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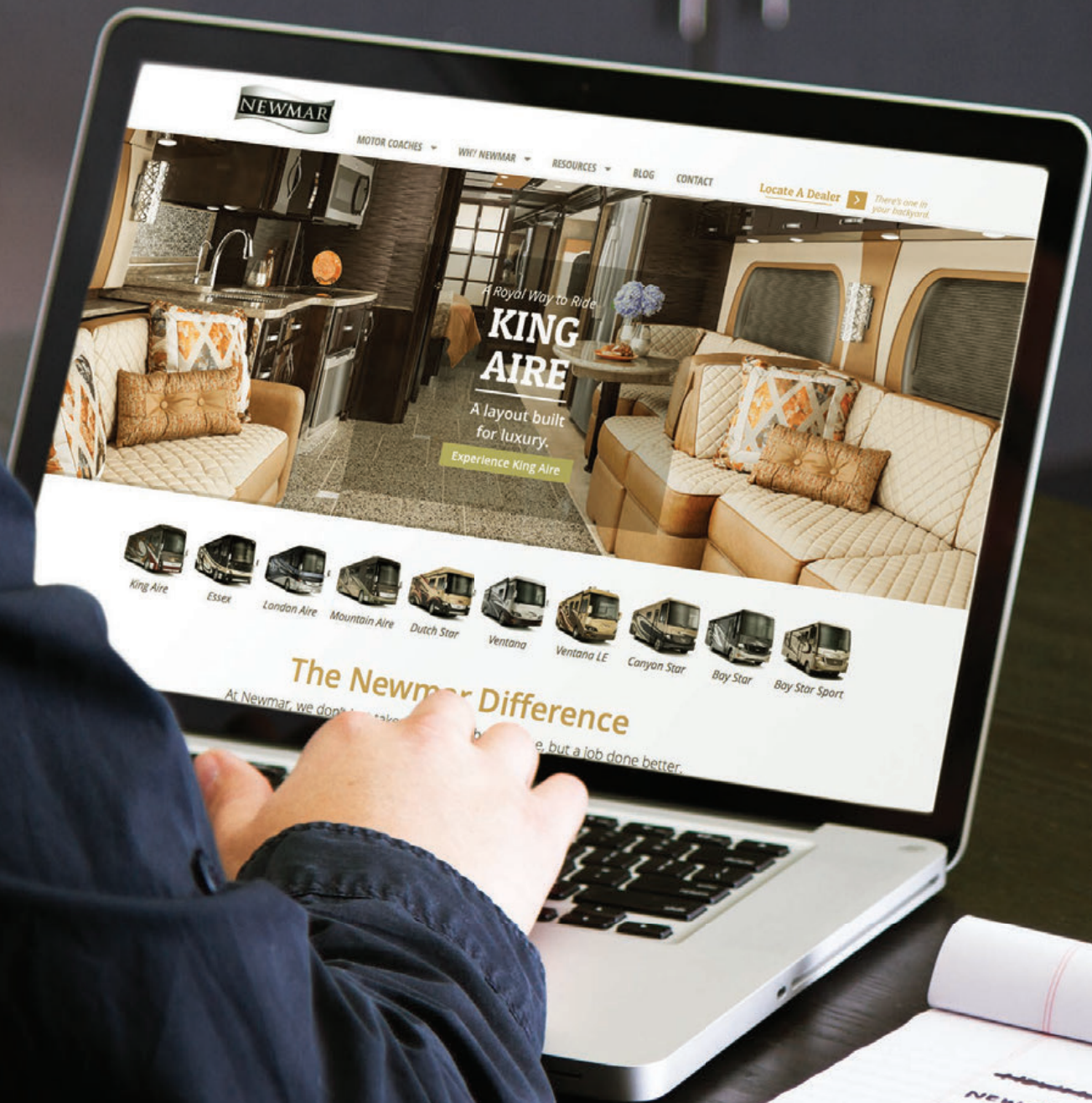
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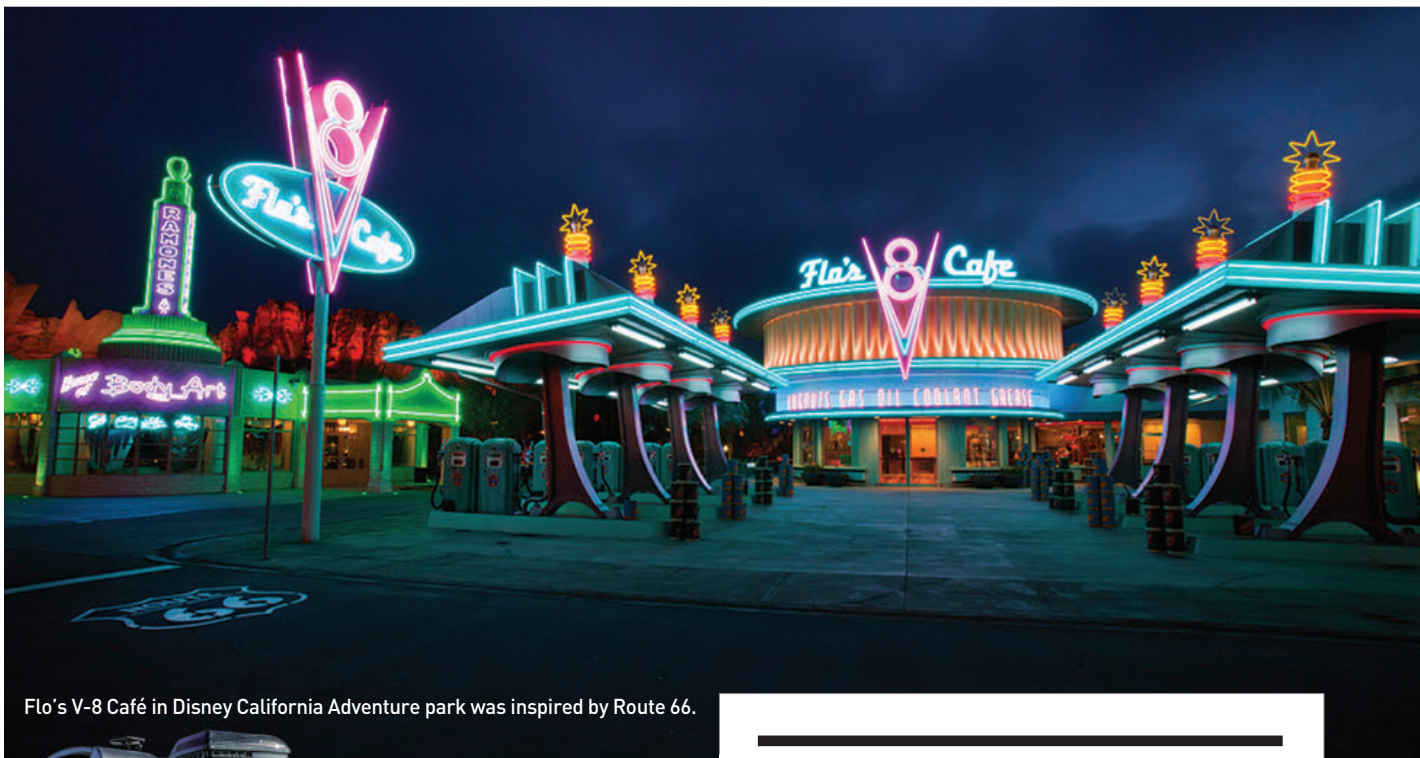
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Flo's V-8 Café in Disney California Adventure park was inspired by Route 66.



The Imperial is EverGreen RV's foray into the Class B market. Pg. 49

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ON THE COVER

Winnebago's Era 70C (see test on page 44) at twilight along California's Pacific Coast Highway at Point Mugu in Ventura County. Photo by Scott Hirko.





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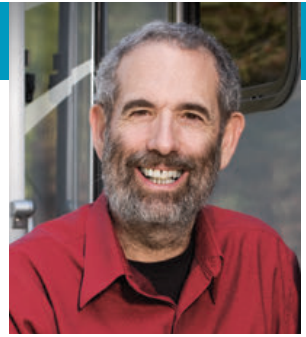
* Spartan Chassis per Mike O'Neil - Freightliner Chassis per Tony Sipple
** Requires Air Brakes on Motorhome



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By Bob Livingston



Class B Revolution

What a difference a few years can make. After burning shoe leather perusing the many aisles of motorhomes on display at the fall annual Open House dealer event in Elkhart, Indiana, it was obvious the motorhome industry is alive and well. It was also clear that type and length no longer dictate luxury and convenience.

At one time, the finer things in life were only found in Class A motorhomes, diesel pushers to be exact. Class C's — with more utilitarian floorplans and features — were reserved for families. Class B's, well, they were van conversions and catered to the more bare-bones crowd. Heck, my first RV was a van that I converted. It was a cross between a hippie wagon and basic RV. The inside of our Dodge van had an interesting combination of paneled walls and flowered window curtains with the necessary accouterments to make it work as a "camper."

Not long after we built our van came the proliferation of van converters who marketed everything

from surfer vans to Class B's with pop- and bubble-tops. There were vans everywhere, and while we enjoyed a number of trips in these RVs, the facilities were rather primitive by today's standards. Taking a shower and using a portable toilet were certainly acrobatic.

Fast-forward to 2015 and Class B's have taken on a whole new role among motorhome enthusiasts: One example, the Era featured in this issue (page 44). It has a full-size shower stall in a bathroom with plenty of space. It also has all the amenities of a larger motorhome, but on a smaller scale. It's definitely not lacking in luxury. This segment of the market is red hot and many owners of higher-end Class A's are stepping down in size without giving up the features they have come to enjoy.

The VW Westfalia probably gets the

credit for building the first practical camping van conversion, a far cry from today's Class B's. But here's a little bit of irony: Most Class B's are now built on German vans.

Class B's are only part of the growing field of motorhome offerings. Class C's rival Class A's in style and livability while Class A's move into new territory, especially the gassers. All this energy can be sampled in the article that covers the highlights of the aforementioned Open House (page 49). As you can see, it's a good time to be a motorhome enthusiast.

It's also a good time to start thinking about places to go in our new motorhomes. Alaska is probably on most RVers' bucket lists and if you're thinking of heading up to America's last frontier, check out "North to Alaska" on page 32. It's the first in our four-part series to make this amazing journey fruitful and exhilarating.

Meanwhile, if you're looking to stay closer to home, consider hanging out with fellow motorhome owners at The Rally in Phoenix, Arizona, Feb. 26–March 1. It's a great time to make travel plans and look at the new motorhomes. **M**

“The VW Westfalia probably gets the credit for building the first practical camping van conversion”



photo: Aaron Healdy

Contributors | January



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MotorHome (ISSN 0744-074X) is published monthly by GS Media & Events (a division of Good Sam Enterprises, LLC), 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036. Periodicals postage paid at Oxnard, CA 93036 and additional mailing offices. The annual subscription rate is \$19.97 per year in the U.S. For Canadian and International subscriptions, add \$12 per year. U.S. funds only.

Postmaster Send address changes to MotorHome,
 P.O. Box 5860, Harlan, IA 51593-1360.

Canadian Return Address GS Media & Events, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, Ontario N9A 6J3. Publication Sales Agreement #40012332.

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Printed in the United States.

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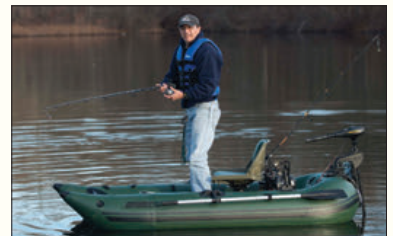
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Are you happy with the color of your motorhome, or would you have preferred a lighter, or darker, model?

That's the question we asked in our October 2014 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.



Window Coverings Reduce Heat

Yes, I am satisfied with the white and silver colors on my rig. It is commonly known that lighter colors reflect more heat than darker colors and that is why RV rooftops are usually all white. The retro-modern Winnebago Brave shown on the front cover of the October 2014 issue is an excellent example of a highly reflective color scheme. Glass surfaces are the main culprit when it comes to heat absorption and heat loss. Many motorhomes have huge windshields and side windows. The use of solar-reflective curtains and window coverings on south-facing glass will drastically reduce heat absorption.

There are a variety of removable (static cling) window-tint products available for automobiles and they work just as well on RV glass. I always

use them on cockpit side windows when driving north/south and I apply them to south-facing windows when parked during summer months. Static cling film is easy to apply and simply peeled off when not needed. I cut mine to fit my windows and roll them up for storage. They have lasted several years and will probably last several more.

Edward Phillips | Greers Ferry, Arkansas

Dark Colors Look Classy

My husband and I have a dark exterior on our Class A Winnebago Vista. It is a tri-tone combination of burgundy, brown and tan. Every time we are in the motorhome we get comments on how classy it looks. We camp in Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky, all of which have hot, humid summers and the dark color has not been a problem. Since

the roof is white, that helps — along with a more than adequate A/C system. We love the darker colors.

Jill Ruthemeyer | Harrison, Ohio

Keeping Cool in the Desert

We are relatively new to motorhome living and bought a 1997 Fleetwood Discovery a few years ago. The outside is white, with tan and brown designs, and we just put a new rubber roof on. When I see a metallic brown coach, I think, "Boy, would I like to have that one!" But then I consider where we live, in the middle of the desert, and I think that the lighter color definitely makes our coach cooler in the warmer months — especially with the white roof. We can always use the fireplace to warm things up in winter.

Linda Kersey | Delta, Utah

Featured Letter

Very Happy With the Exterior Color

Our last motorhome was a Winnebago Adventurer, which was mostly white with some gray. We were in Pensacola, Florida, when we got hit with 26 inches of rain and the coach was flooded. We didn't think we would find a suitable replacement. We searched everywhere trying to find the right one.

We ended up at Florida Liquidation Center in Pensacola and spotted a white motorhome in the back that was being cleaned and had not been put on the lot

yet. It was a 2005 Alfa See Ya in great condition and we love it!

When we pull into a campground, heads turn and people compliment the color — they think it's a beauty, too!

Judy Howell | via email



The Hot-Pink RV

In 1997 we purchased a used 1994 Fleetwood Flair. The exterior is a cream-color base with navy, lavender and hot pink in the design. We would often laugh about "them old people in that hot-pink RV." Seventeen years and 160,000 miles later, we wish we could find another coach that is as livable, reliable and fun to travel in as our Flair. The color wouldn't matter.

Freeman and Bonnie Pearsall
Farmington, Missouri

Silver Sprinter

We have a silver Winnebago Era Sprinter. We would have preferred white; the lighter the color the better — particularly in Florida.

Kevin McManus | Fort Myers, Florida

Filled With Joy

We have a 2008 Fleetwood Providence finished in white diamond, with Accuride aluminum wheels. Every time I gaze at our rig, I'm filled with joy. The coach's light tans and beige are not the

norm nowadays as colors are definitely swaying to the dark side. Not that there's anything wrong with that! I've never been a dark-vehicle person.

Kathy and Charlie Collins
Larkspur, Colorado

European Electricity

I just purchased a new Jayco Precept 31UL. One of the purchase reasons was the light-beige exterior that neither looks cheap nor absorbs a lot of heat from the sun. This enables me to cool the unit with only one A/C and that's important, because here in Europe you'll never find a campground offering more than 30-amp electricity.

Rolf P. Maisch | Boppelsen, Switzerland

More Concerned With Swirls

Actually, black is great for hot climates as it retains hot and cold. My 1995 Fleetwood Bounder is a common brown and tan, which gives it a neutral look. It also has nice straight lines, not swirls all over the sides. I'm more concerned about all the Class A's with

swirly designs. Why are all the manufacturers following the herd on the swirls? And why is it astronomically high to get a custom paint job? Let's go back to simple designs with affordable options for those who want swirls or something semi-custom.

Lynelle N. Phillips | Aurora, Colorado

Three Shades of Gray

The lighter colors on our 2005 Winnebago Adventurer are great. It has three shades of gray. It doesn't show the dirt and we are frequently complimented about how beautiful our motorhome is. The predominance of dark colors on nearly all new motorhomes, including the 2015 Adventurer, is not good. They are unattractive, harder to keep clean and attract more heat. Dark colors are OK for accents, but the basic color needs to be a lighter shade.

Jim Stehn | Rockwall, Texas

Light Colors Inside and Out

We just purchased our eighth RV. We

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shopped for a Class B and passed up many that were just too dark inside. While dark cherry cabinets and black upholstery may be good in big spaces, they make small interiors seem even smaller. The shiny black exteriors are beautiful when clean and polished, but look terrible covered with road salt, sloppy snow, dust and dirt. Since most campgrounds prohibit washing the vehicle, it can be a long time between washings. So we vote for light colors inside and out.

Nancy and Phil Rooker | Elgin, Illinois

There are Choices

Our motorhome is a very pleasant combination of tan and brown that frequently elicits appreciative comments from people. We've never seen a color selection that we like better. It seems that most RV manufacturers offer at least one lighter exterior color. True, darker colors do look more luxurious, and tend to be common on high-end coaches, but

there are other choices.

Rick Boldman | Lake Orion, Michigan

Please Lighten Up Interiors

I like light colors for the interior of motorhomes. When the awnings are out, they reduce the light significantly. With the dark colors on the underside of the awning, that makes it even worse. Add on a rainy day or two and I'm outright depressed! Please lighten up at least the walls and fabrics.

S. Viscito | Springfield, Massachusetts

Doesn't Show Spots and Scratches

We own a 1-year-old motorhome and it has dark colors on the top. The fiberglass roof is white, but the top roof caps are dark, probably in order to coordinate with the dark A/C units and awning covers. We agree that lighter colors should be used mostly on the motorhome in order to keep it cooler and looking cleaner. Dark colors are harder to keep clean and always show water spots and scratches more than

lighter colors.

Evelyn Springer | Wheatland, Missouri

Dogs and RVing

I see a lot of dogs traveling with their owners. Many places say they are dog friendly, but those are mostly for dogs that are smaller than my cat. I'd like to know about places to go in my RV where dogs can run in fields or swim in ponds, lakes and beaches.

Carl Swift | Greeley, Colorado

Question of the Month

Have you visited any off-leash dog areas, parks or beaches during your RV travels?

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Out of This World

The Future is Here ... and it's in Southern New Mexico

By Morey Edelman

America's first commercial spaceport, Spaceport America, is open for business. Both SpaceX, which is testing orbital payload rockets, and Virgin Galactic, which will be flying paying passengers into space, are utilizing this new facility.

Public access to the site is currently restricted until completion of the visitor facilities later this year, but tours are available daily through Follow the Sun Tours (www.ftstours.com), which departs from Elephant Butte, New Mexico (80 miles north of Las Cruces). Tours are available Friday, Saturday and Sunday, and the tour length is approximately 3.5 hours. Reservations are required.

After a 30-mile drive, the tour bus arrives at Spaceport America and visitors spot the very impressive

2-mile runway that will be used for landings of the first commercial passenger spaceship, Virgin Galactic's SpaceShipTwo. Richard Branson's company is offering suborbital rides into outer space for six passengers a flight, at a cost of \$250,000 a ticket.

Tour visitors will also see the Gateway Building, which contains the passenger departure and readiness lounge, the SpaceShipTwo hangar and the Spaceport Operations Center (shown in the photo above).

There are a number of private RV parks in the Elephant Butte and Truth or Consequences area, as well as Elephant Butte State Park, which offers electric and water sites overlooking the large Elephant Butte Reservoir.

For more information, visit <http://spaceportamerica.com>.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Pasties: History and Tradition in the Hand

I'm in love with food in the hand — dishes you can eat without a knife and fork. And none is more delicious or has more colorful history than pasties.

Pasties are meat and vegetable pies you can hold in your hand while you devour them. They're associated with miners from Cornwall, the westernmost county in England. The miners took these tasty, portable pies into the mines for lunch or dinner. For RVers, pasties can be made ahead of time and even frozen for perfect meals on the road.

I learned about pasties while growing up in the California mining town of Grass Valley. Cornish miners had worked the mines, bringing with them the tradition of Cornish pasties. I remember pasties being sold during festivals, Fourth of July celebrations and at the county fair. Today, they're also sold from a couple of brick-and-mortar pasty shops in town and during the Cornish Christmas celebration.

Traditional Cornish pasties are usually shaped like a "D," or an oval, and crimped along the side or top to form a thick crust along the crimp. Miners would hold their pasties with their dirty hands along the crust ridge, discarding the soiled crust when they were finished.

Pasty makers have their own favorite recipes, but traditional pasties include diced or minced beef, potato, onion, and sometimes turnip, cut in rough chunks in a light, peppery seasoning. In Cornwall,



Nancy McLaughlin, owner of Nancy's Pasties in Butte, Montana, has been making pasties for 30-plus years and insists the secret to pasties is great crust.

turnip is usually replaced by rutabaga (aka "Swede" or Swedish turnip). Today, you can find pasties made with chicken, turkey, pork, cheese and even vegetarian pasties. In some places, sweet pasties are made with apple and fig or chocolate and banana. And in Calumet, Michigan, they love pasties so much they hold a PastyFest every June.

The saying goes that Cornish miners' pasties were so tough they could withstand a drop into a mine shaft. The barley flour traditionally used to make pasty pastry makes a hard, dense crust that could have fit the bill. Today, pasty makers usually make a shortcrust that doesn't puff up because it doesn't contain a leavening agent.

Pasties are associated with Tommyknockers, spirits that create knocking sounds indicating rich veins of ore or warning of impending mine cave-ins. To appease the "knockers" and encourage their goodwill, miners would leave a small portion of their pasties within the mine for the Tommyknockers to eat.

Maybe I'll leave a little of my next pasty in my motorhome to encourage the road spirits to show me the way.

Have a favorite pasty shop?

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Marshall's Pasties, Grass Valley, California. Order these delectable pasties to go or eat there, but it's cash only; 530-272-2844

Nancy's Pasty Shop, Butte, Montana. Nancy makes flaky mini-pasties that you can eat while going down the road or big, 8-inchers that require a plate, knife and fork; 406-782-7410



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Waste Master

There's no denying that emptying the holding tanks can be a dirty job, but Lippert Components is trying to give this task a cleaner image with its new Waste Master waste-management system. Unlike traditional sewer-hose coils that trap debris, the tough, wireless Waste Master hose is designed with its helical coil on the outside, while the inside is much smoother, preventing waste from getting trapped inside. The permanently connected nozzle is molded with an easy-grip handle, an integrated shutoff valve and a clear-view port that allows the user to see when waste has been completely evacuated. The nozzle also features a 90-degree discharge port that is easy to fit into any sewage inlet. MSRP: \$169.

Lippert Components, 574-537-8900, www.lci1.com



A Faster Screwdriver

Motorhomes are composed of a lot of screws. Now you can make it a lot easier to tighten or remove them with the new 4V MAX Lithium Pivot Screwdriver by Black and Decker. The tool's handle rotates 90 degrees to allow for pistol grip or inline orientations, and an included micro USB wall charger supplies the screwdriver with a 400-milliamp charge rate. In addition, the screwdriver accepts any micro USB-to-USB charging cable (not included), so it can be charged from a variety of ports. The lithium battery holds a charge for up to 18 months, according to the company, and the state-of-charge display allows you to keep tabs on battery condition. Includes bits and accessories. MSRP: \$39.99.

Black and Decker, www.blackanddecker.com



Retro 'Bago

The brow is back ... again. Winnebago has just introduced its new Brave 31C floorplan sporting the legendary "eyebrow" design. Offered in three floorplans in both the Winnebago Brave and Itasca Tribute lines, this retro coach is loaded with all of the modern conveniences you'd expect in a contemporary motorhome. The 31C boasts a full-wall slideout on the street side, and an opposing dinette slideout for an expansive living space. Sleeping for up to six is made possible by a sofa bed, a queen or optional king mattress in the bedroom, and an available StudioLoft bed that lowers from the ceiling above the cab. Add plentiful storage, and you've got a comfortable, modern coach with the vintage styling we all love. Base MSRP: \$118,999.

Winnebago, 641-585-3535, www.gowinnebago.com



Drier Air

Winter brings cool, damp air that can cause mold, mildew and corrosion inside a motorhome. The Air-Dryr from Davis Instruments uses natural convection to circulate air without switches, fans or thermostats. Just place it on the floor and plug it into a 120-volt AC outlet. The air is heated and then released through the top vents of the device. As warmed air rises, cooler damp air is drawn in and the process repeats. Costing no more to operate than a lightbulb, according to the company, the Air-Dryr makes no sound, is safe to touch and features a thermal cutoff in case airflow is impeded. It's available in two sizes. MSRP: \$59.99.

Davis Instruments, 800-678-3669, www.davisnet.com



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NPS Fee-Free Days for 2015 ⬇

"Every day is a great day in a national park, and these entrance-fee-free days offer an extra incentive to visit one of these amazing places," said National Park Service (NPS) Director Jonathan B. Jarvis. Generally, 133 of the 401 NPS sites have entrance fees ranging from \$3 to \$25. While entrance fees will be waived for fee-free days, amenity and user fees for things such as camping, transportation or special tours will still be in effect.

► The Park Service, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation and the U.S. Forest Service also participate in the America the Beautiful National Parks Pass and Federal Recreational Lands Pass programs. These passes provide access to more than 2,000 national parks, forests, wildlife refuges, grasslands and other federal lands. Four passes are available:

- Free annual pass to current military members and their dependents
- Free lifetime pass for U.S. citizens with permanent disabilities
- \$10 lifetime senior pass for U.S. citizens aged 62 and older
- \$80 annual pass for the general public

2015 ENTRANCE-FEE-FREE DAYS

Jan. 19, Martin Luther King Jr. Day

Feb. 14-16, Presidents Day weekend

April 18-19, National Park Week's opening weekend

Aug. 25, National Park Service's 99th birthday

Sept. 26, National Public Lands Day

Nov. 11, Veterans Day



⬅ Coach House Celebrates 30 Years

Venice, Florida-based motorhome manufacturer, Coach House, is gearing up to celebrate its 30-year anniversary.

The company was founded in 1985 by Ruben Gerzeny, and his sons David and Steven, to meet the growing demand for smaller, easier-to-drive motorhomes. They began by converting Ford, Dodge and Chevy vans into Class B's. In 1996, Coach House moved to a new factory with a showroom and campground hookups for visiting customers. From here, the company developed a downsized Class C called the Platinum and brought it to market in 2000. The Platinum rides on a cutaway Ford E-450 chassis, and Coach House manufactures a one-piece hand-laid fiberglass shell, reinforced with carbon fiber, which is mounted to the chassis.

In 2007, Coach House introduced the Platinum II, constructed on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 3500 chassis. It features the same sort of one-piece fiberglass shell as the Platinum, while offering greater fuel efficiency.

Now in its 30th year, Coach House is introducing the Arriva, an all-new Class B. Built to the same standards as the Platinum line, the Arriva brings the company full circle, back to its roots as a Class B van converter. Coach House motorhomes are sold factory direct.

NEWS BRIEFS

Date Change for RV Rally

► Organizers of the Camping World/Good Sam Rally recently announced a change to the date for this year's rally in Phoenix, Arizona. The Rally will run Feb. 26 through March 1 at the Phoenix International Speedway. The event will feature RV-related seminars and activities, hundreds of motorized RVs and more than 300 indoor booths with the latest RV accessories. Rally-goers can also test-drive an RV on the track. Nightly entertainment includes tribute bands Ticket to Ride (The Beatles), Super Diamond (Neil Diamond) and the RealTones Band ('50s, '60s and '70s music). Halo's Best in Show dog show will be held on Feb. 28 and a Salute to Veterans is on March 1. For more information, call 800-701-1399 or go to www.therally.com.

New Site for Las Vegas KOA

► Boyd Gaming Corp. and Kampgrounds of America (KOA) have reached a long-term agreement that makes Sam's Town Hotel & Gambling Hall the new home of Las Vegas KOA. Under terms of the lease agreement, KOA assumed operations of Sam's Town RV Park Oct. 1, 2014. The park has been renamed the Las Vegas KOA at Sam's Town, and has become KOA's exclusive home in Vegas. With nearly 500 spaces across two parks, Las Vegas KOA at Sam's Town will offer 30- and 50-amp full-hookup sites, pull-through sites and extended-stay opportunities. The park has shade trees, grass and designated pet areas. Amenities include two pools with hot tubs, laundry and shower facilities, cable and Wi-Fi.

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Tucson, Arizona



Photos: Mary and Jim Zalmanek

A Showcase of Gems, Minerals and Fossils

In 1954, the Tucson Gem and Mineral Society held a free exhibition at a local school. Sixty-one years later, the Tucson Gem, Mineral and Fossil Showcase has grown to be one of the largest events in the gem and mineral world. An estimated 55,000 people come to Tucson, Arizona, during the two-week period in early February. The "Gem Show" includes more than 40 sites around town in hotels, big white tents and exhibit halls. Dealers from all over the world bring treasures to delight sophisticated collectors and casual shoppers alike.

The highlight is the Tucson Gem and Mineral Show held in the Tucson Convention Center during the final weekend, Feb. 12-15. An estimated 250 dealers sell a wide variety of items. Display cases of award-winning private mineral collections line the aisles. Museums from across the nation and around the world display some of their finest specimens. In 2014, the Smithsonian lent its 19th-century Marjorie Merriweather Post diamond tiara. Its flower petals and leaves are set with 1,198 diamonds. An armed guard stood nearby.

With thousands competing for parking places, it's best to leave your motorhome at the RV park.

For more information, go to www.tgms.org/2015show.htm. — Mary Zalmanek

Charlotte, North Carolina

Miracle Plane Lands at the Carolinas Aviation Museum



Photo: Lowell Warner

Few of us will ever forget the "Miracle on the Hudson" or the images of passengers standing on the wings of a sinking Airbus A320. Thanks to the skill of Captain Chesley "Sully" Sullenberger III and his crew, all 155 people on board survived an emergency river landing after a bird strike disabled both engines on Jan. 15, 2009.

Near North Carolina's Charlotte Douglas International Airport — the flight's planned destination — you'll see the actual plane, trucked down from New Jersey and reassembled in a hangar. Exhibits include the pilots' uniforms, a life raft and items recovered from the plane such as passengers' suitcases, a coffeepot, beverage cart and safety card. The culprit flock (remains were identified by a Smithsonian Institution team through DNA bar coding) is represented by a stuffed Canada goose.

The Carolinas Aviation Museum has other significant commercial, military and civil aircraft, and exhibits that trace the history of aviation. But attendance has doubled since US Airways Flight 1549 finally made it home.

For more information, call 704-997-3770, or visit www.carolinasaviation.org — Christine Goodier

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St. Petersburg, Florida

Enjoy gorgeous beaches, island wildlife preserves, art, history, culture and attractions with an international flair

By Pam Windsor

If you're traveling to St. Petersburg, Florida, or St. Pete as it's often called, you might want to start with Fort De Soto Park at the southern tip of the Pinellas County peninsula. The massive park, made up of five interconnected islands, offers a scenic, tranquil setting where sightings of pelicans, egrets, sea turtles and dolphins are part of everyday life. You'll find an award-winning beach, a campground with 151 RV sites and partial hookups, fishing piers, bike and kayak rentals, and numerous nature and fitness trails. History buffs can explore remnants of fort buildings and artillery holds built during the Spanish-American War to help defend Tampa Bay against an invasion.

Photos: Pam Windsor



From Fort De Soto, if you're up for an excursion to a deserted island you can catch a ferry to nearby Egmont Key. The island, accessible only by boat, features a working lighthouse built in 1858. You'll also find fort ruins built during the early 1900s. No one lives on the island today, which is a National Wildlife Refuge.

Captain Jeff Stewart has piloted the ferry for 12 years and still enjoys taking people to see Egmont Key for the first time. On the short ride from Fort De Soto he shares historical trivia, interesting facts about the waters of the Gulf of Mexico, and lists the protected wildlife visitors can expect to see, such as some of the more than 2,000 tortoises that roam the island.

"People love to see the turtles," he says with a smile. "They're not used to seeing those."

But the most amazing sights are reserved for those who snorkel and explore some of the old fort ruins that, due to erosion, have long since slipped beneath the clear Gulf waters.

"We find sharks, we find manatees, we find big fish, little fish," Stewart explains. "We find



Getting Here

If driving from the East Coast, take Interstate 95 south to Interstate 4 west, then Interstate 275 south; if arriving from the Midwest and South, take Interstate 75 south to I-275 south; and if coming in from the West, take Interstate 10 east to I-75 south, and then I-275 south.

sea turtles. One year there was a big sea turtle living in the fort,” he said, stretching out his arms. “We find rays like crazy, sting rays, manta rays, spotted eagle rays, cownose rays and there are a lot of little bat rays that swim here.”

On the return trip to Fort De Soto, if there’s time, Stewart may offer to search for dolphins. On one recent trip, Lani Grano, who served as Stewart’s first mate, pointed to a mother and baby dolphin jumping up out of the water, then back down, over and over again.

“The babies stay right with the mom. They’re going to mimic her,” says Grano. “The mom and the babies are tight. If it’s a boy dolphin, he’s going to leave the mom around, oh about six years. But the girls are going to stay with mom and her pod pretty much through their whole lives. They’re a lot like us. A daughter’s a daughter the rest of her life, a son’s a son until he takes a wife, right?” she said, shrugging her shoulders and laughing.

After leaving Fort De Soto, as you head north up the coast, you’ll pass a number of well-known beaches like St. Pete Beach, Treasure Island and Madeira Beach. Each boasts its own characteristics, but all have “sand like sugar and aqua waters,” something that makes beaches here so attractive. They are warm and welcoming places to spend the day.

When you’re ready for a break from the water, downtown St. Petersburg is home to several top-notch museums.



Above left: Armstrong Rapid-Fire Rifles on display at Fort De Soto. Above right: One of the few remaining railroad boxcars used by the Nazis to transport Jews and other prisoners to concentration camps during the Holocaust. It’s one of the exhibits at the Florida Holocaust Museum.

For art lovers, there’s the famous Dali Museum. The museum houses the largest collection of the surrealist artist’s work outside his native Spain and attracts many European visitors, like Allen Hansen from Denmark. “It was very interesting to see his early work and when he shifted to be more surreal,” Hansen says referring to Dali. “This is very good museum experience.”

The Florida Holocaust Museum, one of the largest such museums in the United States, honors the millions killed in Nazi Germany during World War II. Their stories are told through photographs, interpretive panels, documents, film clips, artifacts and an old boxcar from Nazi-occupied Poland. Many of the artifacts here were donated by local survivors, making the stories all the more personal.

In addition to permanent exhibits, the museum brings in other, often high-profile collections from around

the country every three months.

One recent exhibit (Fabric of Survival: The Art of Esther Nisenthal Krinitz), featured the story of Esther Krinitz, a Polish girl who was 12 when the Nazis came to her small town. She escaped with her sister, but never saw her family again. Many years later, Krinitz used pieces of fabric to create detailed and vivid fabric tapestries to tell her harrowing and very moving story, and depict the people and events throughout her life.

DID YOU KNOW?

There are 250 parks and wildlife preserves located in the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area.

The Egmont Key Ferry takes passengers back and forth between Fort De Soto and Egmont Key.



While the museum honors those whose lives were lost in the Holocaust, it goes beyond simply marking a dark and horrible time in history. It does that through programs, tours and school education. Tour manager Sandy Mermelstein says they try to focus on teaching and encourage not just tolerance, but acceptance.

"I think the importance of it all is that we need to embrace our differences and all human beings have value. Every single life has value."

The museum has even worked to use the lessons of the Holocaust to teach modern-day lessons to children about the dangers of bullying.

During your trip to this part of Florida, be sure to visit Tarpon Springs. This established Greek community dates back to the early 1900s when divers came from Greece to work in the sponge industry. As you walk along the waterfront, you'll often hear those who live and work here speaking Greek. A small museum shows a short film about natural sponges and how they're gathered, processed and used. The sponge industry has had ebbs and flows over the years, but many, like Frank Notte, still make a living at it. He admits, it's not an easy life.

"You spend at least 20 days a month out at sea, if you want to be productive," he says, offering a rundown of what the job entails. "You dive with a bag and a knife. You wear a wet suit, some sort of boot, a construction boot so you get some traction. You walk the bottom, you're looking for specific species actually, out of several thousand. You really have to know what you're looking for."

The sponges grow on hard, rocky surfaces and have to be cut away with a knife. Divers cut them one by one, adding them to a sack they carry with them.

When he's not at sea, Notte takes tourists out on a boat for an exhibition dive, wearing the heavy, weighted gear used by sponge divers in the old days.

"It's actually one of the longest-running attractions in the state of Florida," he says referring to the exhibition dive. "It's been going since 1924."



Above: Diver Frank Notte with a collection of natural sponges in Tarpon Springs, Florida. Right: Gopher tortoises roam Egmont Key and are one of the island's most popular attractions. Below right: Fort De Soto Park Campground has 151 partial-hookup RV sites and many are on the waterfront.

During the trip, he shares some of the history, shows how the diving is done, and even brings a live sponge back to the boat to show what they really look like before they're processed.

After learning about the sponge industry, a good meal at a nearby authentic Greek restaurant might sound appealing. Local fare includes Greek favorites like souvlaki, moussaka or fresh seafood like fried calamari, broiled octopus, or grilled fish caught in the reefs offshore. Greek bakeries offer a variety of pastries for dessert. To round out the Greek experience, there is the historical St. Nicholas Greek Orthodox Cathedral. The church, built with authentic Greek marble, was patterned after the St. Sophia Cathedral (Hagia Sophia) in Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey). There are nearly two dozen elaborate stained-glass windows and numerous icons cover the walls inside, including one, the icon of St. Nicholas, that is said to shed real tears. A woman cleaning the church in 1970 was the first to notice the drops of moisture. Since then, thousands have visited the



church to view the weeping icon.

While the beaches are definitely one of St. Petersburg's shining attractions, there's a lot more to the city and surrounding Pinellas County to keep visitors interested and entertained. There's definitely something for everybody. **M**

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By Bobbie Hasselbring

FOUR TIMES THE FUN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

These attractions — Disneyland, Disney California Adventure, Knott's Berry Farm and Universal Studios Hollywood — appeal to the kid inside all of us

Everyone loves amusement parks and Southern California boasts the four granddaddies — Disneyland, Disney California Adventure, Knott's Berry Farm and Universal Studios Hollywood. While kids of all ages can have a ball touring these parks, prices can be steep. Park admission, food and nearby lodging can quickly drain your wallet. To save money, we decided to take in Southern California's sunshine and the major amusement parks in our motorhome. It turned out to be a real adventure.

I was born in Southern California's Anaheim where Disneyland and Disney California Adventure park are located. Back then, Anaheim was pretty rural and I walked to school through orange

groves and strawberry fields.

Today, Southern California, and especially Anaheim, is dominated by chain hotels and restaurants. We see an occasional RV tooling along



See Them All

Disneyland park and Disney California Adventure, in Anaheim, are 15 minutes from Knott's Berry Farm; it's another 45 minutes north to Universal Studios.

the many eight-lane freeways, but not many. And with high land prices, RV parks are scarce. (Disney just purchased one of the largest RV parks — Anaheim RV Village — to convert it into an employee parking lot.)

That's why we're thrilled to find Orangeland RV Park, a neat-as-a-pin, full-hookup park in Orange, a few miles from Disney's two parks. Built in 1971 on a former citrus grove, they saved many of the orange, lime, lemon, and tangerine trees and the owners encourage guests to enjoy the fruit. The trees and grass give the 195-site park a green feel that's missing from the surrounding landscape. And because it's located in the city of



Photo: Courtesy Disneyland Resort

Orange, not Anaheim, the park doesn't charge the 20 percent bed tax that's attached to hotel and RV lodging in Anaheim.

We also love that Orangeland offers free Wi-Fi, two dog areas, a covered kid's play area, tidy showers/laundry facilities, and a big picnic/barbecue area where guests enjoy the great weather and dine alfresco. While we don't take advantage of their pool, billiards, shuffleboard or the mini-golf green, Orangeland makes a perfect home base for exploring the area's amusement parks.

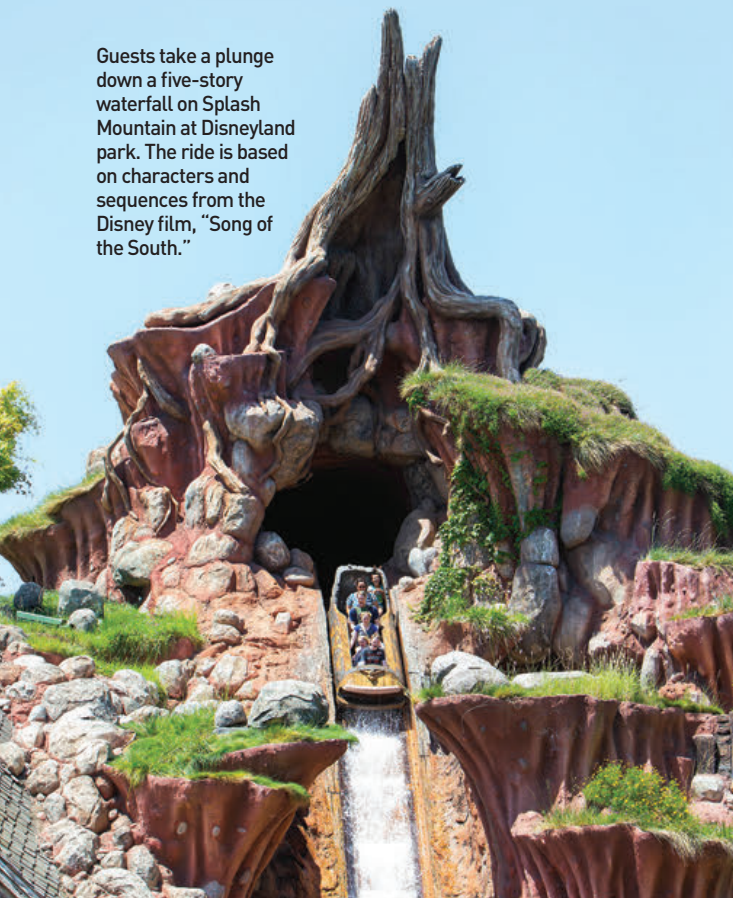
Old California and Mickey Mouse

Like the other amusement parks, Disney offers plenty of parking, including parking for RVs. However, we're trying to cut costs, so we take Orangeland's shuttle service, which picks us up and delivers us to Disney's doorstep. With unlimited trips back and forth for \$3 a day per person, it's a terrific choice.

Disney operates two parks — Disneyland and Disney California Adventure — right next to one another. Both are worth exploring. To save money, we've purchased 2-Day Park Hopper Tickets, which allow us to experience both.

We start with Disney California Adventure, where they've re-created the era between 1920 and 1950 in California. They've built downtown Los Angeles with old streetlights, an electric trolley and two- and three-story art deco buildings. It's fun to stroll these streets knowing this is a city my mother and grandmother would recognize.

Guests take a plunge down a five-story waterfall on Splash Mountain at Disneyland park. The ride is based on characters and sequences from the Disney film, "Song of the South."



At night, lights, water, music, fire and animation come together like never before in "World of Color" at Disney California Adventure park.

In the Cars Land town of Radiator Springs, there's an old-time motel, a junk store and Flo's V-8 Café, a clever recreation of an old Route 66 gas station serving burgers and fries. There's also an impressive auto ride, Radiator Springs Racers, that transports us in individual race cars through a hilly, desert-like landscape and ends with a thrilling race, complete with sound effects, between our car and the one next to us that leaves us grinning.

Paradise Pier pays tribute to coastal California's piers and boardwalks with traditional midway games and fair food and California Screamin', a super-fast roller coaster that turns us around and upside down.

Before we leave California Adventure, we stop at The Twilight Zone Tower of Terror for a stomach-dropping elevator plunge. This popular ride takes us to the top of a creepy hotel with great views of the park and then repeatedly "drops" us so fast we're weightless in our seats.

After enjoying the evening at Orangeland RV Park, including savoring sweet oranges for dessert, we're up early for our Disneyland adventure. We hop the \$3 shuttle and step into "The Happiest Place on Earth." The park is busy with groups of teenagers, families pushing strollers and wrangling wide-eyed youngsters, and plenty of kid-for-a-day grownups of all ages. Many sport Mickey/Minnie ears — glittery, striped, polka dot, furry, flowered and even themed ears like pirates, graduates, and brides and grooms. Despite the throngs, the park doesn't feel crowded. The happy energy is downright contagious and we're soon giggling like children.

We didn't bring our dogs, but Disney offers on-site day care (\$20 per pet, no reservations). They don't allow coolers, but allow water and snacks (sidewalk vendor prices are high). We're also grateful for our comfortable shoes, hats and sunscreen.

Disney's FASTPASS reservation system enables us to hold a spot on popular attractions, come back at our appointed time and bypass the wait. We also use the single-rider system, each of us hopping rides singly that allows



quick access [e.g., 5-minute versus a 60-minute wait on the Bobsled ride].

Disneyland is divided into “lands” — New Orleans Square, Frontierland, Critter Country, Adventureland, Mickey’s Toontown, Fantasyland, Tomorrowland and Main Street, USA. Designed so that guests are immersed in a story being told through the senses, Magic Kingdom buildings are scaled to give the illusion of full-size street scenes. Staff, called cast members, are in full costume and live music floats from every street corner.

Red trolleys in Disney California Adventure park provide tours and a taste of “20th-century” California. Small cars twist and turn on an elevated track on the Coast Rider attraction at Knott’s Berry Farm.

Tours puts us into a “Star Wars” movie and Space Mountain whisks us through space with amazing optical illusions that leave us spinning.

Hunger forces us away from the rides and we head to Plaza Inn, a cafeteria-style restaurant in a Victorian farmhouse. We split three pieces of crispy fried chicken, mashed potatoes, green beans and a biscuit for the bargain price of \$15.99.

blasts of steam and smoke. And Splash Mountain, a flume log ride that moves through Br’er Rabbit characters and landscapes, surprises us with two big drops that leave us laughing and refreshingly damp.

Western Landscape, Thrill Rides

On day three, we head to Knott’s Berry Farm, site of a former truck farm operated in Buena Park in the 1920s by Walter and Cordelia Knott. Now a 160-acre amusement park, this family-friendly multigenerational theme park combines authentic Western history with high-tech thrill rides.

Instead of scheduling a ride with Orangeland’s shuttle service (it’s not a scheduled trip), we drive and park in Knott’s ample lot (\$20 for RVs). Our stomachs are already rumbling, so we walk to the famous Mrs. Knott’s Chicken Dinner Restaurant located just outside the park’s gate (free three-hour parking for restaurant guests). An older server in a striped dress and tennis shoes ushers us into the 1960s maple-and-flowered-wallpaper dining room and we order chicken dinners. It’s a delicious pile of food — salad or soup, four pieces of home-style fried chicken, a mountain of mashed potatoes and creamy country gravy, corn or cabbage

“The happy energy is downright contagious and we’re soon giggling like children.”

Many iconic landmarks like the Matterhorn Bobsleds, Sleeping Beauty Castle, and the space-age Disney Monorail are still here. We love exploring the various landscapes with their lifelike attention to detail, but we’re hooked on the adrenalin-rush attractions. Tomorrowland’s Star

Then we head to the Indiana Jones Adventure ride, an off-road journey that puts us in the “Temple of Doom” movie, including a thrilling moment where a huge boulder threatens to squash us flat. The high-speed roller coaster Big Thunder Mountain Railroad has us twisting and turning through



Special effects dazzle guests at the “Waterworld: A Sea War Spectacular” show at Universal Studios Hollywood.

with ham, an entire plate of light-as-air buttermilk biscuits and pie or sherbet — all for \$17.99. We box up the leftovers, including boysenberry pie, and stash them in the RV's fridge for later.

Knott's Berry Farm has distinct regions — Ghost Town, Calico Square and Camp Snoopy — and wild roller-coaster-style rides that snake up, over and around the park. Ghost Town is much like I remember it — a Western town with replicated or authentic buildings and artifacts like an 1879 one-room school house, an 1881 steam engine, a historic Dentzel carousel and Calico Mine ride and a museum filled with old guns, barbed wire, branding irons and more.

Entrance costs about half the price of Disney (senior discounts available) and the park is filled with families enjoying the sights, rides, and the many shady spots to sit and people-watch. We buy Fast Lane Passes for a few extra dollars for head-of-the-line ride access.

Attractions like the steam train, stagecoach and Wild West show are great for all ages. Camp Snoopy's kid-sized rides are designed for little ones. We leave the 15 fast and furious high-tech rides, including Ghost Rider, a giant, old-style wooden roller coaster, and the Silver Bullet suspended roller coaster that rises 146 feet, drops 109 feet and sends riders screaming through twists, turns, spirals and upside down rolls, to the more daring.

We're in the Movies

The next morning, we're off to Universal Studios Hollywood. Located near downtown Los Angeles, it's a 45-minute freeway drive and we tuck the coach into Universal's RV parking area. While Disney parks combine fantasy and sensory-intense rides and Knott's Berry Farm pairs authentic history and heart-stopping thrill rides, Universal Studios Hollywood puts visitors into the movies. This park

celebrates and brings films to life. Our Front of the Line passes, which cost a bit extra, make it quick and easy.

We take the Universal Studio Tour tram through moviemaker backlots — fronts of Western towns, New York city streets, European (continued on pg. 72)

For More Information

Anaheim Resort RV Park

714-774-3860, www.anaheimresortrvpark.com

Disneyland Parks

<http://disneyland.disney.go.com>
When visiting Disneyland theme parks, RVs should use the main entrance to the Mickey & Friends Parking Structure, located south of the Disneyland Drive and Ball Road intersection.

Knott's Berry Farm

714-220-5200, www.knotts.com

Orangeland RV Park

714-633-0414, www.orangeland.com

Universal Studios Hollywood

www.universalstudioshollywood.com

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NORTH TO ALASKA: A 5,000-MILE JOURNEY TO THE LAST FRONTIER

The First Leg — Dawson Creek, British Columbia, to Dawson City, Yukon Territory

For many people, Alaska is a dream destination that elicits many questions. Shall we cruise or fly? Will we see the real Alaska? How about traveling the historic Alaska Highway in our own motorhome? I can tell you from experience that the answer is, absolutely yes! Nothing else compares.

My husband, Arjun, and I chose to make this epic 5,000-mile journey with an RV group tour organized by Adventure Caravans. On our trip we would learn about Alaska's captivating history and ancient cultures while exploring towering mountains, massive glaciers, pristine fjords, unfettered wildlife and the marvel of Mother Nature's artistry when left undisturbed.

Alaska is larger than Texas, California and Montana combined. Everything here is super-sized, so think big! Mount McKinley — North

America's highest peak — dominates. More than 100,000 glaciers cover the land and in the fertile Palmer Valley, farmers routinely grow 80-pound cabbages and giant pumpkins during the long summer sunlight.

Before departing, we remember to pack our passports and drivers licenses; the current vaccination papers for our dog, Reggie; prescription medications; a spare tire for the motorhome and dinghy; extra gas cans (there can be up to 150 miles between fuel stations); and mosquito repellent. We're ready to go!

Day 1: Dawson Creek

Far up in northeast British Columbia, Canada, lies Dawson Creek, the official entrance to the Alaska Highway and the beginning of our journey. We meet up with the other RVers in our group — all have traveled thousands of miles to reach the rendezvous point.

We only have one day to explore Dawson Creek. This busy little town is loaded with history and everything's within walking distance. So off we go!

Starting at the metal arch (cairn) located near the Northern Alaska Railway Park, a sign states: "You Are Now Entering the World Famous Alaska Highway."

After Pearl Harbor in 1941, a highway connecting the Lower 48 with Alaska became vital. On March 8, 1942,



Opposite page: After crossing the Yukon River Bridge, stop at the large pullout on the side of the highway to see Five Fingers Rapids. This page, right: Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park has the second-largest hot spring in Canada. The Kiskatinaw River Bridge curves 9 degrees along its 543-foot length.



11,000 American troops and 7,000 pieces of equipment arrived in Dawson Creek. Joined by 16,000 Canadian workers, construction on the highway began. Clearing 1,500 torturous miles through mountains and forests in subzero temperatures and mud, 8 miles of road were laid everyday, seven days a week. The 1,390-mile project was completed in eight months, an amazing accomplishment. On Nov. 20, 1942, the highway was officially opened during a ceremony at Mile 1061, known as Soldier's Summit.

We stop in at the Dawson Creek visitors center and art gallery, located in a historic wooden grain elevator, and the Walter Wright Pioneer Village. Then we walk to the Mile 0 Monument, on 10th and 102nd Avenue, and visit the new Alaska Highway House Museum.

Later that afternoon, we return to the Northern Lights RV Park (www.nlrvc.com) for our first Adventure Caravans orientation meeting and potluck dinner.

Day 2: Dawson Creek to Fort Nelson, British Columbia (281.2 miles)

The big day is here! We ready our Thor Challenger motorhome and do a final check. "The MILEPOST," considered the bible of the North Country with details about traveling to Alaska, sits handily in the magazine rack. Odometer set to "0," and we're on our way.

Driving north, we look for historic milepost markers highlighting special points of interest, including lodges and roadhouses built during the 1940s, still used by travelers as mailing addresses and reference points.

At Mile 20 we take a diversion to Kiskatinaw Provincial Park, and the 534-foot historic Kiskatinaw River Bridge. This remarkable curved, wooden timber structure was constructed like this because of the sharp bend in the river, and is the only one remaining along the Alaska Highway. After crossing, we rejoin the Alaska Highway.

The road descends steeply to the Peace River Bridge near Taylor, British Columbia, and we continue to Fort St. John. After a huge natural oil and gas field was discovered in 1951, it became the Oil Capital of British Columbia and it was nicknamed the "Energetic City."

At Fort St. John, Mile 72, is the Shepherd's Inn and Husky fuel station, selling gas, diesel and propane. Their ad in "The MILEPOST" says "Fill up and get a free shower." It's a favorite stop for RVs and tour buses, but we keep going.

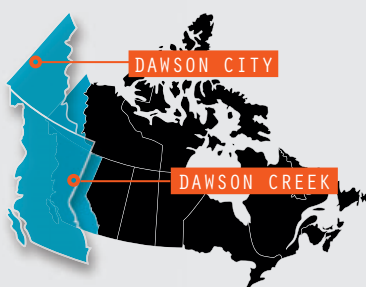
After a steep downgrade, we cross the Sikanni Chief River Bridge and at Mile 268, reach Spectra Energy, the foremost natural gas processing plant in North America. A large gas pipeline crosses the highway overhead.

At 4:30 p.m., Mile 281, we reach Fort Nelson and the Triple "G" Hideaway Campground & Family Restaurant (250-774-2340, www.tripleghideaway.com), a full-service RV park open year-round.

Day 3: Fort Nelson to Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park, British Columbia (188.6 miles)

After a quick tour of the Fort Nelson Heritage Museum, where vintage autos, trucks and machinery used during the highway's construction are displayed, we head north, then west toward Liard River, surrounded by splendid scenery and dense forests cloaked in fog. We climb steadily for the next couple of hundred miles to Steamboat Mountain (elevation 3,460 feet), a lonely, rugged, unexplored wilderness. Reaching Indian Head Mountain we pass "drunken forests" — a condition where thawing permafrost loosens the frozen soil, and the trees, unable to root deep in the ground, get pushed in all directions during high winds.

At Mile 392, we reach Summit Pass (elevation 4,250 feet), the highest point on the Alaska Highway. Snow-covered mountains are visible as we drive through a picturesque valley to the Toad River Lodge. An oasis in isolation,



Similar, but Different

Dawson City, Yukon Territory, is often confused with Dawson Creek, British Columbia, which is Mile 0 and the beginning of the Alaska Highway.



the lodge has a restaurant, post office, tire-repair shop, gas, diesel, propane and full-hookup RV camping. It's also famous for a collection of more than 7,700 hats that deck the walls and ceilings.

Nearing Muncho Lake Provincial Park, we slow down for stone sheep standing stubbornly on the road. As we inch forward gradually, they reluctantly move aside.

Ahead is Folded Mountain. About 175 million years ago, the North American and Pacific plates collided, and the gigantic force raised and bent the land into amazing wave-like shapes.

At Mile 475, we reach Liard Hot Springs Provincial Park (www.env.gov.bc.ca/bcparks/explore/parkpgs/liard_rv_hs). Beautifully maintained and open year-round, it has large, wooded sites for dry camping only. This popular destination attracts visitors from all over the world, so book early.

A major construction camp was located here during the highway's construction, and the hot springs became immensely popular with the troops.

After parking, we walk to the springs

along the boardwalk, surrounded by a natural wetland and boreal forest plants. Tiny minnow-like fishes, "lake chubs," dart among the plants feeding on algae. It's amazing how they survive in this extremely warm water. At the hot springs, the temperatures range from 108 to 126 degrees Fahrenheit, and we settle into the Goldilocks zone, not too hot and not too cool.

Day 4: Liard River Provincial Park to Watson Lake, Yukon Territory (129 miles)

Soon after leaving, we spot a black bear ambling along the side of the road. Excited, we pull over, like the other RVers and motorists, hanging out the windows trying to capture an award-winning photo. As traffic starts to back up, impatient locals honk for us to move on. Sigh! We must leave.

In September 1942, two regiments, one from the north and one from the south, joined here, at Contact Creek, Mile 588, completing the southern segment of the Alaska Highway. Historic Contact Creek Lodge is open year-round and sells groceries, gas,

At 1,917 feet long, the Nisutlin Bay Bridge near Teslin is the longest water span on the Alaska Highway.

diesel and propane. Minor repairs (including welding) are done here.

At Mile 627, we cross from British Columbia into the Yukon Territory, the first of seven crossings that bump in and out between the two. We drive into the town of Watson Lake at Mile 635 and pull into the Downtown RV Park (867-536-2646) at 3:30 p.m. Parking is tight and we must make sure our slideouts don't hit our RV neighbor.

Watson Lake, famous for its Sign Post Forest, is located at the junction of the Alaska and Robert Campbell highways.

In 1942, homesick Private Carl K. Lindley, working on the highway, put up a sign pointing the direction to his hometown in Danville, Illinois. Others followed and it soon grew into this



From far left: Stone sheep stand close to the highway near Muncho Lake Provincial Park. A black bear ambles along the side of the road in British Columbia. This enormous eagle's nest was perched high atop a pole in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory.

remarkable place. It's a tradition to leave behind "a sign," so we remove the front license plate of our dinghy vehicle and nail it to a post. It's like looking for prime real estate to find a vacant spot. If you come, bring a sign, a hammer and some nails.

Day 5: Watson Lake to Whitehorse, Yukon Territory (265.7 miles)

Heading toward Whitehorse, mountains, valleys, lakes and wildflowers grow profusely along the highway, including the bright purple "fireweeds." The locals say, "When the fireweeds top out, it's time to get the long johns out."

At Teslin, we cross the 1,917-foot Nisutlin Bay Bridge, the longest water span on the Alaska Highway. After crossing the 1,466-foot Teslin River Bridge, third-longest bridge on the Alaska Highway, at Mile 911, we enter Whitehorse and pull into the Pioneer RV Park & Campground (867-668-5944, www.pioneer-rv-park.com), our home for the next three nights. It has partially wooded sites, full hookups and sells gas, diesel and propane. Rig washing is allowed and there's also a dog-washing facility.

Whitehorse, a major hub for travelers, is well served with department stores, restaurants, and RV parts and repair outlets.

Nicknamed the "Wilderness City," Whitehorse, located on the banks of the mighty Yukon River, is named for the treacherous waters of Miles Canyon Rapids, which resemble the flowing manes of white horses.

After gold was discovered in the Klondike and Yukon in 1898, Whitehorse was swamped with prospectors heading north to Dawson City (our next destination). Rumors that gold nuggets littered the creeks and roads of Dawson City started a crazy stampede, but they first had to navigate the dangerous waters of Miles Canyon, where many boats were wrecked and lives lost in the frantic rush.

Day 6: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory

We arrive for a guided tour of the historic SS Klondike. Built by the

Our RV group caravanning north on the Klondike Highway to Dawson City through desolate mountains, high ridges and forests.

British Yukon Navigation Company in 1937, it plied the Yukon River between Whitehorse and Dawson City as a freight and passenger boat, with elegant interiors for first-class passengers. The boat was retired in 1955; in 1966 it was "elevated" to its present location on dry land, and designated a National Historic Site.

Next, we tour the Yukon Brewing Company to sample some of its specialty beers for a fun-filled, lip-smacking experience.

At 8:30 p.m., we attend the entertaining Frantic Follies vaudeville revue in the Westmark Whitehorse Hotel. Reliving the early 1900s, this not-to-be-missed high-stepping review and lively can-can dancing show has entertained viewers for almost 50 years.

Day 7: Whitehorse, Yukon Territory

As we leave the RV park for a day of sightseeing, we spot an enormous eagle's nest high on a pole and two young eagles flapping their wings, getting ready for flight.

We head to the Yukon Transportation Museum to see the world's largest, one-of-a-kind weather vane. Completing its final flight in November 1970, this DC-3 was donated to the Yukon Flying Club, raised and flawlessly balanced on a pedestal built by master welder Al Jacobs. We watch fascinated as it slowly revolves on its mount, pointing into the wind, just as it did decades ago, ready for takeoff. Incredibly, it only takes a 5-knot wind to turn it.

At the Yukon Beringia Interpretive Centre nearby, we tour exhibits and watch a film about the prehistoric era of this land. During the last Ice Age, between 18,000 and 11,000 years ago, sea levels were lower, and a vast land bridge called Beringia connected Asia and North America. This became the migration route for woolly mammoth, mastodon, brown bear, moose, and musk ox, and early human hunters



followed, becoming the first inhabitants of North America. After the ice melted, this land became submerged, and is now the Bering Sea.

Returning to Pioneer RV Park, we prepare for the long drive tomorrow.

Day 8: Whitehorse to Dawson City, Yukon Territory (335 miles)

After driving north for 15 miles, we leave the Alaska Highway (only temporarily) and take the Klondike Highway (Yukon Highway 2) toward Dawson City (not to be confused with Dawson Creek, British Columbia, at Mile 0 — the start of the Alaska Highway). It's a six-hour drive along the same route used by gold prospectors during the frantic rush to reach Dawson City.

Heading north (as did the prospectors) across a mostly uninhabited plateau surrounded by desolate mountains, high ridges, forests and lakes, one senses the wilderness and aloneness here.

At Carmacks, we're 78 miles from Dawson City. George Carmack's isolated trading post went bankrupt in 1885 so he moved his family to another isolated area, now Dawson City. That summer he struck it rich, discovering huge quantities of gold in Rabbit Creek, which he renamed Bonanza Creek. Word of his discovery ignited the gold rush.

After crossing the Yukon River Bridge, we pull into a large rest area with an expansive view of the Five Fingers Rapids rocky outcrops in the river. Overloaded boats traveling between Whitehorse and Dawson City in 1898 frequently struck these rocks and sank. Many lives were lost.

On to the Tintina Trench — a major fault that ripped apart the earth's crust, stretching more than 600 miles



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A must-see: The famous Sign Post Forest in Watson Lake, Yukon Territory, at Mile 635.

from southeastern Yukon west to near Fairbanks. One side of the fault has shifted diagonally about 280 miles in the last 200 million years. The rocks and land of Whitehorse and Dawson City, once adjacent, are now about 300 miles apart.

At 4 p.m., we arrive at Gold Rush Campground (866-330-5006, www.goldrushcampground.com) and settle in for the night. The sites are short, unpaved and very narrow.

Day 9: Dawson City, Yukon Territory

Strategically situated at the confluence of the Yukon and Klondike rivers, Dawson City (once the capital of the Yukon), is a well-preserved gold rush town, and National Historic Site. It still looks and feels like a living, breathing 1870s town.

Despite its remote wilderness location, the city is a vibrant cultural and tourist center. The gold fever that gripped North America a century ago made this charismatic town the largest metropolis north of Seattle, Washington. Brightly painted wood buildings line the streets, hurriedly constructed when the gold rush brought thousands into the city.

At the visitors center, Marieke Hiensch, our costumed guide, recalls the vibrant life 100 years ago. Businesses sprang up to meet people's needs, and Ruby Scott — one of the city's colorful characters, originally from Paris — opened a brothel "to

please lonely men."

The Post Office was the daily gathering place for residents. Hiensch tells us about postal employee Percy DeWolf, who transported mail from Dawson City to Eagle, Alaska, 150 miles away. In summer, he used a boat-and-horse team, but during the brutally cold winters, he led his sled dogs along the banks of the treacherous frozen Yukon River. Thirty-five years, and he never missed a day.

The Percy DeWolf sled-dog race, held every winter, honors this Iron Man of the North, attracting world-class mushers from the Yukon Quest and Iditarod, a qualifying race for both.

"How many cities boast about their local dump?" asks Hiensch. "Dawson City does!" Its isolation created a tradition for residents to leave unwanted possessions here for others to take home. "Cave Man Bill" proudly hauled a grandmother clock back to his cave. Kept awake by the ding-dong every hour, he returned it the next day. "Too noisy," he declared.

There's history on every street: Diamond Tooth Gertie's Gambling Hall, Klondike Kate's restaurant, the Midnight Sun Hotel and Flora Dora Hotel, all established in the late 1800s and early 1900s, tell the city's past. The once-busy Dawson City Daily News' old printing presses stand silent.

At sundown, the city springs alive, bringing back the long-gone feverish gold rush days.

(continued on pg. 72)

2014 MOTORHOME READERS' CHOICE AWARDS



YOU VOTED FOR 'EM, HERE THEY ARE

RVers are an opinionated bunch, and that's what makes us so special. Part of the allure of the lifestyle is to share experiences (good and bad) with like-minded individuals. Just sit by a campfire with a group, and sooner or later the talk will turn toward which fixtures work best, or which destinations produce the best photography, or even which satellite provider offers the best programming in the area.

Of course, in such a small sample size, it's easy to write off many of the suggestions as "that may work for

you, but I have a different set of circumstances." But when an entire, knowledgeable group of RVers — such as *MotorHome* magazine readers — weigh in on their favorite RV-related products and services, it's difficult to chalk up to personal preference. That's why we've assembled the winners of our annual *MotorHome* Readers' Choice Awards, and it's hard to argue with the results.

Following are the companies you voted for, free from any obligations/limitations, apart from the fact that they work best for the majority of our readers.

AUXILIARY BRAKING SYSTEM



● Gold: SMI Manufacturing

SMI's braking systems are loaded with proprietary features that give users the latest in towed-vehicle braking technology. SMI's efficient, easy-to-install systems are made in the USA and feature a five-year warranty. The Delta Force (pictured) features the Set-It-Once Pedal Clamp that allows for true one-handed setup without the use of springs and catches. SMI Manufacturing, 800-893-3763, www.smibrake.com.

● Silver: Hopkins Brake Buddy

● Bronze: Roadmaster

CLASS A MOTORHOME



● Gold: Tiffin Motorhomes

Located in Red Bay, Alabama, family-based Tiffin Motorhomes produces several Class A models, including the Allegro (pictured) family, the Phaeton and the Zephyr. All Tiffin coaches come with the manufacturer's Five-Star Warranty, which includes 10 years on construction, five years on lamination, one year of comprehensive and one year of roadside assistance. Tiffin, 256-356-8661, www.tiffinmotorhomes.com.

● Silver: Winnebago

● Bronze: Newmar

CLASS B MOTORHOME



● Gold: Pleasure-Way

Pleasure-Way manufactures the popular Plateau, Prestige and Ascent models, in addition to others. The Class B motorhomes are not mass-produced, allowing Pleasure-Way to ensure quality craftsmanship in each RV it manufactures. The motorhomes are backed by a limited five-year warranty. Pleasure-Way, 800-364-0189, www.pleasureway.com.

● Silver: Leisure Travel Vans

● Bronze (tie): Roadtrek

● Bronze (tie): Winnebago

CLASS C MOTORHOME



● Gold: Winnebago

Winnebago offers a number of popular motorhomes, including the View seen here. Built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis, the View is available in four floorplans. Sleeping arrangements range from a cabover bunk to a queen bed to twin beds. Winnebago Industries, www.gowinnebago.com.

● Silver: Jayco

● Bronze (tie): Forest River

● Bronze (tie): Thor Motor Coach

DINGHY VEHICLE



● Gold: Jeep Wrangler

With a 3.6-liter Pentastar V-6 that delivers 285 HP and 260 LB-FT of torque, the Jeep Wrangler once again takes the award for top dinghy vehicle. Features include all-wheel ABS, skid plates, tow hooks, hill-start assist and Electronic Stability Control. Jeep, www.jeep.com.

● Silver: Honda CR-V

● Bronze: Jeep Grand Cherokee

FUEL ADDITIVE



● Gold: Lucas Oil Products

Lucas lubricants and additives are designed to improve the performance and longevity of motorhome engines. Lucas' fuel treatment (pictured) is formulated to increase power and

mileage while lowering emissions. Lucas Oil, 800-342-2512, www.lucasoil.com.

● Silver: Gold Eagle Sta-Bil

● Bronze: Amsoil

FUEL STATION



● Gold: Pilot Flying J

With nearly 700 locations from coast to coast, Pilot Flying J offers fuel, business conveniences, CAT scales, restaurants, Snap Fitness centers, shower facilities, snacks, beverages and more. Future plans include urgent care centers. Pilot Flying J, www.pilotflyingj.com.

● Silver: Love's Travel Stops

● Bronze: Costco

HOLDING-TANK CHEMICALS



● Gold: Thetford

Thetford's holding-tank deodorants are available in liquid and toss-in forms for ease of use. Thetford brands include Aqua-Kem, Campa-Chem and Eco-Smart, among others. Thetford, 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com.

● Silver: Camco

● Bronze: Happy Camper

MOTORHOME AWNING



● Gold: Dometic

Dometic offers a complete line of patio,

door and window awnings to help keep things comfortable while you're outside at the RV park. Dometic offers a vast selection of awning models, fabrics, sizes and colors, from add-on screen rooms to slide toppers. Dometic, 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com.

● Silver: Carefree of Colorado

● Bronze: Girard

MOTORHOME CHASSIS



● Gold: Freightliner Custom Chassis

Freightliner offers a number of chassis that are the basis for popular motorhome models. Chassis include the best-selling XC-S chassis, which is a straight-rail diesel pusher; a FRED chassis, which offers diesel power on a front-engine frame; and the SL-Series chassis, which is a premium frame used on performance luxury coaches. Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp., 864-487-1700, www.freightlinerchassis.com.

● Silver: Ford

● Bronze: Spartan Chassis

PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING PRODUCT



● Gold: 5 Star Tuning

Specializing in custom tuning for motorhomes and fifth-wheel tow vehicles, 5 Star Tuning offers cutting-edge solutions for more power, additional torque, improved fuel economy and smoother drivability. The family-owned business provides custom dynamometer chassis-tuning products and services so that drivers can fear no mountain. 5 Star Tuning, 843-536-1244, www.5startuning.com.

● Silver: Banks Power

● Bronze: Bully Dog

RV CAMPGROUND RESORT



● Gold: Pechanga RV Resort

This 168-site RV resort can accommodate the largest coaches and offers full hookups, Wi-Fi and cable. Guests have the use of a resort pool, two Jacuzzis, a game room, dog-walking area and more. A free shuttle transports RVers to the casino. Pechanga RV Resort, 877-99-RVFUN, www.pechanga.com.

● Silver: Fort Wilderness

● Bronze (tie): Ocean Lakes Family Campground

● Bronze (tie): Seven Feathers RV Resort

RV CASINO RESORT



● Gold: Pechanga Resort & Casino

Pechanga Resort & Casino offers 200,000-plus square feet of gambling nirvana in Temecula, California. Pechanga Resort & Casino, 877-711-2946, www.pechanga.com.

● Silver: Seven Feathers RV Resort

● Bronze: Jackson Rancheria

RV CLEANING PRODUCT



● Gold: Meguiar's

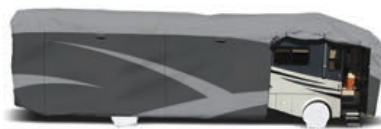
Marine and RV Rinse Free Wash-N-Wax makes caring for an RV quick and easy by lifting away dirt and grime and providing a high-gloss layer of hydrophobic wax with one spray. Meguiar's,

800-347-5700, www.meguiars.com.

● Silver: Thetford

● Bronze: Protect All

RV COVERS



● Gold: ADCO

ADCO RV covers are produced in universal and custom configurations in a variety of outdoor fabrics. ADCO's core products are what they refer to as Designer Series Contour-fit RV Covers, available in SFS AquaShed and DuPont TyvekRV. ADCO, 800-541-ADCO, www.adcoprod.com.

● Silver: CalMark Cover Company

● Bronze (tie): CoverKing

● Bronze (tie): CoverQuest

RV ENGINE OIL



● Gold: Shell Rotella

The Shell Rotella family is available in different configurations offering varying levels of protection. Rotella T Triple Protection oils help control wear, deposits and emissions. Products include Rotella T5 Synthetic Blend Heavy Duty Engine Oil and Rotella T6 Full Synthetic Heavy Duty Engine Oil. Shell Oil, www.shell.com/rotella.

● Silver: Mobil 1

● Bronze: Amsoil

RV GENERATOR



● Gold: Cummins Onan

Cummins Onan AC generators allow

RVers to spend more time off the grid without worrying about their power needs. The gasoline-powered RV QD7000 pictured here boasts quiet operation, low vibration and digital voltage regulation. Cummins Power Generation, 800-888-6626, www.power.cummins.com.

● Silver: Honda

● Bronze: Generac

RV REFRIGERATOR



● Gold: Dometic

Dometic's RV refrigerators are designed to make the best use of the available space in coaches. Dometic's Versatile Racking System, eye-level control panels and automatic system that securely locks the refrigerator doors as you turn the ignition key are impressive features. Dometic, 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com.

● Silver: Norcold

● Bronze (tie): Samsung

● Bronze (tie): Whirlpool

RV RETAILER



● Gold: Camping World

Needing no introduction in the RV industry, Camping World is the No. 1 spot for your RV needs. Whether through its website or at one of the hundreds of stores/dealers across the country, Camping World has everything from new motorhomes to awning lights to grills. Camping World, 888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com.

● Silver: Local Dealer

● Bronze: Lazydays

RV TIRES



● Gold: Michelin

Michelin offers a variety of tires for coaches. The XRV (pictured) is an all-position radial tire for motorhomes that has a shallow, stable tread engineered with a cool-running compound that generates lower heat for greater durability and improved handling. Michelin, www.michelin.com.

- Silver: Goodyear
- Bronze: Toyo Tires

RV TOILET



● Gold: Dometic

Dometic offers a variety of space-saving toilets designed specifically for RV bathrooms. Models range from residential-style gravity discharge toilets to VacuFlush toilets and highly efficient macerator systems. Dometic, 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com.

- Silver: Thetford
- Bronze: N/A

SATELLITE HARDWARE



● Gold: Winegard

Winegard makes every type of RV antenna, from batwing to portable to roof-mounted. Popular units include the Rayzar, the Carryout Portables, the TRAVLER and the Road Star series.

Winegard, 800-288-8094, www.winegard.com.

- Silver: King Controls
- Bronze: DISH Tailgater by King Controls

SATELLITE PROVIDER



● Gold: DirecTV

With the DirecTV Choice Mobile Package, RVers can take their favorite programming with them (provided they purchase the proper equipment). More than 285 channels available, including premium, local and sports channels. DirecTV, www.dir ectTV.com.

- Silver: DISH Network
- Bronze: Shaw

SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT



● Gold: Cracker Barrel

Cracker Barrel offers Southern cookin', just like "mama use-ta make," in more than 40 states. The restaurant features delicious comfort-food meals like roast beef, meatloaf and delectable country-fried steak. Cracker Barrel, 800-333-9566, www.crackerbarrel.com.

- Silver: Applebee's
- Bronze: Denny's

STATE IN WHICH TO RV



● Gold: Florida

White-sand beaches, world-class

golfing, the Daytona Speedway ... and we haven't even mentioned the famous mouse and other top-notch theme parks! There's plenty to do outdoors in the Sunshine State, from world-class fishing to scenic tours of wetlands and historical cities and settlements. Visit Florida, www.visitflorida.com.

- Silver: Oregon
- Bronze: California

TIRE-PRESSURE MONITORING SYSTEMS



● Gold: TireMinder

Minder's new TireMinder TM66 monitors up to 22 tires and offers several RV-friendly features such as front- or rear-disconnect modes (allowing separation of dinghy sensors) and a micro USB charger. Available exclusively at Camping World. Minder Research, 772-463-6522, www.minderresearch.com.


- Silver: Truck System Technologies
- Bronze: Hawkshead

TOW BAR



● Gold: Blue Ox

Blue Ox offers baseplates and tow bars. The Class IV Aventa LX tow bar features a ball-in-socket design that reduces wear points between the coach and dinghy. The 360-degree swivel makes hooking up a breeze, and connecting is made simple with Signature Series easy-release locking handles. Blue Ox, 800-228-9289, www.blueox.com.

- Silver: Roadmaster
- Bronze: Demco 



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27³/₄"L x 14³/₄"W x 1¹/₄"H

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34"L

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Charcoal #58707 Desert Clay #32516

Brown #69367

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Desert
Clay

Brown

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Awning Rope Light Kit, 18'L #69032
Clear rope light and track in one.
Ship Wt. 2 lbs. | ♥



Walnut

24"H x 12"W x 15¹/₄"D

Oak

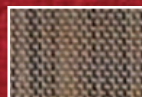
**CLUB SALE
\$36⁹⁷**

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Sofa Table
Walnut #69218

Oak #69084

🚚 \$18⁹⁹



Cool woven mesh

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**Adjustable Folding
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Lightweight—only 8 lbs. Non-slip feet. | 🚚 \$18⁹⁹ | ♥



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225 lb.
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4 positions



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Collapsible for storage.

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17 1/2"H x
16"W x 16"D

Orange

CLUB SALE
\$139⁹⁹

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Rachael Ray 10-Piece Hard Enamel Cookware Set

Blue #72084

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1 qt. and 2 qt. covered saucepans, 6 qt. covered stockpot, 3 qt. covered sauté, 8 1/2" and 10" skillet. | 🚚 \$14 \$9



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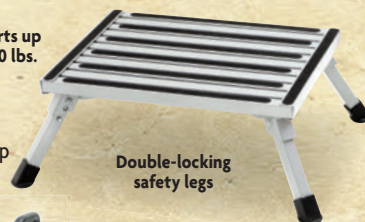
CLUB SALE
\$79⁹⁷

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Aluminum Folding Step #38293

Legs lock in 2 positions for 3" or 8" step height. Gripper strips on 19" x 14 1/2" platform. | Ship Wt. 8 lbs.

Supports up
to 1000 lbs.



Double-locking
safety legs

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Open: 35 1/2"L x 20 1/4"W x 22 1/2"H.

Folded: 29 1/2"L x 20 1/4"W x 8"H.

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- Propane powered
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37 3/8"W x 17 1/4"D x 15 1/4"H. | 🚚 \$20 \$9



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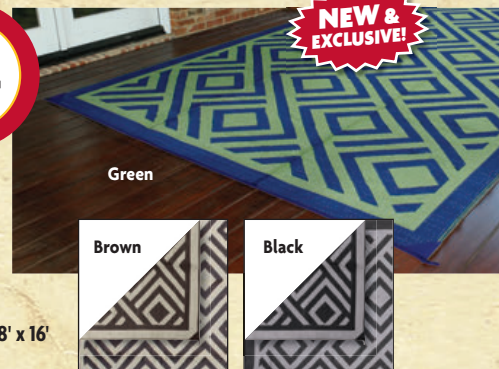
Deluxe Diamond Key

Green #69300

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Heavyweight patio mats dry quickly, are mold and mildew resistant, and UV coated for weather and fade resistance. | Ship Wt. 13 lbs.



Green

Brown

Black



Era 70C

Winnebago's turnkey Touring Coach for two offers up lots of packing space and is the first with a slideout

By Donya Carlson

I admit to being a chronic over-packer. When it's time to load up the RV for a trip, my theory is "Why not bring it?" — especially when there's space — because it could very well come in handy. Or a neighboring fellow camper may just want to borrow that salad spinner. And if we don't need it, well, then, what's the harm? So when Winnebago's latest Touring Coach, the Era 70C, which boasts a wall brimming with cabinets and deep pullout drawers next to the refrigerator, arrived at our offices, my wheels — and the Era's — were turning. Try as I might, even I couldn't fill up the drawers with a variety-pack of kitchen gadgets, enough food to feed a KOA, clothing for an assortment of temperatures

and bedding for a three-day meander up the California coast. And souvenirs picked up along the way.

This Class B motorhome is built on a Sprinter chassis with a Mercedes-Benz 3.0-liter 6-cylinder turbodiesel engine and a five-speed automatic that uses "Tipshift" technology to allow manual shifting. The Era is equipped with ABS brakes, dual rear wheels and a hitch receiver for towing up to 5,000 pounds. The Era was first introduced to Winnebago's dealers in 2007 as a 2009 unit and produced in the last half of 2008. The 70C, one of three Eras in the 2015 Touring Coach lineup, is the first to have a slideout. It also has the largest freshwater capacity at 45 gallons.

The Era's chassis sports a "Blue

EFFICIENCY" badge — essentially it's a term Mercedes-Benz coined to encompass the fuel-saving and emission-reducing efforts used on the rig. Our test vehicle averaged 17.05 MPG.

The Era is smooth and easy to drive — at an inch longer than 24 feet, it's like maneuvering an oversized van where you monitor the mirrors and pay attention to height restrictions. With a 9-foot-7-inch height, all enclosed parking structures are off-limits. The Era's integrated running boards are great for stepping into and out of the motorhome.

We found the cockpit's setup well laid out and efficient. There's plenty of room to store sunglasses, maps, road-trip munchies and music CDs/DVDs. Just watch your noggin when climbing into the cockpit from the living

ABOVE: The Era has a large side entry with retractable screen door. The electric awning with integrated LED lighting provides respite from the sun.



area, as large, practical shelves are at head level. The Ultraleather driver and co-pilot chairs are super comfortable and have adjustable lumbar support. They rotate and recline; great for use when in camp because they offer the soothing feel of a La-Z-Boy-type chair.

Armrests are height adjustable but on the short side. While driving, I had to consciously move my right arm back from what would be a natural position because the armrest's edge fell at the nerve of my funny bone. Armrests are incorporated into the cockpit doors, and keyless entry is offered on all doors. The Infotainment Center (\$1,533 option) with Rand McNally RV GPS has a 6-inch touch-screen, Bluetooth hands-free calling and audio pairing with a Smartphone or tablet, AM/FM stereo, CD/DVD player, iPod direct and USB connection, an outdoor thermometer and a color rearview camera display. While driving, we were impressed with how we could carry on a normal-volume conversation, though there was the occasional squeak from the slideout

BELOW: The bathroom is roomy for a Class B, with a decent-size shower and expansive storage. Across from the galley are six pull-out drawers and two large top cabinets. Access cabinets in the lower section have space for small items. The systems monitor panel is above the fridge.



and other sources, and the rattle of the bathroom's pocket door in the rear. The pocket door would benefit from a second hook-and-loop strap at its base.

In contrast to a plethora of inside storage — someone commented that there was enough drawer space for "25 people" but room to sleep just two — there is no outside storage. In back, cargo doors can be folded back flush against the body. Large tinted windows, as opposed to solid walls of metal, are attractive and go with the Era's Brilliant Silver color. A spare tire, attached to the left cargo door, is standard on the 70C model only and needs to be swiveled out of the way to open the door.

Behind the back doors is storage where we stowed two camp chairs, two Quik-Fold tables, a large mat, a water hose and the shorepower cord. Winnebago added an access door to the shower from the storage area and provides a carpeted piece of plywood that protects the shower pan should it be needed to store additional supplies. If you're using the shower for storage, take care how items are packed because during travel items can shift and block the inward-opening shower door.

At the RV park, we settled in and started preparing dinner. We liked

the way the kitchen is laid out so that, while cooking, we were facing the sliding door, which we kept open. With the slider open, we felt like we were working in a large kitchen while watching the goings on outside, plus this inviting look encouraged folks who were curious about the Era to walk up and chat. The accordion-style screen door in the slider was quite a hit.

The 52-inch-long Ultraleather couch is housed in a streetside slide that adds 25 inches of living space. The no-fuss 16¾-by-35½-inch dinette table (the slide must be out to set up the table) was assembled in a flash. It does not lock into place — a nice feature, on the one hand, because it can be turned out of the way when you sit down or get up from the couch. However, it doesn't remain level and was unsteady, so we avoided using it for placing cups filled with hot liquid or tipsy wine glasses.

A three-burner stove with a glass top that serves as a backsplash and a stainless-steel sink are housed in an attractive curved Corian countertop. During cleanup, with the range's glass top down, there was not much of a barrier to keep objects from falling behind the cabinet, which is spaced away from the wall to allow room for the Alde convector that heats the

living area. Plus, the back side of the cabinet could use a makeover. We'll explain: When the slider door is closed and you're looking through the glass window from the outside, you're viewing unfinished wood and an assortment of pipes, hardware and other stuff that's generally hidden behind a cabinet. Yes, the window is tinted so that helps hide it, but this unfinished look is a contradiction to the caliber of this motorhome.

Two colors of Italian-styled cabinets are used in the Era — dark High-Gloss Marbella Cherry over the couch and in the kitchen, and a cream-colored Sand Back for the rest, which nicely complement each other. Naturally, fingerprints showed up prominently on the high-gloss cherry.

A 20½-by-8¾-inch countertop



(Above left to right) Cockpit is well laid out with shelves and pockets for keeping road-trip widgets within reach. Streetside slideout houses the couch/sofa bed and adds 25 inches to the floor space.



extension flips up, and we left it up to serve two purposes: as a needed countertop space, and to divert people from the TV above, which protrudes into the side entrance. Virtually everyone who stepped up into the RV before we deployed the extension bumped their head on the TV. The extension is also useful for keeping utensils within reach while prepping a meal, but for overzealous chopping, the surface was too wobbly. Standard are a microwave/convection oven, which can be powered by a 2.5-kW Cummins Onan MicroQuiet LP-gas generator when dry camping.

A 16½-by-3-inch metal shelf over the sink served well as a spice rack once we added Grip-It shelf liner, and it is a good place to drape a dish towel since there is no towel rack. Four electrical outlets are within easy reach and the area is well-lit, as it is throughout the rest of the interior, with

LED lighting.

Two buttons inside the RV (one in the galley, one by the passenger door) operate the 13-foot electric awning with integrated LED lighting. Some designer wasn't thinking clearly, in our opinion, when it was decided to place an awning switch in the galley of this coach. It's an accident waiting to happen, because your natural inclination is to stand inside with the slider open and push that button to deploy the awning. But the awning will not clear the slider door when it's open, and if you're trigger-happy and don't get your finger off that switch soon, damage will be done. The best way to open the awning is to close the slider, stand outside the passenger door and use the switch at the base of the seat so you can watch what's going

on. Additionally, the awning's arms were wedged into the rafter assembly so tightly that we had to use a flat-blade screwdriver to get them out. Once the large awning was set up, however, we relaxed in our chairs and listened

WHAT'S HOT

Lots of cabinets and roll-slide drawers, quiet ride, comfortable Ultraleather couch/sofa bed

WHAT'S NOT

Electric awning switch in galley, no outside storage, wobbly dinette table

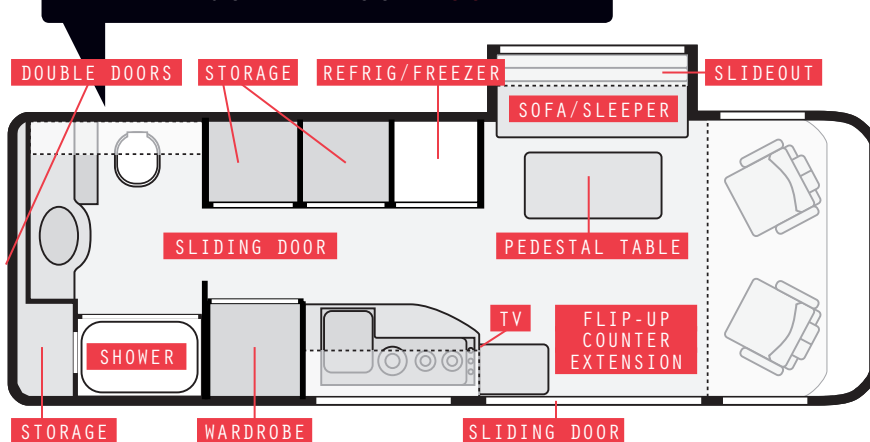


to music playing through the superb outdoor speakers of the Jensen stereo system, which is located just inside the sliding door. The system includes AM/FM radio, Bluetooth capability, a CD/DVD player and surround sound.

A 22-inch HDTV with rooftop antenna swivels for viewing from pretty much every angle inside the motorhome, with an especially good view when reclining in bed. During travel, it stayed securely in place.

Below the TV is a touch-screen panel for the Alde Compact 3010 hydronic radiant heating and continuous hot-water system. Nighttime and morning temperatures can be programmed in, and the furnace was so quiet we weren't quite sure if it was on at first. The system uses a network of convectors located on interior walls: Air warmed by the convectors flows up the walls and around furniture to heat

WINNEBAGO ERA 70C FLOORPLAN



Specifications

Chassis

Model	Mercedes-Benz Sprinter
Engine	3.0-liter 6-cylinder turbodiesel
SAE Hp	188 hp @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	325 lb-ft @ 1,200-2,400 rpm
Transmission	Five-speed automatic with "Tipshift"
Axle Ratio	3.92:1
Tires	LT215/85R16E
Wheelbase	170"
Brakes	Hydraulic disc with ABS
Suspension, Front/Rear	Independent with transverse mono-leaf spring and stabilizer/leaf spring with stabilizer bar
Fuel Capacity	26.4 gal
Fuel Economy	17.05 mpg
Warranty	Three years/36,000 miles

Coach

Exterior Length	24' 1"
Exterior Width	6' 4"
Exterior Height	9' 7"
Interior Width	5' 10"
Interior Height	6' 4"
Construction	Steel framing, skin and roof
Freshwater Capacity	45 gal
Black-Water Capacity	22 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	25 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	Equivalent to 6 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	16 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Refrigerator	5.3 cu-ft
Converter/Charger	45 amp
Battery	Group 31 AGM
AC Generator	2.5 kW LP-Gas
MSRP	\$119,069
MSRP as Tested	\$124,352 (Z package)
Warranty	One year/15,000 miles

Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	3,720 lbs
Rear Axle	6,100 lbs
Total	9,820 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,410/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
ROCCC	1,210 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity



Galley layout is practical with flip-up countertop extension (shown down), three-burner range with glass top and deep stainless-steel sink. Elegance is added with a curved Corian countertop and attractive backsplash.

the interior while forming a barrier in front of the windows that prevents cold air from entering. The Alde system also heats the water, supplying what is claimed to be the equivalent of a 6-gallon water heater.

The Ultraleather Flexsteel couch makes into a 52-by-75-inch sofa bed. Brace yourself — tugging the bed out of the frame takes some muscle. The thick cushions made for an impressive, comfortable mattress sectioned into three parts — although our spare blanket kept sliding off because of the slick Ultraleather on the lower portion of the bed (the rest is cloth). Smooth-retracting roller shades, accordion-style windshield shades and side curtains do a marvelous job keeping in privacy and keeping out light. Walk-around space is limited, and one must use care when walking around the foot of the bed to prevent falling down the sliding door step, especially in the dark.

A pocket door with full-length mirrors on each side separate a surprisingly large bathroom from the galley. Like in the kitchen, the countertop is curved to give it an elegant look, and there's lots of space for stowing toiletries, etc., including a commodious deep drawer to the right of the sink. There's a porcelain toilet (an upgrade from prior years' plastic ones), a Fan-Tastic vent and a hanging rod in the shower. The showerhead had a

shut-off valve and good water pressure, and the shower was spacious enough.

We like the straightforward approach to the Era. About the only thing we found to grumble about is that the bed has to be made up and put away everyday. For as much storage as there is, our bulky bedding took up a good portion of the wardrobe, and this was the only one with a hanging rod for clothing. Aisle space is narrow, so depending on the size of the people, if one person is cooking, for instance, he/she might have to move out of the way to allow someone else to get to the bathroom.

This is a motorhome that doesn't have to sit when you're not exploring the country — it's a convenient vehicle for parking at your kids' sporting events, for example, where you'd have a pleasant place to relax, assemble sandwiches and have a not-so-public bathroom. Curiously, the sofa is wide enough to seat two — even three, if they're small people — but there's only one seat belt.

The Era 70C keeps it simple for one or two people to travel in luxury in a motorhome that offers more storage than the average Class B, chic styling inside and out, and fuel economy equivalent to an SUV. **M**

Winnebago Industries

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A Glimpse Into 2015

Creative floorplans and continuing advances in technology lead the charge for new motorhomes introduced to dealers; **Class B's are the fastest-growing segment**

There's a good reason why toy haulers number among the most popular RVs going into 2015 — and it doesn't necessarily have anything to do with a garage.

Well, almost nothing. Sure, a garage-on-wheels is about the handiest thing to hit the RV industry since a 5,000-pound hitch receiver, but beyond the ability to haul toys is the fact that the ramp door of such units provides a whole new dimension to camping. Simply attach the provided support jacks and rails, and owners can enjoy outdoor vistas from the comfort of their own patio.

That's no small feat. Neither is the fact that a 10-by-8-foot ramp door, converted to patio use, can add 80 square feet of living area — an increase of 20 percent or more to the average motorhome floorplan. That's something that even outdoor enthusiasts who don't ride ATVs or motorcycles or even golf carts — the typical toy hauler audience — can appreciate.

Oddly enough, though, the ability to give coach enthusiasts an

exterior living zone separate from the main cabin wasn't the impetus behind the new 38RE Outlaw from Thor Motor Coach (TMC) that — like most of the other new-for-2015 motorhomes showcased on these pages — debuted in September at the Elkhart County RV Open House. It actually came about after the Elkhart, Indiana, builder began hearing from an increasing number of retail customers and even dealers who were looking for something different — specifically, the type of almost cavernous interior that's become a signature design stroke exclusive to high-end fifth-wheels.

"We realized that because of the way we drop the floor in the rear of our Outlaw to accommodate a garage, that area could be transformed into a unique living space," noted Jon Krider, TMC's vice president of product development. By incorporating the bedroom into the rear of the Outlaw, TMC was able to build the space with a ceiling height of nearly 9½ feet — more than 2 feet higher than a typical coach — and added to the residential ambiance by designing

a coffered ceiling with a full-size fan.

Adding to the unique 39-foot floorplan, the subsidiary of Thor Industries Inc. also swapped the usual positions of bath-and-a-half configurations, placing the full bath forward in the motorhome while giving the rear bedroom a half-bath that's accessible both from inside and outside the \$169,000 coach (MSRP) — "outside," in this case, meaning the rear patio. And, since the 38RE was no longer a toy hauler in the traditional sense, TMC added an exterior kitchenette to the rear wall, making the newest Outlaw perhaps the ultimate "tailgate" touring vehicle for sporting events.

Built on a Ford gas chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 26,000 pounds, the coach also boasts all the amenities expected of a higher-end gas Class A, including a large galley and home entertainment area, plus the sort of pass-through basement storage you'd expect of a toy hauler — which, in a way, it isn't.

Here are some other notable new motorhomes that were on display:

Ⓜ EverGreen Imperial

It looks like Class B exterior design just got swept into the 21st century.

Don't get us wrong — there's nothing wrong with the appearance of these diminutive motorhomes. Most builders simply focus their efforts on creating an optimum — and oftentimes opulent — camping atmosphere inside and leave the factory profile alone. All of which meant that when



Middlebury, Indiana-based EverGreen RV, a longtime towables manufacturer, announced that it was getting into the crowded Class B motorized sector, the company realized it needed to make an impact.

It has. The EverGreen Imperial, a ground-up design in concert with Andy Mauck of Mauck Specialty Vehicles, a well-known custom builder, is based upon a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter cutaway chassis with a GVWR of 11,030 pounds — although the body is 10 inches wider than most Sprinter-based B's on the market. The body itself incorporates a one-piece, almost monocoque, design according to EverGreen president Mark Boessler.

That extra width makes itself known in several ways, not the least of which is the addition of slide-out storage trays running nearly the length of the wheelbase on either side of the coach. EverGreen put the extra 10 inches of body width to good use inside as well, offering a queen-size bed along with solid-cherry-wood cabinets, Corian countertops, Dometic marine-type appliances, a microwave, cooktop, 16,000-Btu furnace, 2.5-kW

generator, an inverter with 50-amp charger and 3-cubic-foot refrigerator that operates via 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC power. Plus, an energy-management system will shed loads when available amperage is too low.

Forest River FR3

"Doing more with less" is a mantra in the motorhome industry today — but it's probably just the opposite of how it sounds. "Less," in this case, is all about feet, not amenities. In fact, builders are pumping coaches with more appliances and accessories than ever; they are just stuffing them in smaller profiles. In fact, Michael Hums, product manager for Forest River's FR3 motorhome line, goes so far as to refer to the company's 26- to 31-foot coaches as "crossovers" — shorter Class A motorhomes that compete directly with Class C's.

"For example, the FR3 has a power bunk in the front that drops down over the cockpit," Hums pointed out. "In Class C's, they're sleeping over the cab, which is the same concept. So, you take a Class C and load it up with paint, jacks and everything else and you're in the same price point as a

Class A. So, a customer who doesn't think they can get into a Class A really can get into a Class A and still have Class C features."

The newest FR3, the 28DS, offers all this plus a rear-wall 36-inch-deep slideout in the bedroom that's home to a king-size bed. "We wanted to give customers a coach less than 30 feet long that has a walkaround bed," Hums noted. The FR3 uses extra-deep slides all the way around; there's also a 32-inch-deep extension room in the streetside wall in the main cabin that houses a wraparound booth dinette, cooktop and residential microwave. Together with the forward captain's chairs and a sofa (with footrests) curbside, it forms what Hums calls "the conversation pit." The coach has an MSRP of \$113,000.



Class B's Climb the Charts

Quick quiz: We all appreciate that motorhomes have rebounded dramatically in popularity during the last year or two, but do you know which coach class has seen the largest upswing — percentage-wise — in shipments to dealers this year?

If you said "Class B," you win the salted caramels. Granted, the actual number shipped through July 2014 — 2,073 units — pales in comparison to those of its larger Class A and Class C brethren, the maneuverable little B's are building a powerful niche market. Among the newest entries:

Airstream: In

comparison to previous Airstream Interstates, the company's new Sprinter-based Interstate Grand Tour has a larger galley, additional counter and multifunctional storage space, a flexible workspace desk,



expanded bathroom area, oversize refrigerator and freezer, standard power awning and optional dual-screen doors. MSRP is in the mid-\$150,000 range.

Leisure Travel Vans:

To celebrate its 50th anniversary, Winkler, Manitoba, Canada-based Triple E RV's Leisure Travel Vans division has

rolled out a 25-foot Unity Anniversary Edition luxury Class B on a Sprinter 3500 chassis. Featuring a full exterior makeover, four floorplans and an available 50th anniversary interior package, the Unity features integrated running boards, LED taillights and three paint schemes plus fiberglass curved baggage doors, espresso-brown cabinets and white Corian countertops. Pricing starts at \$118,495 USD.



Pleasure-Way: This Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada, firm previously built its Lexor on a Chevy chassis, but Pleasure-Way

Riding on a Ford chassis with a GVWR of 18,000 pounds, the 29-foot-10-inch 28DS is equipped with most everything needed, from a 16-foot patio awning and flip-up 32-inch LED TV to cherry cabinetry and a 4-kW Onan genset. Good thing, too, since as Hums points out, “Everything is standard — there are no options.”



Fleetwood RV Flair

Fleetwood is credited with creating the “crossover” type of Class A motorhomes — less expensive, shorter Class A’s with Class C features — when it debuted its \$90,000 Storm at the National RV Trade Show in 2009. However, as Steven Hileman, Fleetwood’s marketing director, noted during Open House, “Through the years, with normal price creep and product upgrades, now the Storm is closer to \$115,000-\$120,000.” At Open House, the Decatur, Indiana, builder, a division of Allied Recreation Group (ARG), introduced an all-new crossover, the Flair.

“While we may be offering this at an entry-level price — we’re working on a consumer campaign so that we can advertise to buyers that the dealers can offer it at \$69,995 — we

don’t view it as an entry-level coach,” said Hileman.

According to Hileman, the new Flair is built to the same standards as ARG’s other Class A gas and diesel coaches — lines that include the Monaco, Holiday Rambler and American Coach nameplates.

“You get the thicker fiberglass walls and vacuum-bond construction and interlocking aluminum construction techniques. You also get features people are looking for right now, like large awnings with LED lights, diesel-style baggage doors and a blind spot or ‘doggie’ window — and lots of storage, including large pass-through storage in the back. Plus it’s

got full-body paint. Everybody else in this segment is either using graphics or colored fiberglass. Full-body paint is a huge premium and it will hold up a lot better in the long term and it has a heck of a lot better look to it,” Hileman explained.

Built on a Ford chassis with a GVWR of 16,000 pounds, the Flair also sports an aggressive-looking front cap with LED accent lights and high-intensity headlights and ARG’s hide-a-loft drop-down bunk system. “The cabover bunk sleeps two with a capacity of 650 pounds,” Hileman noted, “unlike some other beds in the class, which are rated for a 200- to 300-pound maximum capacity.”

recently introduced its first Ram ProMaster-based Class B. The LEXOR TS (Twin Sofa) is similar to the floorplan of the Chevy-based LEXOR, but with a larger bathroom. The TS comes with standard multiplex wiring, a 13-foot power awning, Onan 2.8-kW generator, 11,500-Btu rooftop A/C, solid maple cabinetry, 24-inch interior LED LCD TV and Blu-ray player, in-dash navigation, king bed and five-year limited coach warranty for \$98,787 (MSRP fully loaded).

Roadtrek:

Augmenting its popular “Adventurous” line of Sprinter-based RVs, which includes the CS-Adventurous and RS-Adventurous, the Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, Class B builder has released the TS (Touring Series) Adventurous. Featuring an onyx interior and interactive Coach-Connect monitoring system utilizing a tablet to



perform an array of tasks such as turning on lights or extending awnings, the TS retails beginning at \$121,901.

“It is innovative as far as electronics are concerned,” said Joe Morales, director of sales administration and events management for Roadtrek. “With a phone or iPad, you are able to control the components in the vehicle when you are away from the coach. You can check on the temperature inside the motorhome if, for example, you have a pet inside and you want to turn on the A/C. You can also check battery levels. The coach has the ingenuity to tell you whether your tanks are starting to get too high and it will send you a text telling you it’s time to dump, or tell you when batteries are getting low.”

SVO Group: An altogether new entrant, SVO Group Inc. of Elkhart, Indiana, threw its hat into the Ram ProMaster Class B ring with the debut of an \$86,000 Embassy B van at the Open House. The Embassy differs in that it features a rear-bath floorplan (with composting toilet), which opens up the living area. The motorhome also features a hydronic heating system and a 6-foot patio that extends off the rear.

Forest River Dynamax Rev ↗

Known for its lines of “Super C” coaches built on nearly bulletproof Class 8 truck chassis, Dynamax Corp. certainly turned some heads at the Open House when it unveiled its relatively diminutive Rev, the latest OEM to build on the Ram ProMaster chassis. “It’s a whole new class, a whole new ballgame for Dynamax,” said Jim Jacobs, the company’s new general manager.

Featuring a Dynamax-built “house” with aluminum-framed side walls, the Rev “B-plus” came out of the chute with two 24-foot floorplans: the 24RB (rear bath) and 24TB with a rear bedroom. The GVWR is 9,350 pounds.

Standard features on the Rev, part of a new wave of diminutive motorhomes being introduced into the U.S. market as adaptations of a



European, Fiat-based van, include a 32-inch outside entertainment center (with 32-inch TV), armless electric Carefree awning with built-in wind sensor and LED lights, frameless windows and an exterior “service station” that includes a shower, drain valves and a tank-monitor panel.

Inside, expect to see solid-surface countertops, a 7-cubic-foot refrigerator, electric drop-down bed and a second 32-inch LCD TV.

Fully loaded — Jacobs said there are virtually no options on the product other than color choice — the Rev retails for about \$85,000.



TMC Tuscany ↗

Thor Motor Coach released a number of new models at the Open House, including a new A.C.E. 293, which is one of the few floorplans in the entry-level market with dinette seating on the passenger side of the coach. But there was even more attention being generated by the company’s high-end Tuscany single-axle diesel pushers, where the XTE line’s revamped interior featuring Amish-built, high-gloss cabinetry wowed visitors and the new 40DX found its way on a lot of order sheets.

With a floorplan built for entertaining, the 40DX 40-footer with a GVWR of 37,600 pounds is a bath-and-a-half unit with opposing seating in the main cabin. “We designed it so there are theater seats in it,” noted Adam Gudger, national sales manager for TMC’s diesel division. “That’s one thing that hasn’t been done in motorized until now — full-recline theater seating.” Above the opposing sofa is a 60-inch retractable TV and, at the back of the coach is the full bath, which, with the bedroom, creates more of a master suite feel. “Even with a king bed you still have this huge rear bathroom,” Gudger pointed out.

Powered by a 450-hp Cummins, the coach (\$375,000 MSRP) also features a new 10-kW generator and three 15,000-Btu air conditioners with heat pumps.

Coachmen Sportscoach Cross Country 404RB ↘

Designing a motorhome is always a compromise between weight and space. That’s especially true when it comes time for lights out, and is one reason why small Class A crossovers with their cab bunks are so popular — but they look woefully out of place in a luxury diesel pusher. Coachmen RV found a way to add two more sleeping positions in its upscale Sportscoach Cross Country 404RB — and most people would be hard-pressed to find them.

The Middlebury, Indiana, builder





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is the first motorhome OEM to offer what regional sales manager Joe Kellogg calls a “salon bunk.” Using an Italian-sourced mechanism, the nearly 12-foot-long bunk is crafted into the top of the Sportscoach’s forward streetside slideout. When not in use, it’s concealed by a slightly deeper slideout fascia. At night, the belt-driven bunk lowers and can support 500 pounds.

That adds two extra sleeping spots in a coach that already boasts a rear king-size bed and a sofa bed in the main cabin that can accommodate two — an impressive arrangement in a high-end diesel. And that’s not counting a possible swap of the freestanding dinette for an optional booth that can welcome two more.

The bath-and-a-half 404RB does all this without sacrificing the kind of luxury commanded by its \$280,000 MSRP. Built on a Freightliner chassis and powered by a 340-hp

Cummins, the 41-foot-9-inch coach also features a polished porcelain snap-tile floating floor, an induction cooktop, quartz countertops and a 21-cubic-foot residential refrigerator.

Coachmen Pursuit ➡

The term “entry-level” sometimes has a negative connotation — but as Coachmen demonstrates with its Pursuit gas Class A line, cutting costs doesn’t have to mean cutting corners. The line was on the receiving end of a major facelift while still keeping a lid on the MSRP; depending on floorplan options and length, the 27- to 33-foot motorhome with its 18,000-pound GVWR, prices out at \$98,000 to \$115,000.

Of the four coaches in the lineup, all are two-slideout models — except for the model 27KB on display at the Open House. The smallest member of the family at 29 feet, the 27KB boasts the biggest slideout, a full-wall



number that incorporates the entire curbside galley — including the stovetop, microwave, sink, refrigerator and food pantry — as well as the rear king-size bed. It’s also the most open of the four floorplans, and the use of warm tones creates an inviting atmosphere and highlights many of the Pursuit’s upgrades. They run the gamut from new wood options to new flooring, fabrics, backsplashes and wainscoting. Outside, the Pursuit has a new dyed-fiberglass exterior with new graphics, along with a “more automotive-style” front cap. **M**

Pleasure-Way



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By Ben Smith

BRAKE TIME



Installing the RVibrake2 auxiliary braking system, with a tire-pressure-monitoring feature, nets shorter stopping distances and greater confidence

There are a great number of RVers who want to take the comforts of home with them when they travel in a motorhome. Of course, these include things like a comfortable bed, shower, TV, etc., but for many, “comfort” also means having a car available to reach beyond the campsite when you arrive at the destination.

Renting a car at your destination is a solution, but rental cars are not always available because of location and/or distance from a rental source. Using a towing dolly is an option, but that means finding a place to park the dolly, either at home or at a campground. And, getting the car on the dolly, and tied down, can require quite a bit of effort.

The most often used solution is to hook the family car to the motorhome and flat tow it. There are many excellent products available that allow you to do this — towbars come in many sizes and shapes, and have a variety of features. Once the towed vehicle is connected to the coach, however, a new issue arises. By adding the additional weight of a towed vehicle to the already heavy weight of the motorhome, the stopping distance and even the normal slowing distance of the combo increases significantly.

In order to provide additional braking, an auxiliary braking system can be installed in the towed vehicle. It's quite a relief when a situation requires you to use the brakes in your motorhome — either in normal braking or in full-on emergency braking — and you sense you are not being pushed by the towed vehicle, but are indeed getting additional braking from it. And, if the

towbar failed and the towed vehicle were to break away, it would be extremely important to have the vehicle's brakes applied immediately to bring it to a stop.

In most states, the primary need for an auxiliary braking system is to meet the requirements of the state vehicle safety code. These states, and provinces in Canada, require an auxiliary braking system be installed in the towed vehicle. Indeed, having an auxiliary braking system in the towed vehicle is almost as necessary for safety as is having a towbar just to move the vehicle along behind the coach.

There are a number of braking systems on the market; some are portable and others can be permanently mounted in the dinghy vehicle. Portable units are very popular for obvious reasons, but some are quite bulky and heavy, and occupy valuable storage space. The RVibrake2 auxiliary braking system is svelte and proportional (inertia-activated) to boot. Installation is relatively easy and once we got the motorhome and dinghy on the road, it was clear that this braking device is a top performer.

The RVibrake2 packaging is good looking and functional, keeping the components well organized and protected.



If packaging represents the quality of the product inside and the corporate mindset of the company that makes it, RVi has nailed it. The product inside was not oversold by the packaging nor the advertising hype.

The basic brake actuator is not much larger than an older laptop computer and has a handle on the side that makes it easy to carry and install in the vehicle. There are various bits and parts in the box and they begin to make sense once the installation begins. Installation of the breakaway switch and wiring (included with the system) from the vehicle's front bumper through the firewall is the most difficult and time-consuming step. Once the breakaway switch and wiring is in place, however, the rest of the installation is pretty straightforward.

The RVi actuator sits on the vehicle floor directly in front of the driver's seat and the actuator arm is attached to the



1



2



3

[1] The RVibrake2 incorporates a spring-loaded jaw that is very easy to operate. [2] The jaw clamps to the brake pedal and is designed to fit a variety of brake pedal shapes and sizes. [3] The actuator unit sits on the driver's side floor, and must have a rear stop to prevent movement rearward when the brake pedal is applied. In this Jeep Liberty, the floorpan had a rise of about 2 inches that worked perfectly; in other applications, it may be necessary to attach a supplied bar to the seat support at floor level.

brake pedal with a set of claw-like grips that are very easy to use. Through some clever engineering, the rear of the actuator arm is positioned at any of the several anchor points to adjust for the variations in floor and pedal configurations between various cars. Having the ability to move the actuator arm also makes placement and detachment of the claws from the brake pedal a very easy process. In some cases, a bar that is included with the unit can be attached to the driver's seat support at floor level to provide a rear stop for the actuator if necessary. In the Jeep Liberty used for the test, the floor pan had a slight rise of 2 inches that provided a rear stop so the bar was not required.

There is a wire antenna that plugs into the actuator and it is draped over the vehicle's rearview mirror to provide the communications link to the monitor that goes in the motorhome. Then, the power cord is plugged into the vehicle's 12-volt DC outlet and the lanyard between the motorhome and the breakaway switch is connected. At this point, the red lights on the actuator will begin to flash and the compressor, which provides air pressure for the ram mechanism, may or may not come on.

The next step is to push the Auto Position button three times, waiting for the actuator to press the brake pedal and retract between each time the Auto

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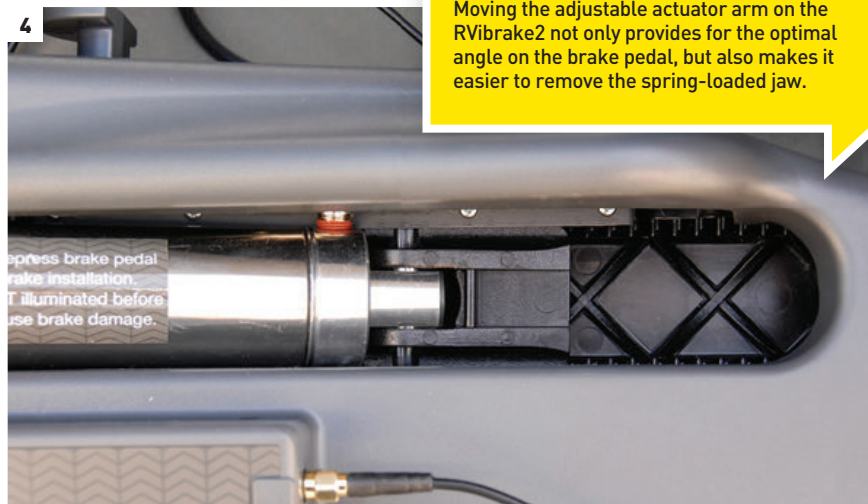
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⚙️ INSTALLATION TIP

Moving the adjustable actuator arm on the RVibrake2 not only provides for the optimal angle on the brake pedal, but also makes it easier to remove the spring-loaded jaw.



[4] The rear of the actuator arm features an adjustment slot to provide for variations in floor and pedal configurations.

Position button is pressed. It is very important that the button be pressed three times to automatically position the actuator and to relieve any vacuum stored in the dinghy's vacuum braking reservoir. This process is required each time you hook the dinghy to the motorhome and install the RVibrake2.

Should the vehicle engine be started any time after this point, the 12-volt DC connection must be unplugged; then wait for a brief period and plug it back in to reset the actuator. As before, the Auto Position button must be pushed three times to relieve the vacuum assist. There is a very strong warning from the manufacturer that failing to relieve the vacuum assist will most likely result in some degree of tire damage and/or adverse brake wear due to overbraking.

Once the installation of the RVibrake2 actuator is complete, the wireless monitor can be plugged in to any 12-volt DC outlet in the motorhome

dash and in a position that is obviously viewable from the driver's seat. The wireless monitor has a very descriptive menu that is easy to follow. Because the RVibrake2 system is a Bluetooth device, the monitor must be paired (initially only) to the actuator in the dinghy. Following the steps in the Menu instructions completes this task.

Once the monitor and actuator are paired, the additional features of the wireless monitor can be accessed. In addition to the Menu button, there are three other buttons. Using the Sensitivity button, the driver can select the system sensitivity for Low, Medium, or High (we selected High for this application). The Vehicle button selects the type of vehicle being towed (Compact, Small SUV, Large SUV or Truck), and the last button is the Brake Test button. When the Brake Test button is pushed, the actuator applies the dinghy brakes. This test should only be performed in an open area where there is no traffic and speeds are slower than 10 to 15 mph.

The wireless monitor also offers a number of helpful indicators and warnings. For example, an LCD bar display reflects the amount of braking the system is applying, and should the dinghy brakes stay applied for



[5] Tire-pressure-monitor sensors install easily on the vehicle's valve stems.

[6] The wireless monitor is plugged into any 12-volt DC outlet in the dash and positioned so that it is visible to the driver. Using the Sensitivity button on the wireless monitor, the driver can select Low, Medium or High braking sensitivity. The Vehicle button selects the type of vehicle being towed. [7] Once the tire-pressure-monitor sensors are paired to the system via Bluetooth, the tire pressure is displayed on the wireless monitor with the push of a button. [8] A zero PSI alert is one of three displays that can let the driver know something is wrong. Here, you can see the display is showing zero pressure in the right front tire; the readout is accompanied by a loud alarm.

15 seconds, an indicator will light, an alarm will sound and the system will disengage the brakes. They can then be reapplied using the motorhome's brakes. The system also has a low-battery-voltage warning/alarm, and a breakaway indicator/alarm.

Another nice feature of the RVibrake2 is a tire-pressure-monitor system for the dinghy's four tires. Installation is pretty straightforward; just attach the tire-pressure sensors to the correct valve stem and follow the steps on the wireless monitor. The tire-pressure sensors operate via Bluetooth and need to be paired to the system for the initial installation. This is accomplished by following the menu on the wireless monitor. The RVibrake2 actuator must be plugged in and operational before installing the tire-pressure sensors. Once paired, the tire pressure is displayed on the wireless monitor with the push of a button.

There are three displays for tire-pressure alerts. A Low Pressure alarm

[9] Installing the breakaway switch and related wiring from the vehicle's front bumper through the firewall is the most time-consuming part of the installation. Other than that, it's a pretty straightforward job.



sounds if any tire falls below the set pressure (default is 25 psi); a TPS Zero Pressure lets you know if the dinghy vehicle has a flat; a High Temp Alert goes off if any tire temperature exceeds 170 degrees Fahrenheit.

Out of the gate, the smoothness of the dinghy braking was impressive. Once up to normal non-freeway speed, the brakes were applied again and the slowdown was very smooth. A hard stop at low freeway speed resulted in maximum dinghy braking without tire squealing or burning rubber. The proportional operation of the RVibrake2 is a strong confidence builder. Adjusting the Sensitivity Level control allows the driver to dial in comfortable dinghy braking effort.

It's nice to know the RVibrake2 system will have your back when needed. At \$1,325, it's a good investment in safety and it can be moved to a new dinghy vehicle at any time. **M**

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Handy Lighting

A trio of Tri-Lynx LED fixtures use motion and dawn/dusk sensors to help keep owners out of the dark

By Kevin Livingston

LIGHTING

Cost: \$15.00- \$23.00

Time: 10 minutes

Difficulty: 1/10

It seems that no matter how well-equipped your motorhome is with all the latest and greatest in technology and trinkets, there's always something lacking. For example, just when you think that every nook and cranny is completely out of the dark, you find that you could use more lighting. Everyone is on the LED bandwagon these days and there are a wide variety of fixtures suitable for RVs. Tri-Lynx, a longtime supplier to the RV industry, has a slightly different approach to alternative add-on LED lighting, with a line of new battery and solar Tri-Lynx Lites.

The company followed the same path when designing all three versions of its new Tri-Lynx Lites, which are meant to be permanently and/or temporarily mounted, depending on the situation. Key components include motion and dusk/dawn sensors, and a clever mounting plate.

Three LEDs are used in the smallest model and they can be triggered by a built-in motion sensor, making it perfect for adding just enough light for occupants to move about safely in hallways and bathrooms during the slumber hours. The motion sensor is actively tripped within a 6- to 9-foot range; the light operates on three AAA batteries. Contributing to system versatility, the housing can be mounted to the provided Slide N' Lock plate or it can simply be removed from the plate and secured to a metal surface by way of four strong built-in magnets.

The second style of Tri-Lynx Lites is similar in shape and size to the three-light model and utilizes the same motion sensor and Slide N' Lock plate or magnet mounting, but the 12-LED layout makes it much brighter. Complementing the motion sensor is a dawn/dusk sensor, which makes a huge difference in extending battery life,

The Tri-Lynx 12-LED model has motion and dusk/dawn sensors.



since the lights are only activated in low-light conditions. The 12-LED format works exceptionally well for things like compartments or for lighting up the area when attaching a dinghy vehicle. It takes three AA batteries.

Tri-Lynx's third LED product is completely different in form and function. This light has a triangular housing with six white LEDs in the lower panel while supporting a solar panel on top. The solar power unit shares the same daylight and motion-sensor technology, which is turned on for 25- to 30-second intervals. Like its kin, the six-light/solar model has magnets for mounting as well as two screw holes for a more permanent fixture; hook-and-loop strips are provided for even more installation options.

The Tri-Lynx Lites come in handy when extra lighting is needed and permanent wiring is not practical. I found the Slide N' Lock plate to be incredibly versatile by allowing the light to be secured in multiple locations. Of course, the solar model needs exposure from the sun to operate and if it's going to be used in places where the sun doesn't shine, like under an awning, you'll have to move it into the sun's path during the day. The hook-and-loop strips make it easy to move it around.

We found numerous uses for these lights from lighting up the entryway to overcoming darkness inside storage compartments. The possibilities are virtually unlimited and these lights are inexpensive. Camping World sells all three models, with the smallest priced at \$15; the 12-LED model sells for \$17; and the solar version is \$23. **M**

Tri-Lynx, 800-463-5505, www.trilynx.com



From far left: Tri-Lynx lights are offered in battery and solar configurations. Magnets can be used to attach the lights to a metal surface or simply use the Slide N' Lock plate, which accepts the three- or 12-LED housings and can be attached to just about any surface.

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Service Contract Quandary

When a promised reimbursement looked like it never was going to arrive, a reader asked Hot Line to intervene. She wrote:



“ On Sept. 16, 2013, I purchased a 2014 Tiffin Breeze from Colton RV (North Tonawanda, New York) when I was at America’s Largest RV Show in Hershey, Pennsylvania. At the time, I signed a service contract with Premier Dealer Services at a cost of \$8,000 for 60 months or 50,000 miles. Upon returning home, I decided that the cost, which was added to the total of the RV and submitted to my loan company, was not worth the price, so I contacted Colton RV and asked them to cancel the service contract. They sent me the cancellation form, which I signed and returned on Sept. 25, 2013.

On June 25, 2014, I faxed a letter to the president of Colton RV, and I followed up with a phone call on July 1, 2014. I have also left numerous voice mails. To date, I have not received the \$8,000 deduction from my loan amount, which I was told would happen when they received the paperwork. I don’t know how I can get this problem resolved and am hoping that Hot Line can help.

Linda Jenkinson | Waretown, New Jersey

Hot Line contacted Colton RV and Premier Dealer Services on Jenkinson’s behalf. The following correspondence explains the outcome of this misunderstanding.

Premier Dealer Services:

As a member of Premier Dealer Services’ legal department, I am responding to Hot Line’s letter regarding Linda Jenkinson. We have investigated this matter and have worked with the finance manager at Colton RV to refund Jenkinson the purchase price of her service contract. Her bank will be receiving a check for \$8,000 within the next 10 business days. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

**Nichole Hack, Consumer Relations
Premier Dealer Services
San Diego, California**

Colton RV:

We take customer service very

seriously and are embarrassed by the service Linda Jenkinson received. This was a rare internal situation where communication was not at its best. We have expedited the refund check to her bank and have changed our internal process in regard to cancellation. Please accept my sincerest apologies for how this matter was handled.

**Binoy George, Finance Director
Colton RV | North Tonawanda, New York**

Black-Water Tank Trouble

Frustrated with the placement of the black-water tank on his coach, a reader

requested the assistance of Hot Line when all else failed. He wrote:

“ I have a problem with my new Jayco Precept. I have exhausted all efforts to get a resolution from Jayco and my dealership (World Wide RV Center) on a problem with the placement of the toilet. The design of the black-water tank has a shelf over where the waste drain exits the tank. When installing the toilet, the Jayco factory cut the hole for the toilet drain over the shelf area, which makes the toilet paper and waste build up on the shelf, not flush into the tank. It builds up until it starts coming up into the toilet. I used a toilet spray wand to move the waste to the deep part of the tank — not a very desirable thing to have to do once a day. Can Hot Line please help?

Paul Mayo | Mesa, Arizona

Hot Line sent a letter to Jayco on Mayo’s behalf. After receiving our letter, the company offered to replace the tank with an identical tank. Mayo refused the offer, stating that it would not solve the problem. Soon after, we received the following letter from Jayco that closed the case. It read:

We are working with Mayo’s dealer and have sent a new tank to be installed in the motorhome. I also talked with the service technician Mayo had contacted, and told him there was a new tank at World Wide RV Center. This new tank will resolve Mayo’s concern with his holding tank.

**Paul Martin, Customer Service Specialist
Jayco Inc. | Middlebury, Indiana**

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 2015 Chrysler 200

Q I am looking to buy a new automobile and am interested in the new 2015 Chrysler 200C with AWD. I want to tow the car behind my motorhome using a tow dolly with electric brakes purchased from Camping World. Is it OK to tow this car with the front wheels on a dolly? I asked three Chrysler dealers and they all said yes, but they said to contact Chrysler engineers for a definite answer. I am waiting to order the car pending this answer. I would like the AWD option, but will go with two-wheel drive if that is the only way.

Garry Nielsen | Hansen, Idaho



A According to the most recent version of the 2015 Chrysler 200 owner's manual, the only model approved for towing with a tow dolly (front wheels off the ground) is the FWD Chrysler 200. None of the all-wheel-drive models are approved for flat towing, as they do not have a neutral position in the power transfer unit.

Starter Failures

Q We have a 2012 Georgetown 329 motorhome with a Ford Triton V-10. Last June, every time we stopped and turned off the engine it would not start again. There was no sound at all; no clicking or grinding, but the dash indicator lights lit up normally while the key was being turned. After waiting 30 minutes, the engine started again as normal. We took the coach to a service center and we were told the starter needed to be replaced. We had it replaced and Ford Motor Co. reimbursed us under warranty. The replacement was not an original Ford part, but a new starter from NAPA.

Three months later, the motorhome would not start again, and a cooling-off period didn't help. We called for roadside assistance and the mechanic who arrived checked the starter. He used a screwdriver to make a connection in the starter and it worked. Not wanting to get stranded, we bought another new starter from NAPA (we got a refund on the purchase price when we returned the defective one) and had it installed. Do you know what might have caused two starters

to fail and what we can do to prevent it from happening again?

Dennis Mendonsa | Newberg, Oregon

A Intermittent problems are always frustrating, often inconclusive, and putting this kind of a puzzle together after the fact is difficult. The root cause of each failure should have been diagnosed at the time and the evidence is now gone. Sometimes heat causes electrical components to not work, and when they cool off they start working again. There are relays, solenoids and a neutral safety switch that are all in the starting circuit. The starters should have been bench tested, and taken apart if necessary, to determine why they failed.

Did you try using the emergency start switch that connects both coach-and-engine-starting batteries together for extra oomph? I do hear about Ford starters failing from heat. If both starters were replaced without bench testing them, it's possible that the root cause of your problem is still there, but since it is intermittent and maybe hasn't been hot enough, is still lurking. I would cross my fingers; if it happens again it is statistically doubtful that the starter is defective again and some

other component is faulty.

Shuddering Steering

Q I have a 2002 Rexhall Vision on a Ford F53 chassis with 38,000 miles. On a recent drive down a modest mountain road, I experienced for the first time a shudder or oscillation in the steering wheel as I applied the brakes. As soon as I took my foot off the brake, the symptom subsided. It repeated to a lesser extent as I finished the descent, but did not occur every time I hit the brakes (although when it did occur, it was only after hitting the brakes). The brakes should not have been excessively hot, because I gear down as needed for even slightly extended descents, and I don't ride the brakes, instead hitting them somewhat hard for a few seconds to slow down then letting them off to cool down.

My thought is that I could have a warped rotor that might warp more when it is warm. Is a warped rotor likely the culprit, or is there another cause? If this were the cause, would the rotor warp more when it's warm? Can it be turned, or does it have to be replaced? Any help is appreciated.

Chris Klein | Manhattan Beach, California

A There are two different types of oscillation or shuddering and two very different sources of the problems. Rotors can become warped in one hard stop. Some warped rotors can be resurfaced on a brake lathe, but many cannot; the only way you can tell is to try it and measure them to ensure they will be above minimum turning thickness after machining. Warped brake rotors stay warped, even when cool. So if you don't feel this every time you press fairly hard on the brake pedal, that's perhaps not the problem.

The Ford F53 chassis uses a solid-beam front axle, which is known to cause violent shaking when the vehicle hits certain types of bumps such as railroad tracks or rough pavement. This results in the front wheels flopping back and forth, left and right, in a rapid oscillation. Under the right circumstances it might be possible for the shuddering from the brakes to combine with uneven road surfaces to initiate the front-end wobble. Usually it only goes away after the vehicle is slowed down below a critical speed. This is consistent with your situation after braking.

The cure for this varies. Out-of-balance front tires, excess play in the steering gear and linkage, loose wheel bearings, bushings; anything that puts "slop" in the steering can exacerbate it. So the entire front end needs to be checked closely for these things, even though it has relatively low mileage. Finally, if the coach does not have a hydraulic steering damper (it looks like a shock absorber on the steering linkage) or if the unit is worn, install or replace as necessary. This is usually what cures it and it's not very expensive; I recommend it on all F53 chassis.

Hocus Focus

Q I purchased a 2014 Ford Focus Titanium four-door hatchback with automatic transmission and push-button start. I got this car because everything I read and heard said it is towable four on the ground.

In essence, that is true, but in reality not very practical because one of the requirements is to disconnect the negative battery cable prior to towing. Doing so will wipe out most data input by the owner, plus, after reconnecting, it will take several minutes for the transmission to relearn its adaptive strategy and idle condition. Here is my question: Can I run a charging wire from the motorhome to the car battery and by doing so not have to disconnect the negative battery cable? If that is a solution, what else do I need to do prior to towing?

Werner Koelln | Alamogordo, New Mexico

A Yes, you can run a charging line and leave the battery connected. It's important to have a battery connected onboard to power most auxiliary braking devices, and to operate a breakaway switch system that will operate the brakes if the car comes disconnected.

Mirror Tip

Q This is in regard to "New Motorhome Owner's Questions" from Ed Pavone in the November 2014 issue. If he would adjust his right side mirror properly, he could tell when it is safe to pull back over after passing. To do this, hook the dinghy to the coach. Then, if you don't have enough space at your house, go to a large parking lot and enlist the help of a friend. Park the motorhome and dinghy so they are straight in line, then position another vehicle off to the right and farther back than the dinghy, as if it were the vehicle in the lane next to you that you are passing. Position this vehicle at a safe distance behind the dinghy, as if you were going to pull back into the right lane. Now, sitting up straight in the coach's driver's seat, set your right mirror so that you can fully see the vehicle in the right lane. Then, when passing another vehicle, just check the

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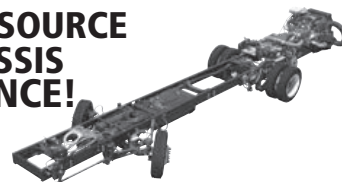


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right mirror and wait until you can see the complete vehicle in the mirror and then it is safe to signal and pull over.

Butch Nottelman | Moneta, Virginia

A Thanks for sharing your tip, Butch. Some motorhomes have smaller and less effective mirrors than others. It may be that the owners need to change or add mirrors. Your procedure should help in either case.

Towing Capacity Clarification

Q We have a 2008 Damon Daybreak motorhome and would like to tow a vehicle behind it. We have a 7-by-18-foot flatbed auto hauler trailer that we had planned to use. I have a 10,000-pound equalizer bar system on the trailer hitch. The gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of the coach is 20,500 pounds and the gross combined weight rating (GCWR) is 26,000 pounds. The GVWR of the trailer is 7,000 pounds and the carrying capacity is 4,940 pounds. The trailer weight is 2,050 pounds.

I have talked to several people and some say I can tow a vehicle with a weight of approximately 5,000 pounds, while others say I can only tow a vehicle of approximately 3,000 pounds. These figures take into account that the trailer weight will be added and thus increase the total amounts to 7,000 pounds and 5,000 pounds, which are within the trailer limits. The trailer is a double axle and has brakes on the rear axle. The coach has a brake controller installed.

Any help would be appreciated as we hope to travel to the U.S. and want to be within legal and safety limits.

Donald Graydon | Vars, Ontario, Canada

A If you subtract the GVWR from the GCWR, you are left with 5,500 pounds (when the motorhome is loaded to the GVWR), which is the most the trailer with the vehicle on it should weigh. If you subtract 2,050 pounds from the 5,500 pounds, you're left with 3,450 pounds for the vehicle. However, you should check the hitch weight rating on the motorhome, because many of them are rated for a maximum

Make Metal and Chrome Shine

Metal surfaces are prone to oxidation, leaving them dull. RV owners can restore lackluster metal and chrome with Shurhold's Buff Magic. This all-in-one buffing and polishing cream enables users to transform surfaces with no product switching required, saving time and money. Buff Magic is formulated with jeweler's rouge to be a metal polish, as well as a buffing and polishing cream. With each pass of a buffer or hand polishing, the abrasives in the compound break down smaller and smaller, which enables it to work a finish from dull to sparkling. This compound also removes clear-coat staining, surface rust, tarnish and Plexiglas scratches. In addition for use on motorhomes, Buff Magic works on pots, pans, acrylic tubs and showers. A 22-ounce container of Buff Magic retails for \$28.98.



Shurhold, 800-962-6241, www.shurhold.com/rv.

of 5,000 pounds, which would limit you further, to 2,950 pounds.

You could eliminate the weight of the trailer by flat-towing the vehicle, as long as it is designed for doing so (check our annual dinghy towing guides). Or if you select a vehicle that needs to have only the front wheels off the ground while towing, a tow dolly would work and still reduce weight.

Old Brake Hoses

Q I experienced a brake failure in my 1998 GM P-chassis Fleetwood Flair. After downshifting, emergency brake application and pumping like crazy, I stopped before "eating" several cars. I've read accounts about replacing the brake hoses, but haven't heard of anyone replacing the junction line that sits on top of the differential housing and splits the steel line

from the master cylinder to the rear calipers. On my unit, it is rubber.

Roy Beatty | Winter Garden, Florida

A We all have so many things going on that it is easy to overlook changing brake fluid, flushing the brake system and replacing rubber hoses. Thanks for your reminder of what can happen and for pointing out this hidden hose. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

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



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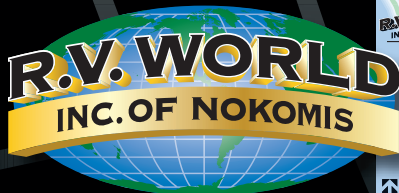
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(continued from pg. 36) Diamond Tooth Gertie's, Canada's first gambling hall and nightlife hub, draws visitors and locals. In 1898, legendary Gertie Lovejoy, craving attention, had a diamond lodged between her front teeth that sparkled every time she laughed. It drove men crazy! Soon celebrated as the town's dance hall queen, she was in high demand by men who willingly parted with their gold to spend time with her. Spend an entertaining evening here, try your luck at the slots, and enjoy an old-fashioned musical floorshow, while reliving the frivolous gold rush days. All profits go toward the town's restoration.

Want to try something different? The Sourdough Saloon offers a unique sourdough cocktail with a real human toe. No joke! Miner and rumrunner Louie Liken's frostbitten toe was amputated in the 1920s. He preserved it in a jar of alcohol in his cabin, but forgot to take it when he moved. After 53 years, Captain Dick Stevenson

discovered it in 1973, and served the first Sour Toe Cocktail for the brave at the Eldorado Hotel bar. Voila! The Sour Toe Cocktail Club was born.

In July 1980, Gary Younger, a miner, was determined to set a Sour Toe record. While downing his lucky 13th glass, he tilted his chair too far, fell back and swallowed the toe. Sadly, toe No. 1 was never recovered.

Through the years, toes were lost, stolen or swallowed. Amazingly, another always showed up. Now the toe is carefully preserved, protected and reused.

Enjoy a cocktail and join the club with more than 40,000 members. The toe must touch your lips, but do not swallow it, and you'll receive an authentic certificate for your bravery sure to impress friends and family back home. Caution: There is a substantial penalty for swallowing the toe!

Day 10: Dawson City, Yukon Territory

We drive 2.2 miles south on the Klondike Highway, then another 7 miles along a gravel road running alongside the famous "Bonanza Creek" to Dredge No. 4. Built in 1912 to extract gold, it was the largest dredge in North America. This industrial monster, eight stories high and two-thirds the length of a football field, operated 24 hours a day between April and September, excavating millions of dollars of gold.

Oblivious of the ruinous damage to the permafrost and pristine environment, this earsplitting, noisy giant left behind a colossal scar for many miles on a ruptured landscape. It now stands exactly where its last shift left it in 1992.

Later, we drive up a steep, winding road to Midnight Dome (elevation 2,894 feet) for a panoramic view of Dawson City and the surrounding hills. During the summer solstice, crowds gather to watch the sun dip behind the mountains, (its glow still visible), and later, watch it rise again. After a continuous twilight, it's dawn again.

Tomorrow we head for Chicken, Alaska, and the beginning of part 2 of our journey. **M**

FOUR TIMES THE FUN IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

(continued from pg. 30) villages and "Jaws Lake" inspired by the Steven Spielberg movie. At one point, we drive into a tunnel-like area, designed to replicate Skull Island from the movie "King Kong." King Kong 360 3-D features the behemoth himself "attacking" our tram as we pivot from side to side alongside dinosaurs that spit water on us. In a cavernous New York subway soundstage, we endure a major earthquake with fire, flooding, crashing cars and collapsing tunnel. It's thrillingly fun and leaves us smiling broadly.

Most rides at Universal are based on films and TV shows such as Shrek, the Simpsons, Despicable Me, Jurassic Park and Revenge of the Mummy. Many of the "rides" don't actually go anywhere. Instead, we sit in "cars" that jump, shift and jiggle with water and air blasts while we watch 3-D video. Some, like the impressive Jurassic Park, combine high-tech movie magic with a traditional theme ride that drops us down an 85-foot waterfall at 45 mph. The fast-paced Transformers 3-D has us flying through a futuristic world to save the planet.

Other attractions include live action. On the aqua-based movie set of "Waterworld: A Sea War Spectacular," actor-stuntmen perform amazing feats in a fast-paced drama.

They also offer behind-the-scenes glimpses with presentations like Special Effects Stage and Universal Animal Actors where the trainers demonstrate animal stars' training. In the NBCUniversal Experience, we check out cool props, costumes and artifacts from movies and TV shows, including the original DeLorean car from "Back to the Future" and the E.T. figure used in the sci-fi movie "E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial."

We return to Orangeland RV Park lighthearted and thoroughly spent. We've experienced four amusement parks in four days and loved it all. The best part? We saved money by bringing our beloved RV and, as we munch on sweet oranges in the shade of our personal citrus tree, we're feeling that our motorhome might just be "the happiest place on earth." **M**

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Goodbye Couch, Hello Adventure

The first step in having yourself a real adventure is saying *so long!* to your sofa

By Alan Rider

It's been said that you're not having a true adventure unless, at some difficult point, a part of you desperately wishes you were safe at home curled up on your couch. Inversely, they say the measure of whether you have an intrepid spirit is that, in spite of memories of such unpleasant moments, you often find yourself sitting on said sofa longing to be off on another adventure.

This, friends, is my life in a nutshell. Inevitably it seems that, from the minute I back my motorhome into our driveway after a particularly grueling trip, it's only a matter of days before the *go-for-it-dude!* part of my brain signs me up for some new and entirely novel experience. Next thing I know I'm restocking the pantry and heading out on another RVing adventure, usually before my self-preservation instinct has a chance to stammer "Uh, are you sure this is such a good idea?"

This is the story of one of those leap-before-you-look adventures (and yes, I think the substantial effort it took to avoid blacking out from the intense G-forces qualifies it as such) and the man who made it possible.

That would be a highly decorated former U.S. Navy fighter pilot by the name of Jim Neubauer, call sign Nails. I met Nails one sunny Southern California afternoon when I showed up to fly with Air Combat USA (800-522-7590, www.aircombat.com) where he'd been the operation's chief pilot for more than a decade.

As the name implies, Air Combat's

raison d'être is to give wannabe fighter pilots like me a chance to actually fly a two-seat SIAI Marchetti SF260 — the same propeller-driven aircraft used to train scores of new jet jockeys around the world — in a series of actual dogfights. No virtual reality here; this was the real deal.

After a short safety briefing and overview of basic fighter maneuvers, Nails and I donned our parachutes and flight helmets and walked across the tarmac to our mottled-gray plane. Having efficiently handled all the serious pilot stuff, he turned control of the aircraft over to me shortly after takeoff.

My equally green opponent and I spent a few minutes practicing the

dogfighting tactics we'd covered in the classroom. Before we knew it, our instructors turned us loose to shoot each other out of the sky using Air Combat's unique laser gun sight-tracking system.

Needless to say, things happened pretty quickly after that. Somehow Nails' calm voice managed to talk me through one high-G maneuver after another until I came up behind my adversary and closed the gap until his plane filled my gun sight. As I pulled the trigger and smoke billowed from his engine, Nails said simply, "Nice job!" A small compliment that felt like high praise coming from him.

All told, I won four of our six dogfights that afternoon, which turned out to be a good thing as Nails later admitted that he hated to lose even these make-believe battles.

That was the first thing I thought of when I heard Nails had recently lost his battle with cancer. For me, though, Jim "Nails" Neubauer will always be a winner because of the central role he played in helping thousands of us live out our "Top Gun" fantasies.

Ultimately, it's memories of bona fide adventures like this that get me off the couch and behind the steering wheel, searching out the unforgettable people and places I know are out there waiting for all of us motorhome travelers along The Road Ahead. **M**

“No virtual reality here; this was the real deal.”

Top Guns ☺

From left: Jim "Nails" Neubauer was the chief pilot at Air Combat USA before his passing in 2013. Ben "Joker" Clerx and Nails prepare author Alan Rider for takeoff.



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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

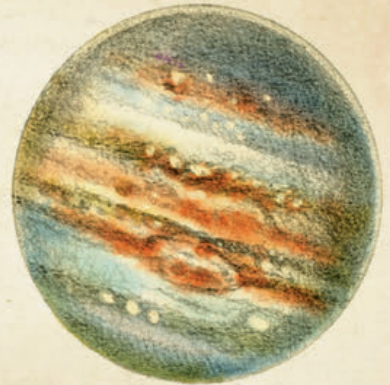


Fig. 7 Jupiter

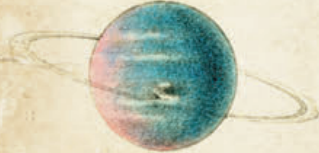


Fig. 2 Neptune

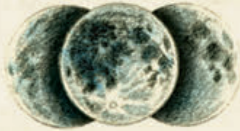


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon

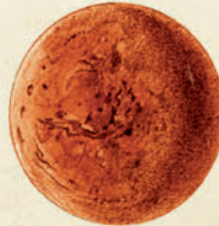


Fig. 6 Mars

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