffin's customer service with making upkeep easier.

"Tiffin support is absolutely the best," he says emphatically. "I had a lot to learn, and the previous owner really didn't know his RV, so he couldn't help. Something would go wrong, and I'd get Tiffin on the phone, and usually it was some little thing they could walk me through. I have nothing but good things to say about Tiffin!"

In addition to maintenance, Russ installed a fireplace, three smart flat-screen TVs with sound bars (two inside and one outside), new carpet and LED lights throughout. Most notably, he also did some amazing tile work. Glass tile is used as a backsplash to frame

### FLYING HIGH

The Zephyr is still being manufactured by Tiffin today with an MSRP around \$640,000. A used model like the Erdmans' 43-foot Zephyr, built between 2000 and 2006, can be found on the market for between \$79,000 and \$145,000, though the average is closer to \$90,000.

▶ The original paint on the Zephyr still shines.





the fireplace, and is also on the stairs. It gives the coach a sleek, custom look and is one of many reasons guests cannot believe the Erdmans' motorhome is 16 years old. Both Russ and Maryann point out that modifications like flooring, backsplashes and TVs are really the "inexpensive stuff," and while they make an impression, they should not be a main consideration when making a used RV purchase.

"Your criteria should be the condition of the high-dollar items, the ones that are expensive to replace, like the engine or the generator," Russ explains. "Everything else is easy to redo."

Unlike many of the classic ride owners we've met, Russ and Maryann are not snowbirds. Their home is on a beach in Florida, the same mecca that many motorhome enthusiasts flock to each winter, so you probably won't find the Erdmans exploring the road in January. Instead, they use their Zephyr to find solitude and to escape the summer heat.

"By June, we want to get away. We're looking for cool air and a place without crowds," Russ says with a laugh.

The couple has headed north the past six years, spending at least some of each vacation staying by the shore of Lake Superior. It's a beautiful area where Russ says their view regularly



The glass-tile backsplash gives depth and sets off the white counters in the bathroom and kitchen.

includes "watching an eagle grab a fish." When we spoke, they had even applied to manage their favorite campground there for the month of September.

"We love meeting folks who are heading through, exchanging information and ideas," Russ observes. "We've made friends from all over the country."

Maryann agrees, "It's like having a whole other life."

That is the beauty of the RV lifestyle and the dream behind motorhome ownership. For the Erdmans, that dream has become a reality — thanks to their 2002 Tiffin Zephyr, a quality classic ride. **M**

Clockwise, from below left: The fireplace, incorporating glass tile, has become a focal point of the motorhome. The solid-walnut cabinetry is a mark of Tiffin quality. Glass tile on the entry stairs is a creative touch that adds interest to an often-overlooked area.



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## Screen Time

While set up in camp, Class B and Class C motorhomes can often benefit from additional ventilation at times by rolling down the cab-door windows. The problem is, insects and other critters are extremely quick to find their way into the interior when the windows are open. I solved this problem with some screen, magnets, and hot glue, for an easy and rewarding project. Now, whenever we need some cross-ventilation, I install the screen to the magnets around the windows, roll them down and enjoy the breeze.

**Kay Black** | Seymour, Tennessee



## Kid Catcher

We found a solution to make the cabover sleeping area in our Class C much more child-friendly. We bought a 1-by-8-by-96-inch piece of poplar lumber. It sits between the cushions and the back of the front cabin. This helps to prevent a child from rolling off the sleeping area. We attached cleats on the wall to create a groove, and also attached the ladder brackets to this piece of lumber. Finally, we cut circles in the top of the lumber for hanging odds and ends on hooks. The entire unit can be picked up and stored when not in use.

**Nancy Cable** | via email

## Ultimate Blow Dryer

When I return home from a trip, I wash my motorhome to clean off the bugs and road grime, and also to get the coach ready for storage. But, after washing the coach in the driveway, water spots are always a persistent problem due to the size of the motorhome. To solve the problem of water spotting, I use our leaf blower to blow the water from the motorhome, similar to the way it's done at a commercial car wash. The leaf blower has enough power to remove the water without doing any damage to the graphics, and leaves behind a clean and spot-free surface.

**Denny Doucette** | via email

## Wipe Clean

When driving from a warm, humid climate into a cold front, the glass on a motorhome's windshield often will suddenly become cold, and moisture will quickly condense on the inside — making road and traffic visibility instantly terrible. It might also be

raining, but neither the wipers nor the defroster will help. Apart from pulling over until visibility improves, there is a solution. If your motorhome is like most, the windshield is too large and expansive for the driver to wipe off, which is an unsafe practice to begin with. That's where your co-pilot comes

in. Using a soft towel (cloth or paper) wrapped and secured with rubber bands around a Swiffer base with a long handle, your co-pilot can quickly wipe off the glass, making it easy to see once again. After a while, your blood pressure even returns to normal.

**Jay Sigel** | Pearland, Texas 



### Have an Idea?

Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com). Photos must be high-resolution, at a minimum of 1,400 by 1,400 pixels. If your tip is published, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.

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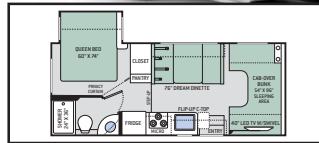
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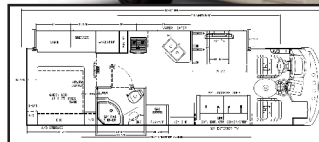


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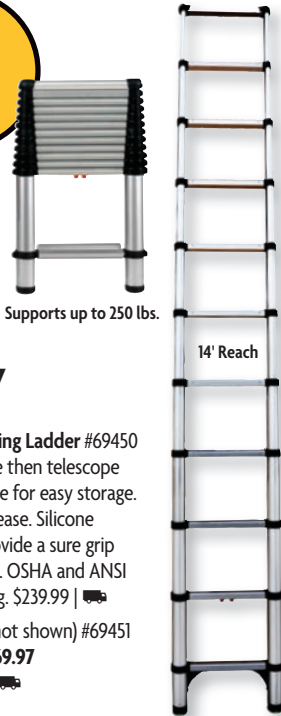
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## Is Anybody Out There?

At his wit's end after the manufacturer of a defective GPS unit would not reply to his repeated requests, a reader asked Hot Line to intervene. He wrote:



“ Please help me with a problem that I have with my Magellan GPS. On December 6, 2017, I bought a Magellan GPS model 5430T-LM online. The GPS was a new unit and was sold with a one-year warranty. On April 23, I emailed Magellan with a list of all the problems I had experienced with this GPS. Some of those problems include the screen blacking out; the unit not giving instructions; losing the route when we switch it off, as in while shopping; and the GPS not allowing the “optimize” function to enable us to change the order of destinations. Plus, even after I set the speed warnings to give a 5 mph buffer above the set speed limit, the unit periodically resets itself to zero tolerance.

Incidentally, it was no mean feat to contact Magellan. The company doesn't supply an email address or a phone number. Plus, its online contact program limits the number of characters you can use in a letter to them. I didn't receive a reply to my April email, so I sent another one on May 7 and included the text of the previous email. Magellan's reply was an automated answer saying they received my correspondence.

On May 28 I sent another email, again with no response. In the correspondence, I requested an older [reconditioned] model 5230T-LM in place of the new 5430T-LM. I previously owned a 5230T-LM, and it worked, but I have lost faith in the new model after experiencing so many problems.

Your help with resolving this issue will be greatly appreciated.

**David Ginsburg | Richmond, British Columbia, Canada**

When a customer is unhappy with a purchase, they would expect to be able to speak with a company representative in order to rectify the situation. In this case, Ginsburg was unable to connect with a live person, which can be quite frustrating.

We passed along Ginsburg's correspondence to Magellan in the hope that the company would offer a replacement; whether it would be the exact older model Ginsburg requested would be up to the company.

We didn't hear back from Magellan, but Ginsburg offered the following update:

“ Thank you most sincerely for Hot

Line's wonderful assistance in resolving the problem I was having with noncommunication regarding a Magellan GPS unit. This week I received an email from Magellan offering me an alternate model, and within two days they dispatched the replacement unit. This was only due to Hot Line's intervention, and I'm grateful to you for your help!

**D.G.**

### Off the Mark

After canceling an order that didn't ship as promised, a reader asked for assistance with getting a refund. He wrote:

“ I ordered a system from Bullseye Leveling LLC after being assured it would ship two days after payment was received. Bullseye even offered a significant discount if I paid with a check rather than a credit card. The company was quick to answer every phone call and email prior to the purchase, but once my \$1,750 check was cashed, communication stopped. After weeks of no word on the status of my order, I canceled it. The company replied that it was going to “refrain” from processing my refund. Can Hot Line please help?

**Matt Keechle | Maineville, Ohio**

When a company fails to make good on a promise, the consumer may or may not possess the right to cancel a transaction. This is a good time to remind potential buyers to read the fine print; sometimes, companies run out of product, or have a limited supply, especially when promotions such as reduced price and expedited shipping are in play. We did reach out to Bullseye Leveling LLC in an attempt to get Keechle a refund. A few weeks later, we received the following note from Keechle:

“ I have received a full refund from Bullseye Leveling. Thank you for helping me get my money back.

**M.K. M**

### Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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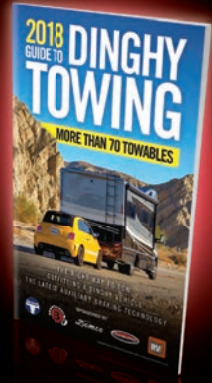
By Ken Freund

## Towing a 2018 Chevrolet Equinox

**Q** We just purchased a 2018 Equinox, the 1.5-liter turbo with front wheel drive. I followed the dinghy directions, but the security alarm continues to “peep.” I contacted the dealer and was informed that it will continue to peep for approximately 30 minutes, then stop. The listing for the 2017 Equinox advises to remove fuse 32 (as stated in *MotorHome’s Guide to Dinghy Towing*). That does not work on the 2018 since it’s a different engine. I think the dealer just doesn’t want anyone to remove fuses. Has *MotorHome* updated its towable list to include the 2018 Equinox?

**Paul Dyresen | via email**

**A** *MotorHome’s* 2018 Guide Dinghy to Towing ([www.motorhome.com/download-dinghy-guides](http://www.motorhome.com/download-dinghy-guides)) lists your model as approved by the manufacturer for flat towing, and the 2018 Chevy Equinox owner’s manual lists it as towable as well, but does not mention the removal of any fuses. We were able to confirm that your dealer was correct and that the noise should stop after 30 minutes.



### Guardian Shield Blocking Airflow?

**Q** Recently I bought a GMC Canyon 4X4 with an automatic transmission and two-speed transfer case. The owner’s manual says to put the transfer case in neutral and the transmission in park to flat tow. I have a Roadmaster Guardian Shield. The owner’s manual says using this shield could damage the transmission. I have asked several mechanics, and talked to three people on the phone at General Motors. No one can tell me why it could do damage. The last person told me if the manual says not to, I probably should not use it. What is your take on this?

**Leo Mehlfaff | Nampa, Idaho**

**A** I contacted Roadmaster tech support (800-669-9690) on your behalf. The representative advised that GM states that the Roadmaster Guardian Shield blocks too much airflow, which doesn’t allow sufficient cooling of the transmission during towing of this particular model vehicle. Roadmaster instead recommends using its Tow Defender unit, which allows sufficient airflow for your vehicle, protecting the front of the vehicle and the transmission.

### Fuel Efficiency

**Q** I have a friend who is an ASE-certified mechanic in Canada and does a lot of work on German vehicles. A German couple came into his shop and asked him to repair their motorhome that was on a 30-day visa before it had to go back to Germany. It was not getting the gas mileage that it should. Under the hood was what appeared to be a standard Ford engine. It was a minor repair (I believe he said it was a sensor). He asked them what kind of mpg/kpl they were getting. When told the equivalent of 31 mpg, he did not believe them. So, he topped the tank off and spent a day driving around, then filled the tank again. He said that 31 mpg was what they got. The customer told him they were not allowed to bring the motorhome into the States long term. Could something like this be true? How can this be possible? Is it a change in computer programming, carburation, or some other means?

**Joe Swenson  
Brooklyn Center, Minnesota**

**A** Europe has had very high fuel prices for a long time, and this has spawned a number of innovative,

compact and lightweight motorhomes built for the European market. There’s a good chance it was a Hymer coach. Many have tiny (based on our standards) four-cylinder engines, often turbodiesels. Many of these are not compliant with U.S. motor-vehicle laws, including emissions regulations. Thus, they are not imported for sale.

### Solar-panel Care

**Q** In reading the article on installing a Solar Power system in the August issue (“Watt do You Need?”), many of the processes were well covered. However, the issue of maintenance was not covered; it is otherwise a well-written article that covers many issues of selection and installation of the system. My motorhome roof seems to be a magnet for road film, tree sap, bird droppings, etc., that would affect the efficiency of a roof-mounted system. How would you measure the system efficiency and know when to clean the panels, and what do you use to clean the panels? I would assume harsh cleaning chemicals would damage the solar panels, so mild cleaning solutions would be used. Are there other routine maintenance items to be considered?

**Pete Garrett | Huntsville, Alabama**



**A** Solar panels are generally durable and fairly resistant to cleaning chemicals, but you only want to use products that are just strong enough to get the cleaning job done. Mild household cleaners, such as Simple Green, should be adequate for most crud. Effectiveness of the panels depends on intensity of sunlight, which varies with the season and time of day, as well as with cloud cover and haze, etc. These factors make it difficult to compare the difference between clean and dirty. You could simply check the panels when you wash the motorhome, or after being bombarded with environmental elements. Devices to measure efficiency are available, but it's much cheaper to just keep the panels clean. You should also check mounting bracket security, and ensure that any holes that go into the roof are properly sealed.

### Slow Oil

**Q** My motorhome came with a 5.5-kW Generac (Primepac 5500) gas generator. I change the oil and filter, but find it extremely slow refilling the oil. It takes only about 1 ounce at a time because it seeps down so slowly. That means about 48 increments — ugh! A local Briggs & Stratton tech had no suggestions, but said he experiences the same dilemma. Do you have any suggestions to speed up the addition of new oil?

**Darrell Fevegeon | Bend, Oregon**

**A** First, make sure you are using the right viscosity oil for the anticipated conditions you will be operating in. Viscosity that is too "thick" will flow very slowly at low temperatures. Then, when it comes time to pour oil, first heat it to about 150 degrees Fahrenheit. This can be done by heating it in intense sunlight, or by warming the oil container in a pot of hot water. Just be careful not to overheat it and melt the plastic!

### Starter Failures

**Q** We purchased a new Thor A.C.E. in 2013. Now with just over 27,500

miles on the odometer, we have had two starters go bad. The first starter went out in 2016 at 20,150 miles, and the second failed recently at 27,300 miles. The symptoms were the same both times: turn on the key and the starter just sits there unresponsive. Both failures occurred at out-of-the-way locations resulting in long tows and trip interruption headaches. The first starter was replaced under warranty at a Ford facility and the second replaced at a large RV repair shop. I was told that power was at the starter when the key was turned on, so I assume the diagnosis is correct. Is there a design issue with Ford F-53 V-10 starters? Are other owners having issues with them? Do I need to carry a spare starter wherever I go? This is our first RV and we are now getting worried about traveling out of town.

**Gary Koch | Hemet, California**

**A** I have not heard of a particular problem with starters on these models. However, excessive heat can "cook" starters, and you live in an area with high summer temperatures. If the starter is right next to the exhaust, a heat shield between the two might be an answer. Although you didn't state whether the replacement starters were rebuilt parts, some off-brands are known for high failure rates. If you are concerned and are handy as a do-it-yourselfer, you might carry a spare starter. If not needed, you can always sell it later on eBay or Craigslist.

### Removing Decals — Tip

I was reading about removing the film off the front of motorhomes. We did a lot of what was said. My husband finally used a decal eraser and it worked well. It still took a lot of time, but it looks great.

**Patti Patterson | Saint Charles, Iowa**

Thanks for sharing your experience. Decal eraser tools are available from many sources, including paint and body supplies stores, Walmart, Lowe's, Amazon, etc.

### Obscure Air Leak

**Q** I have a 2015 Itasca motorhome on a Freightliner XCS chassis. I'm trying to find an air leak in the portion of the system that controls air bag fill/dump and leveling. I already isolated the problem to this area with testing. Unfortunately, the problem increases in severity as the ambient temperature drops (and starts around 60 degrees). Hence, soap-and-water tests find nothing when conducted in the heated shop. As part of my investigation, I have been told the air bags drain and fill during normal running down the road to maintain the ride height. I have found the height adjustment and associated valve that adds air to the air bags (three valves on this coach) but have not found anything that would cause the air to be released while driving. Any insight on areas to look at when the temps drop? I can look underneath if that would be helpful. I'm particularly concerned as I use the rig in fall/winter in the cooler temperatures. Also, I would like to understand how the air-bag pressure might be automatically reduced while driving.

**Roy Aydelotte | Grawn, Michigan**

**A** You live in an area with a lot of moisture in the air and wide temperature swings. This can result in a large buildup of condensation in the air system. The dump valves control ride height, and they can gum up from excess moisture. This could cause the leaking you are encountering. They are located at the front axle. I suggest first checking/replacing the air dryer, which should be located on the driver's side by the rear axle. Then clear out the air lines and check operation. Also, you should open the drain valves on the air tanks to discharge any moisture that may be in them. If all else fails, you might try visiting a local RV or truck repair shop to help diagnose the problem.

### Slideout ... Won't!

**Q** We have a 2002 Coachmen Sportscoach and the slideout

won't function. An RV tech checked the fuses, the three relays and the switch, but still no power gets to the motor. The tech said there might be a controller, but he could not find one. Can you offer a solution, or tell me where the controller is located?

**Jim Terwilligar | Lemoore, California**

**A** As I recall, these don't have a controller unit. Basically, the switch sends power to the motor via the relays. You can test operation of the motor and slide mechanism by temporarily connecting power directly to the motor. Check for voltage at the switch and relays. There might be a wiring or connection problem, or a faulty circuit breaker that is failing in the open position. Aside from these concerns, it is possible that the wiring has failed, or a connection somewhere is loose or corroded. A continuity test with a multimeter will help diagnose this problem.

**Genset Quits — Comment**

This is a comment on the "Genset Quits" letter in the August issue. My Onan 4000 would not start. I watched four hours of YouTube videos to find a possible solution, and I ended up doing the following:

Changing the oil and not filling it too full (the ECU will not let the generator start if there is not enough, or too much, oil); replacing the breaker (it was OK) and the solenoid (it was OK); removing and cleaning the carburetor (using Berryman B-12 carburetor cleaner and Sea Foam Motor Treatment); and finally replacing the ECU.

The OEM ECU will not let the generator start or run with any issues. The new ECU (by Flight Systems) lets you start and run the generator in order to fix the problems. After all of that, it turned out to be the coil (stator). If you spray B-12 cleaner into the intake while the generator is

running at full throttle it might clean the carburetor and solve your problem. The carburetors that Onan uses are very finicky and are easily gummed up with anything that gets past the filter.

**Kim Wardle | Layton, Utah**


Thanks for writing, Kim. Your saga points out the need for a step-by-step diagnostic process, rather than "throwing" parts at it in hopes that it will get fixed; this can be very expensive and time consuming. Spraying carburetor cleaner when the engine is running won't do much, except perhaps dislodge any crud in the throat or on the throttle and choke plates. It does not go into the carburetor itself.

**Ford Quits When Hot — Comment**

This is in regard to the "Ford Quits When Hot" letter in the September issue. Several years ago we had

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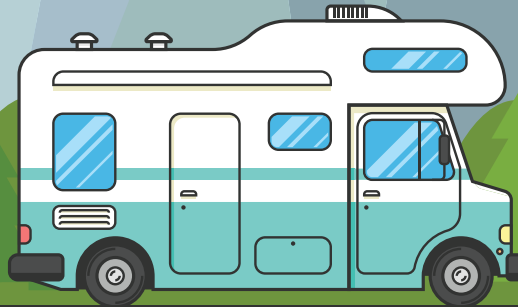
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a similar problem. I'm not saying that the solution to our problem is the cure-all, but it's something to consider. My father-in-law, a long-time auto and aircraft mechanic, suggested removing the flexible fuel line and holding it up to the light to inspect the inside. The interior of the fuel line had cracks, and fuel flowing through the line was causing the loose flaps inside the line to partially cut off the fuel flow. A new flexible fuel line cured the problem.

**William Groom | Puyallup, Washington**

Thanks for writing, William. I have seen this condition occur, although it's more common for fuel lines in this condition to leak (and sometimes start a fire).

**Ford Quits When Hot — Tip**

Regarding the "Ford Quits When Hot" letter in the September issue, another high-failure item on the Ford 460 that can cause the symptoms in Mr. Harper's letter is the ignition module. I can't remember on that model if it's a Duraspark ignition or not. Whatever the case, there is a remote-mounted ignition module that has a high failure rate. If it's a Duraspark ignition it will have a square box with two harnesses coming out from it with two round connectors. Where the wires come out of the module there is a colored grommet. This grommet color is important in identifying a replacement part. I am a heavy-equipment mechanic with 26 years of experience.

**Ian Penney | via email**

Thanks for sharing your experience, Ian. I have replaced a few of these over the years, too. Most of the time the engine wouldn't start at all, but it could also be intermittent.

**Ford Quits When Hot — Cure?**

In regard to Jim and Carole Harper's Ford 460 that quits running when hot (September), it's not a fuel problem but an ignition problem. I, too, had a Ford with the 460-cubic-inch engine that, when it got hot, would stop running.

It was wintertime and I thought it was a hot coil. When it stopped running I would pack snow around the coil, wait a few minutes, and it would start and run for quite a long time, until the snow melted and it would stall again.

Consulting several Ford mechanics, I found the problem. The magnetic pickup in the distributor had a hairline crack. When cold, the crack would be closed and let the spark go through to the spark plugs, but when hot, the crack would open and thus no electricity could flow to the spark plugs, and the engine would stall. Replacing the distributor cured the problem. I hope this helps everybody with the Ford 460 that stops running when hot.

**Daniel Hamblly** | Colorado Springs, Colorado

Thanks for sharing your experience with this engine, Daniel. Basically, when a gasoline engine quits on the road temporarily, it's due to either a fueling problem or an ignition problem. Typically, when the problem [temporarily] clears after a short period (such as five-10 minutes) it's due to a failing electrical component cooling down and starting to work again. Although the fuel-injected Ford 7.5-liter engines have a reputation for in-tank fuel-pump failures, ignition failures such as this can also wreak havoc. A fuel pressure test, when the problem is occurring, can verify/rule out a pump problem rather quickly.

### Chirping Noises

I have been a mechanic all my life and learned a long time ago about belts and motorhomes. When you park and let them sit there, engine pulleys get rusty. As the belt wears off, the rust gets imbedded into the belt. After several times, you will never stop the chirping without replacing the belt. This is also true with the newer micro belts made with Kevlar. Just my two cents worth of learning things the hard way.

**Lewis Myatt** | via email

Thanks for sharing your tip, Lewis. Also note that as belts (continued on page 65)



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(continued from page 61)

age, they dry out and become glazed. This also seems to cause "chirping" or squealing sounds, which can only be squelched by replacing the belt.

**LP-gas Regulator Failures**

**Q** We have a 2014 Itasca Navion motorhome with 15,000 miles on the odometer and we like to boondock. It is equipped with an LP-gas Onan generator, range, furnace, and a dual LP-gas/electric water heater and refrigerator. We have had professional mechanics replace failed LP regulators three times. Number two regulator had an oil discharge; number three regulator was a Camco that lasted only four months. When we have the LP-gas tank filled, we are careful that the electronic valve is closed and emergency switches are off. Newly installed number four regulator is a Marshall-Excelsior. This defect is ruining our experiences. What can account for our repeated LP-gas regulator problems?

**Pat Miller | Chambersburg, Pennsylvania**

**A** The key phrase in your letter is "Number two regulator had an oil discharge." This is a key indicator that water or moisture has gotten into the LP-gas system, most likely from a contaminated source and/or excessive condensation from a new tank that was not properly purged. While I'm not sure what symptoms you experienced that led you to replacing the regulators, this can be quite a pain to fix. Often, a jumping manometer gauge needle during a test is a telltale sign. A professional LP-gas technician or certified RV technician should be able to help remedy the situation. **M**

**Have a Tech Question?**

**Contact our experts:**

Email [tech@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto: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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## Motorhome on the Range

Drive into the Old West at the National Championship of Cowboy Action Shooting

By Alan Rider

**H**ere's a truism of modern life: Wait long enough, and everything that's gone out of fashion will eventually become cool again.

So it is with the Hollywood Western. Looked down upon for decades, these gritty morality plays, populated by gun-slinging good guys intent on squaring off against a bevy of bad hombres, are enjoying a welcome resurgence.

I bring this up because I've found an event where this Old West ethos is not only alive and well, it's downright celebrated. An alternate universe where western traditions like straight talk and even straighter shooting are more than quaint abstractions.

It's known simply as Winter Range (602-397-3434, [www.winterrange.com](http://www.winterrange.com)) and, in many ways, it's as authentic an Old West experience as you're ever likely to have. A place on the outskirts of Phoenix, Arizona, where the duded-up folks you meet walking the dusty streets go by colorful handles like Slick and Diamond Lil, and hats with turned-up brims and low-slung gun belts are the uniform of the day.

Technically, this celebration of the cowboy way of life is billed as the Single Action Shooting Society's National Championship of Cowboy Action Shooting (scheduled for February 18-24, 2019; dry camping is available on-site). That said, the overall effect is like stepping into the recent Netflix Western series "Godless."

The main event runs competitors through a dozen shooting "stages" over

the course of three days. And *stage* is actually a fairly literal description, what with elaborate sets ranging from saloons to stagecoaches that function like old-fashioned carnival shooting galleries.

As each stage begins, a "marshal" briefs the group of shooters — known as a "posse" — on the challenge before them, including the number of targets they're required to engage, with which weapons and in which order.

Participants start the clock by saying an oftentimes tongue-in-cheek catchphrase like, "This town ain't big enough for the both of us!" (what's a Western without memorable dialogue?). They then commence to shooting a series of metal targets — aka the bad guys — in a prescribed order with pistol, lever-action rifle and double-barrel shotgun. While the weapons may not be actual antiques, they are all period-correct and based on firearm designs

popular before 1899.

Scoring involves hitting the most targets in the least amount of time. Missing a target (or shooting them in the incorrect order) carries with it a time penalty of up to 10 seconds, a substantial demerit in matches that are often decided by a few ticks.

Speaking of time, these folks are as good as any wild west gunfighter, with many being able to rip off five accurate pistol shots in less than three seconds. Add the fact that these are real guns, not toys, and it's darn hard to argue that these folks are mere posers.

Other contests at the event include a quick-draw station, where winners are determined by an electronic timer. At the opposite end of the sprawling facility, members of the public can sign up to fire a variety of larger weapons, including a rare 19th century-style hand-cranked Gatling gun.

When you're not oohing and aahing over the feats on the firing line, you'll find dozens of vendors (more appropriately known as "sutlers") selling everything from old-fashioned single-action revolvers to vintage-style clothing (including cowboy hats with actual bullet holes). There's plenty of grub, too, along with cowboy entertainment from western balladeers to trick ropers.

As you head out to roam your own winter range, I'd encourage you to set your sights on this good old-fashioned western adventure, one of many you'll find awaiting you along The Road Ahead. **M**

**“These folks are as good as any wild west gunfighter, with many being able to rip off five accurate pistol shots in less than three seconds.”**

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