

THE BEST OF THE BEST: ANNUAL READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

# MotorHome

Travel, Tech, Lifestyle – For the RV Enthusiast

January 2017

## 14 NEW COACHES AND TOP TRENDS FOR 2017

### THE CLASSIC RIDE

THE EASY-TO-DRIVE  
ITASCA NAVION

### PASSION IN ACTION

10 HOBBIES FOR  
THE RV LIFESTYLE

### DIY FRIDGE SWAP

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Visitors to Oregon's Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park can take a break from the sand dunes to swim or paddle at one of the scenic lakes.



The 2017 Winnebago Paseo Class B, powered by a 310-hp V-6 gas engine, features a fully equipped galley and many residential appointments. Pg. 48

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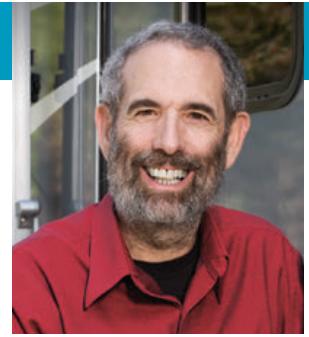
Looking for a smooth transition to life in a motorhome, this couple finds the 2007 Itasca Navion highly livable and easy to drive



## ON THE COVER

Built on the Ram ProMaster chassis, EHG's Aktiv combines the easy maneuverability of a Class B with the unexpected space-conscious ingenuity of European engineering (see test on page 42). Photo by Shawn Spence.

By Bob Livingston



## And the Winners Are ...

**M**otorhome owners get into the groove of things pretty fast. They are brutally subjective when it comes to what suits their lifestyle, and are not timid about letting others know when something works well or needs improvement. And with the explosion of social media, it's not hard to get the word out in a hurry.

That's great news for people looking for a new motorhome, especially those entering the lifestyle. It's also what makes our Readers' Choice Awards tick. Each year, readers vote online for their favorites and the results are published in this magazine (see page 31).

Everyone has an opinion, and distilling feedback from others can help current and future owners make good choices. In many cases it can also keep them from making costly mistakes. The process of reaching out to others to help make decisions was perfectly illustrated when a buddy of mine and his wife decided they wanted a motorhome. They were not total strangers to the lifestyle because over the years they had traveled with me on test junkets, helping with photography. Most of their assignments found them in Class A's and C's, but they took a multiyear hiatus and motorhome development passed them by.

To reacquaint, they shopped hard, spending hours on the internet looking at reviews and, of course, engaged in a number of conversations with

me. Finding the right floorplan was predicated on models that could handle the three dogs they always travel with. After renting a Class A gasser, they knew they wanted a diesel pusher, citing drivability as a major objective. (They are not alone, as you can see by the top chassis choice winner voted by our readers.) By the time our friends brought home their newly purchased motorhome, they were confident they had the right motorhome for their lifestyle. I expect they will be voting in next year's Readers' Choice Awards.

Customer feedback helps the industry move in the right direction, and encourages innovation and improvement. Manufacturers tend to listen, and we've seen a number of changes over the years that have made motorhomes more livable, with creature comforts tied to technology and modern design developments — as well as advanced building materials and accessories. Motorhomes are getting better, but they are not perfect — and probably never will be.

While it was fun to see which products, places and services are reader favorites, there's always a flip side. In an informal survey, I asked owners to give me the top three items on their wish list that would enhance their RV experience. As expected, the answers were all over the board, but there were those that stuck out. Ford chassis owners wished for a smoother ride. More efficient heating and cooling systems were high on the list, especially for those who only had one air-conditioner on a longer motorhome. Sinks without dividers, or at least with one side big enough for larger pans, were pretty universal, as was the wish for LP-gas ovens that don't require getting on one's knees to light.

A few people missed having a dinette over the freestanding table and chairs, and no one I talked to missed pleated day/night window shades. More comfortable seating was also fairly universal, as was the need for better Wi-Fi in RV parks.

It seems that getting away from it all is a major factor for motorhome ownership as long as the internet, reading e-mail and posting on Facebook are not part of the "all."

No doubt, staying connected — whether for information or friendship — is beneficial for all of us. **M**

### Contributors | January



**Ann Eichenmuller** is a retired educator and freelance writer living in Virginia's Northern Neck. She and her husband, Eric, divide their time between sailing and traveling in their Minnie Winnie.



**Bobbie Hasselbring** is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of [www.realfoodtraveler.com](http://www.realfoodtraveler.com), which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS Class C.



**Malia Lane** has been a full-time RVer since 2001 and loves traveling in her motorhome. She has traveled to Alaska and up and down both coasts. Her favorite places are state and national parks.



**Alan Rider** has been wandering America's backroads for more than four decades, and is passionate about collecting memories of the remarkable people and unforgettable places he encounters along the way.



**Barb Riley** is a northern-Indiana, lifelong RVer working in RV industry-related marketing and writing. She loves books, ziplines and finding new things to cook inside Pudge Pie irons over the campfire.



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

# MotorHome

**Publisher** Bob Livingston  
**Editorial Director** Eileen Hubbard  
**Managing Editor** Kristopher Bunker  
**Technical Editor** Chris Dougherty  
**Art Director** Rick Damien  
**Production Director** Bob Dawson  
**Production Manager** Brenda Hutchinson  
**Business Manager** Katey Purgatorio

**Consulting Editors** Wes Coughlan, Ken Freund, Jeff Johnston

**Contributors** Ann Eichenmuller, Chris Hemer, Malia Lane, Alan Rider, Barb Riley, *RVBusiness* Staff, Shawn Spence, Mary Zalmanek

**Vice President National Sales** Terry Thompson

**RV Classifieds** Katey Purgatorio  
3431 S. 257th St., Kent, WA 98032  
Tel 847-229-6756 Fax 270-495-6278  
katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com

**Advertising Sales Representatives**  
Sue Seidnitz (Southwest Region)  
847-229-6813, sue.seidnitz@goodsam.com

Kim Whitaker (Southeast Region)  
919-412-6325, kim.whitaker@goodsam.com

Lou Cicirelli (Northeast Region)  
954-297-9234, lou.cicirelli@goodsam.com

Scott Oakes (Northwest Region)  
Tel 847-229-6758 Fax 270-282-7356  
scott.oakes@goodsam.com

## Customer Service

**Subscriptions** (print and digital)  
**800-678-1201**  
motorhome@cdsfulfillment.com

**Website** www.motorhome.com

**Editorial** info-motorhomemagazine@goodsam.com



**President** Mark Boggess  
**Sr. Vice President/Group Publisher** Bob Livingston  
**Vice President/Advertising Sales** Terry Thompson  
**Vice President** Ann Emerson



*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.

Printed in the United States.

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## Which everyday household items do you carry along in your motorhome to help make life on the road easier?

That's the question we asked in our October 2016 issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

### Helpful Hangers

Which everyday household items make life easier on the road for us? Clothes hangers. For those items that we don't want to dry in the hot commercial dryers or things we only partially dry, we take 12 plastic-coated hangers for T-shirts, 12 white plastic hangers and six clip-type pants hangers. We have a Roadtrek 210, which features two clothes bars that are used to hang clothes in the back seat of cars and fit overhead across the front. To hang our clothes, we move the bars out. Having the hangers and the clothes bars and doing our laundry about every five days helps to make this chore a little easier.  
**Sue Hankins and Pat Yacklon | Torrance, California**

### A Healthy Blend

When my wife and I read this question, we both responded with the same answer: our Blendtec. With our Blendtec (which is a blender, but it does much more), we make our

morning smoothies, we grind our coffee, we make soup, etc. We literally use it daily, at home and on the road. And, no, we don't work for Blendtec.

**Paulette and Mike Littrell | Buda, Texas**

### Brew Master

There are three items that we wouldn't be without: a Keurig coffeemaker, a NuWave oven and a crock pot. If I had to narrow it down to one, I'd give up the crock pot and possibly the NuWave. The Keurig is an essential for life in a motorhome ... after all, the last three letters of the item are R-I-G!

**Karen and Dwayne McAbee | Fort Worth, Texas**

### Top 5

Here are the Top 5 household items we carry in our motorhome:

1. A washer/dryer combo. We simply put in a load, start the machine and then go do something else, and in two hours the laundry is done and dry. Now if it would only fold it and put it away ...

2. A Keurig coffeemaker. I can't start the day without a hot cup of coffee (uses 12 amps when heating the water).

3. With two cats and a black lab traveling with us, our Dyson V6 cordless vacuum is a must.

4. Our MasterChef countertop icemaker is much more efficient than the in-door icemaker we removed. The MasterChef makes cubes every 7 minutes (uses 10 amps when in use).

5. And a dual-zone electric blanket, which only pulls 2 amps.

**Jeff and Susan Gibbs | Via email**

### What, No Kitchen Sink?

I carry a variety of household items in my motorhome to help make life on the road even easier. Among them are:

- Stackable, magnetic measuring cups and spoons
- Hook-and-loop fasteners to tie extension cords and appliance cords
- Indoor/outdoor thermometer
- Refrigerator/freezer thermometers
- Hook-and-loop dots or squares

## Featured Letter

### What a Crock!

After the obvious, which is a coffeepot, the crock pot is our go-to item. A crock pot is an easy way to prepare a meal — we simply plug it in and turn it on. We are then free to do other activities, such as sightseeing, hiking and shopping.

When we return to the motorhome, we only need to set the table, grab a beverage and we're ready to eat.

**Geno R. | Tucson, Arizona**





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- First-aid kit

Linda Rogers | Via email

**The Press Is On**

A recent, and invaluable, addition to our motorhome was an inexpensive panini press with nonstick griddles from Amazon. In seconds, the press allows us turn a fairly bland cold sandwich into a hot grilled sandwich without the mess (and grease) of a conventional pan-grilled sandwich.

Bob Garrott | Young Harris, Georgia

**Home Skillet**

One of the handiest items for me is an electric skillet. I use it inside and out. RV kitchens are limited in counterspace, plus the stoves are often too small, depending on what you're cooking.

Linda Nash | Via email

**Think Safety**

There are items that we carry that I recommend everyone also carry.

As much as we'd like to think to the contrary, our coach and dinghy vehicle don't take care of themselves, and do require some care at times. So, we carry tools and other items that would assist us in the repair, replacement or maintenance of some items in our coach or dinghy.

Safety is another issue too many take for granted. We carry three fire extinguishers in our coach: one in the front, one in the rear bedroom and one at the entrance. Every coach should have one at the entrance. Check yours, know how to use it and turn it upside down every few months to make sure the contents are not all packed hard at the bottom. It's located at the entrance for a reason. Always fight any fire from the outside.

We also carry bottled water and extra batteries for emergencies.

Dick and Sandy | Near Buffalo, New York

**Fire Escape?**

I recently noticed that the fire-escape window in our Class A motorhome is about 7.5 feet above ground level. My wife and I are both in our mid-70s, and both have knee and leg problems. In the event of a fire, we will find it extremely difficult to get out.

All of the rope ladders I have looked at have problems under these conditions. Do your readers have any ideas on how to make this exit for senior citizens?

Mike Foley | Via email

**Question of the Month**

Which auxiliary products for exiting the motorhome do you carry along in the event of a fire? And, which types of fire-prevention/alert systems do you use?

Send your comments to: MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com

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# ESCAPES

**Be Cool** 🌀  
Dometic CFX coolers feature technology allowing owners to control them using any smart device. [pg. 14](#)



12 ROAD FOODIE | 14 WHEELS & GEAR | 16 CROSSROADS



## Welcome Aboard!

The uniquely constructed GulfQuest National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico in Alabama serves up an interactive, sea-worthy experience

By James Richardson

One of the newest museums along the Gulf Coast is located on the Mobile riverfront in Alabama. GulfQuest National Maritime Museum of the Gulf of Mexico, which opened in September 2015, is an unusual museum in several ways. GulfQuest is the only one dedicated to the Gulf of Mexico's rich maritime traditions and history; the 120,000-square-foot space is shaped like a ship headed into Mobile Bay; and there are 90 interactive exhibits for adults and children.

The museum has five levels, or decks, each loaded with creative displays. There are four theaters that explore the Gulf's maritime history and Mobile's shipbuilding contribution during World War II. An interesting Ocean Planet Theater shows satellite data projected onto a suspended 6-foot "Earth." Up on Deck 5, visitors can "Take the Helm" at the aptly named theater with a simulator that allows a lucky guest to "navigate" through the Port of Mobile.

Five miles southwest of the museum is Shady Acres Campground (251-478-0013, [www.shadyacresmobile.com](http://www.shadyacresmobile.com)), which offers full hookups and free Wi-Fi.

For more information on GulfQuest, call 251-436-8901, or visit [www.gulfquest.org](http://www.gulfquest.org).

The full-size container ship actually houses the museum exhibits at GulfQuest. Visitors to the facility explore the interactive environment to learn how containers are used to transport products worldwide.



By Bobbie Hasselbring

## Reindeer Jane's Cookies

**W**hen you think of wildlife in Fairbanks, Alaska, bear, moose, caribou and perhaps wolves come to mind. But reindeer? Yes, if you're at Running Reindeer Ranch (<http://runningreindeer.com>), a unique attraction just outside the city that allows visitors to learn about and walk with reindeer.

Reindeer aren't native to North America. These second cousins to the larger and wilder caribou are residents of Siberia and Northern Europe, where they were domesticated thousands of years ago for meat, milk and transportation.

Ranch owner Jane Atkinson, a former nurse and child-welfare worker, didn't intend to become a reindeer expert or, perhaps more accurately, a reindeer fanatic. A dozen years ago, Jane's 10-year-old daughter, Robin, wanted a horse. Jane's allergies forced her to say no. How about goats? Sheep? Again, no.

A visit to the University of Alaska Reindeer Research Program planted the idea that reindeer might be the answer (Jane's not allergic). Confident it wouldn't happen, Jane insisted Robin raise the money to buy one.

Two years later, with \$2,000 from selling cookie dough Robin developed, they purchased Ruby, their first reindeer.

Today, Robin is away at college and Jane is chief reindeer whisperer to a herd of eight. "The kids are gone, but the reindeer are still here," Jane says with a wry smile. "These personable creatures have changed my life."

Year-round, and by appointment only, Jane conducts 90-minute reindeer walks, where visitors learn about the gentle animals and stroll the forest with them. We joined 13 guests, including a family with several children, who paid \$55 per person to learn about, and play with, the reindeer.

Jane begins with a safety talk. While she encourages people to pet the reindeer, no one touches the potentially deadly antlers. "We've taught the reindeer not to touch people with their antlers," she says.

She also tells us not to worry if the animals charge by. "They won't hit you," she assures the group. "They're amazingly agile."

That's good advice when Rufus, a large, 180-pound neutered male streaks in front of me, his massive antlers inches away.

We hike an easy trail. The herd follows, meandering behind grandmother Ruby, who is gently led by one of the visiting children. The animals stop to graze or nibble tree lichen and, when they realize we've gone ahead, thunder through the trees to catch up.

We pause for more info about reindeer — the "click, click, click" mentioned in the Christmas song, "Up on the House Top" actually refers to popping ankle tendons; reindeer grow and drop new antlers every year; Olive, a reindeer especially bothered by flies, often



From top: Reindeer lose and regrow their antlers every year. A visitor feels a pelt on display at Running Reindeer Ranch.

sneaks into Jane's house; and more.

Back home, Jane shows us reindeer hides and antlers and serves us excellent cookies.

### Got a favorite cookie recipe?

Email [bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com](mailto:bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com) with "cookie" in the subject line.

### RUNNING REINDEER RANCH COOKIES



Not overly sweet, these cookies are great for travel or for the holidays.

- 1 cup butter
- ½ cup white sugar
- ¾ cup brown sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons vanilla extract
- 1 cup flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 1½ cups unsweetened coconut
- 5 cups oatmeal (whole rolled oats, not instant)
- 2 cups dark-chocolate chips
- 1 cup walnuts, chopped (optional)

► Preheat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Cream the butter and sugars together, then add the eggs and vanilla extract to the mixture. Mix well, add the rest of the ingredients and mix.

Bake for 10 minutes. Remove to a wire rack to cool completely.



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## Sight Lines

For added safety and visibility for the dinghy while it's in tow, RVers have the option of adding auxiliary taillights rather than tapping into the vehicle's electrical system. And we all know the benefits of LEDs over traditional bulbs: they're brighter, they activate faster and they last longer. Plus, LEDs do not generate significant heat, so there's no danger of melting the taillight lens. For the best of both worlds, Roadmaster offers an LED Bulb and Socket Kit that completely bypasses the dinghy's electrical system. The wiring is routed underneath the dinghy to a socket mounted to the grille or fascia. The complete kit contains a 27-foot wiring harness, butt connectors, two LED bulbs, two sockets, cable ties, ring terminals, a split loom and installation instructions. Note: Before beginning installation, ensure that the dinghy's taillight fixtures have room for an extra socket and bulb inside the lens housing. MSRP: \$98.92

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## Smart Coolers

Dometic's line of CFX portable refrigerators/freezers is a popular choice when the RV fridge is full, or if you're looking to keep things cool outside the motorhome. The company has announced that the CFX lineup will be getting a smart-technology upgrade, as each of the six different models will be Wi-Fi-enabled, allowing users to monitor and set compartment temperatures while on the go. Simply download the app to a smartphone or tablet, and the alarm function can be enabled to alert you if the temperature in the compartments deviates more than 3-5 degrees from the set point. The coolers all operate on 120-volt AC/12-volt DC power, and offer the choices of one single cooling unit, one single freezer unit or a cooler and freezer with separate zones for each. Sizes range from 26 liters up to 95 liters. MSRP: \$575-\$1,200

**Dometic | 800-544-4881 | [www.dometic.com/USA](http://www.dometic.com/USA)**



## Capture the Moment

Magellan has introduced its newest lineup of MiVue DashCam devices. The MiVue lineup features four stylish dashcams with varying levels of features and functionality. All dashcams include the features of the MiVue 240 (\$79.99), including 720p HD recording via a 130-degree wide-angle lens, a 2.3-inch screen, an impact sensor and an event-recording mode, in which the camera instantly saves protected files when it detects sudden changes in motion (like in an accident). The MiVue 320 (\$129.99) adds 1080p HD recording and a 140-degree wide-angle lens, a 2-inch screen, GPS tracking, night-view enhancement and a speed alert. The 420 (\$179.99) boasts a 2.7-inch screen, lane-departure warnings, forward-collision avoidance and 1296p HD recording. The flagship 480D (\$299.99) is outfitted with dual cameras, 1296p front/1080p rear HD recording, two wide-angle lenses and a motion-detection parking mode that activates the system when motion is detected around your parked vehicle.

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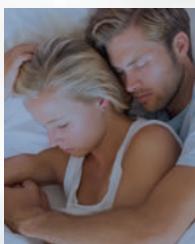
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## ESCAPES CROSSROADS

### Chiricahua National Monument

## A Wonderland of Rocks

Chiricahua National Monument appears as a little brown square on the map, located in the quiet southeast corner of Arizona, about 35 miles south of Willcox.

But the nearly 12,000-acre site is well worth the trip for a close-up look at what the Chiricahua Apache called "The Land of Standing-Up Rocks." After driving through ranchlands, you come to the surrounding mountains and the Rhyolite formations. Stop first at the visitor center, where there are interpretive displays and a good video explaining the geological and historical history of this unique place. Then set out on over 17 miles of day-use hiking trails that wind through the canyons and forests of pine and cedar, and through the rock formations themselves. The park shuttle transports visitors to the top at Massai Point, from which they can hike down and back to the visitor center. You can also drive and stop at the many lookout points. The names of the formations give you a good idea of what you'll see, with monikers like Mushroom Rock, Big Balanced Rock and Heart of Rocks.

In addition to the rocks, visitors can tour Faraway Ranch to learn about the Chiricahua Apache who once lived in this area. Bonita Canyon Campground, located less than a mile from the visitor center, offers 25 sites (no hookups) and a 29-foot RV restriction.

**For more information**, call 520-824-3560, or go online to [www.nps.gov/chir](http://www.nps.gov/chir) — Morey Edelman



Photo: Morey Edelman

### Destin, Florida

## Fish On!

Often referred to as "The Luckiest Fishing Village in the World," Destin, Florida, has attracted visitors of all ages for many years. While the fishing is indeed great, there is much more to do along Florida's Emerald Coast than wetting a line. Along with relaxing on the beach and fishing, Destin's attractions include waterparks, golfing and camping.

For an overview of the area, the Destin History and Fishing Museum (850-837-6611, [www.destinhistoryandfishingmuseum.org](http://www.destinhistoryandfishingmuseum.org)) offers

informative exhibits on a variety of subjects, including rods and reels, local fish and a glimpse at pre-electricity Destin back in the 1930s.

Destin has several excellent RV parks and campgrounds, some right on the beach, others with beach access, including Camp Gulf (877-226-7485, [www.campgulf.com](http://www.campgulf.com)), Destin West RV Resort (850-200-4533, [www.destinwestrvresort.com](http://www.destinwestrvresort.com)) and Geronimo RV Resort (850-424-6801, [www.geronimorvresort.com](http://www.geronimorvresort.com)).

**For more information**, call the Emerald Coast Convention & Visitors Bureau at 800-322-3319, or visit [www.emeraldcoastfl.com](http://www.emeraldcoastfl.com) — James Richardson 



Photo: James Richardson



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The author's new friend, Dennis Johnson, takes her on an adventurous tour. There are 2 miles of sand dunes between Honeyman Memorial State Park and the Pacific Ocean.

## Digging the Dunes

Some unlikely campground neighbors make a wonderful lasting impression at Oregon's Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park

By Malia Lane

If someone had asked me if I'd like to stay at a campground with dune buggies or ATVs as neighbors, I probably would have politely refused. Just goes to prove your first impression is not always right because I ended up thankful I didn't stick with that snap judgment.

In 14 years of fulltime RVing, I'd never come across a campground with ATV access to sand dunes right from the campground. I guess that's not too surprising, since I don't own an

ATV and it had never been an interest of mine, but I still think it's fun to be exposed to different worlds and I like to try new things. That's one of the things I've always appreciated about RVing, anyway.

So when I was introduced to Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park halfway up the Oregon coast and given the chance to ride on the dunes, I wasn't about to pass that up. At Social Security age now, having lived a somewhat unconventional life, the opportunities to do something totally new and exciting are too rare.

My cool adventure began with a chance meeting of Deputy Sheriff Ed LaGrone (the "Dunes Deputy") in Florence, Oregon, with me asking him what I shouldn't miss while in the area, and him taking me to meet his RVing friends at Honeyman. Ed introduced me to Dennis Johnson, an RVer who frequently visits Honeyman from California, to

JESSIE M. HONEYMAN MEMORIAL STATE PARK, OREGON



### ← Getting There

Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park is located midway up the Oregon coast, 3 miles south of Florence. From Portland, take Interstate 405 South to Interstate 5 South. Merge onto Oregon Route 569 West, which eventually becomes Oregon Route 126 West. Turn left onto U.S. Highway 101 South and continue for about 3 miles until you reach Canary Road.



take me out on my first ride. He knew Dennis was meticulously careful and safety-minded, but would also give me a fun ride. When Dennis was getting me harnessed in, he told me about the extra safety features he had installed, but I still ended up with a death grip on the sturdy bars in front of me the entire time.

The dunes are quite beautiful, and some parts look pretty innocent

Above: For a more tranquil experience, the day-use area at Cleawox Lake is great for swimming and kayaking, and is not accessible to ATVs. The entrance to the dunes is at the RV park, so it is extremely important for visitors to be considerate of fellow RVers before twisting the throttle.

and easy. But Dennis educated me a little about how he studies the dunes when he first arrives, and looks for things like razorbacks (sharp ridges with steep drop-offs), or a “witch’s eye” (a hole in the ground where two razorbacks almost meet facing each

other, which creates a narrow gulch that you could crash into). These things are not always easy to see, especially when the sun is up high and no shadows are made on the ground, so these obstacles are invisible and the ground will look flat.





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## GETAWAY

JESSIE M. HONEYMAN MEMORIAL STATE PARK, OREGON

Sometimes, too-steep drop-offs are not visible if you're driving up to one with the sun at your back. If you're going too fast, you could fly off and crash nose end into the sand. Dennis assured me he was taking me over parts he knew were safe, but let me tell you — they look a whole lot taller when you're going up them and it looks like there's a vertical drop on the other side. I did get a bit more comfortable as the ride went on, but I still couldn't quit alternating between screaming and squealing from the fun of it.

I was so loud that at the end of my ride, Deputy Ed kidded about having to ticket me for excessive noise. I think my screams exceeded even the acceptable ATV noise decibel level. Ed rode with us down to the flat area by the ocean and told me that he regularly has people jokingly ask him, "How do I get a job like this?" He admits it's cool because not everybody gets paid to go four-wheeling and ride ATVs all day. His passion, however, is to keep riding the dunes safe for everyone, saying the most common accidents are from hitting the razorback ridges. The most common ticket is for not having the required Safety Education Card (a driver's license for ATVs), and warnings or tickets are given for not having the tall flag flying that enables other vehicles to better see other riders over the dunes.

But the dunes are not the only attraction here. Honeyman is such a large and diverse park that there are two freshwater lakes within its boundaries: Cleawox Lake is on the same side of the highway as the campground and can be accessed by trail or by driving from the entrance, while Woahink Lake is on the opposite side of U.S. Highway 101 and has picnicking, swimming and fishing opportunities.

Cleawox Lake's stone-and-log bathhouse was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1938. I always enjoy the



Top: Deputy Sherrif Ed LaGrone is known as the "Dunes Deputy" because he patrols the dunes to ensure rider safety. All vehicles must be equipped with a tall flying flag for increased visibility. Above: Pete Romero makes the trip to Honeyman from Ferndale, Washington, to enjoy the campground's easy access to the dunes.



The Cleawox Lake bathhouse dates back to 1938. Today, visitors can rent canoes, kayaks and paddleboats, or use the swimming and fishing docks.

history and handiwork of the CCC, and you can see other examples of it here in the enduring stonework borders and shelters around the lake. You can rent paddleboats, canoes and kayaks, and there is a swimming dock and a fishing dock, plus the lake is stocked with rainbow trout.

Sand Dunes Trail is a boardwalk trail from the campground to dunes that are not accessible to ATVs. There are beautiful views of Cleawox Lake, the lodge and other facilities here. The sign warns that the sand is unstable and not to dig or tunnel on the dunes, but you can walk up to the top from here. And let me just say, that's a lot more difficult than it looks.

The RV campground itself is the second-largest in Oregon, with 2 miles of sand dunes between the park and the ocean. Within the campground, the road to access all the loops is paved and in good shape. Only Loop H at the back allows ATVs, and offers direct access to the dunes during the months of October through April. There is also an area for parking trailers and loading/unloading the ATVs. There are 47 paved, full-hookup sites, and all are oversized to accommodate the ATVs. Each site features a picnic tables and a fire ring with a cooking grate. Flush toilets and showers are conveniently located nearby.

It seemed strange to see ATVs parked in front of RVs — where normally you'd see tow vehicles or dinghies — or driving around the grounds. Dennis talked about the importance of "having respect for your campground" by being as quiet as possible when going through the grounds before or after getting on the dunes, and generally following the rules and observing quiet time at 10 p.m. when the gate to the dunes closes.

I sure had fun visiting with him, and would welcome him and his family as my neighbors any time.

But of course no matter how considerate the rider, these machines are inherently noisy, so if you're looking for a totally tranquil and quiet RVing

trip, that loop is not the place for you during this period. I found the whole experience to be interesting and something quite new to me; no easy feat at my age.

This adventure turned out to be a perfect example of how wonderful a day can be if you don't make yourself stick to what you had planned and just go with the flow. I ended up learning a lot, as well as having tons of fun being

introduced to this new activity. I'm not ready to go buy an ATV for myself, but I sure wouldn't turn down another ride sometime. **M**

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park**  
800-551-6949, or visit [www.oregonstateparks.com](http://www.oregonstateparks.com) and type Honeyman in the search bar

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## ON THE FAST TRACK

Good Sam puts the pedal to the metal in February

As the Good Sam RV Super Show gets ready to roll into Arizona's Phoenix International Raceway, February 23 through 26, the lineup of activities and entertainment is picking up the pace. Beyond shopping for RVs and RV gear, show-goers can saddle up on a mechanical bull, sample grilled chicken, pork and beef at the barbecue cook-off and ride shotgun in a real stock car.

The Rusty Wallace Ride Along Experience lets would-be race-car drivers buckle up in the passenger's seat of a NASCAR Sprint Cup car, as a professional instructor takes three high-speed laps around the 1.022-mile oval. To top it off, members get 50 percent off all Rusty Wallace Experience packages. Over at the Good Sam BBQ Showdown, \$5,000 is up for grabs at the Barbecue Championship Series-sanctioned cook-off, staged by AZBarbeque.

Trailer Life and MotorHome Publisher Bob Livingston tops the seminar schedule, games and giveaways are on tap at the Good Sam hospitality tent, and carnival rides, a climbing wall and a four-person bungee trampoline ratchet up the fun. After the sun sets, live music, Friday's movie under the stars and Saturday's fireworks show keep the good times going.

► For full details and to reserve a spot, call 866-838-5299 or visit [www.goodsamrvshow.com](http://www.goodsamrvshow.com).

## MORE RV SHOWS

In addition to February's big event in Phoenix, Good Sam stages RV shows across the country all year long. The following five shows are recent additions to the 2017 lineup:

### Knoxville RV Super Show

**January 6 through 8**

Sevierville Convention Center  
865-453-0001

### Wisconsin RV Super Show

**January 6 through 8**

Wisconsin Center, Milwaukee  
414-908-6001

### Chattanooga RV Super Show

**January 20 through 22**

Chattanooga Convention Center  
423-756-0001

### Cincinnati-Dayton RV Super Show

**February 2 through 5**

Dayton Airport Expo Center  
937-333-4700

### Columbus RV Super Show

**February 10 through 12**

Greater Columbus Convention Center  
614-827-2500

► For a complete list of 2017 shows and to purchase tickets online, visit [www.gsevents.com](http://www.gsevents.com). Good Sam members can save 50 percent on two adult tickets by showing their membership card at the ticket office or entering their membership number when buying tickets on the website.

## GOING PLACES WITH GOOD SAM

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#### New Orleans Mardi Gras

**February 21 through March 1**

New Orleans, Louisiana

#### An American Civil War

**March 26 through April 9**

Start: Charleston, South Carolina  
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#### Alaska Your Way

**June 26 through August 26**

Start: Anacortes, Washington  
End: Prince George, British Columbia

► For more details about Good Sam RV tours, visit [www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam](http://www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam).

### REGIONAL EVENTS

Don't miss the chance to connect with fellow members at the following club get-togethers:

#### Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair

**January 13 through 15**

Lake Havasu City, Arizona

#### FunFest

**May 8 through 11**

Washington Land Yacht Harbor RV Park, Lacey, Washington

#### Good Sam Fun Weekend

**June 2 through 4**

The Villages at Turning Stone Verona, New York



**Off to a flying start at January's Havasu Balloon Festival and Fair.**

► Find the full schedule of Good Sam regional events, including State/Provincial Rallies, at [www.goodsamclub.com/events](http://www.goodsamclub.com/events).

**🎁 GOLDEN GIVEAWAY** Eddie and Margie Richardson of Nashville, Georgia, are the latest winners of a new Coleman 262BH travel trailer in the Golden Giveaway, part of the 50th anniversary celebration for Camping World and Good Sam in 2016. The Richardsons hitched up their new trailer in October at Camping World of Valdosta.

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By Mary Zalmanek

# PASSION IN ACTION

These RVers have found the perfect on-the-road hobbies to go hand in hand with the motorhome lifestyle

**D**ave Barry, the Pulitzer Prize-winning syndicated columnist, is a funny guy. If you need further proof, just Google "Dave Barry colonoscopy." He makes me laugh, even when I disagree with him. He once said, "Hobbies of any kind are boring except to people who have the same hobby." Even though I don't share the same talents with 90 percent of the people I've interviewed for this *MotorHome* series on RV hobbies, I've always found the people and their passions to be fascinating.

## 1. Songwriter

Nanci Stahlman-Drag (she claims she's never been one; it's just her name) comes from a musical family with six kids. She grew up on church music and sang in the choir. Nanci, a real-estate developer, has been singing in local restaurants for more than 15 years. She also enjoys songwriting, especially about her camping experiences. In 2009, on her first date with future husband, Paul Drag, she wrote a song about Airstream travel trailers. She's written 20 songs — 12 of them about traveling — including blues, folk, rock, classic Americana and even one rap song. Her favorites to write are 12-bar blues, which are repetitive and easy to sing. That's important, since audience participation is her goal. Her method for songwriting is to have a story, figure out how to tell it, make it rhyme and set it to a melody. While her husband drives on RV trips, she sits in the passenger's seat playing her ukulele, trying out lyrics and melodies.

If you ever camp next to Nanci, you're in for a treat. She often introduces herself to neighbors with this line. "Excuse me. I hear you're breaking the law. You can't have a campfire without singing, so I'm here to sing." She brings her guitar and ukulele, and plays songs people know the words to, encouraging her new friends to sing along. If you'd like to purchase her CD, *Travel Tunes*, email Nanci at [nanci33792@yahoo.com](mailto:nanci33792@yahoo.com).





## 2. Ham Radio Operator

If you were camped next to Gary Stone, you might wonder what he's up to. Gary is an amateur (Ham) radio operator, call letters N5PHT. When he sets up camp, he strings wire antennas in nearby trees, either by throwing a rope tied to a rubber mallet over tree limbs or propelling a rope with a bow and arrow, then pulling up the wires. Gary has set up in more than 70 U.S. counties in 19 states. Even more impressive, he's made 13,517 contacts from his RV. He enjoys "DX Chasing," which is contacting distant stations around the world in the 339 "entities" (usually a country,

but not always; Alaska and Hawaii are separate entities). While RVing, he's contacted 152 entities, and from his home station, he's contacted 338. Gary has participated in United States Islands on the Air, Summits on the Air (hiking to mountain peaks and making contacts on the radio) and various Ham radio contests from campgrounds. You might consider yourself lucky to be camped next to Gary during inclement weather, since he and other Ham radio storm spotters keep an eye on dangerous conditions. If he's running for cover, you should too.

## 3. Sock Maker

Whether she is at home in her park model or traveling in her RV, Diane Thomas makes 300 to 400 pairs of socks per year on her 108-year-old circular sock-knitting machine. These cast-iron machines were popular during World War I, when women used them to make socks for soldiers. The first time Diane saw one of these



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machines was when she Googled a knitting term and ended up watching a video titled "The 8½-Minute Sock." She had to have one. Her husband bought a collectible machine for \$2,700 for her birthday in 2012. It takes her about two hours to make one pair of socks for an adult. First, she winds the yarn into a "cake" shape so it will feed freely through the machine. Each ribbed sock takes about 20 minutes to knit (the 8½-minute socks are for a child). Finally, she finishes the toes and works in the loose ends of the yarn. She sells them at craft shows. I love the pair I bought from her. From November through February, she does 10 to 14 shows.

#### 4. Crocheted Purse Designer

Blanche Murin crochets one-of-a-kind purses from wool or cotton quilting material that's leftover from her quilting projects. Before heading south for the winter, she cuts ½-inch strips of fabric using a rotary cutter on a cutting mat, then joins the pieces together and wraps them into a ball. While her husband drives, she crochets, making the bottom of the purse first. When she is ready to do the sides, she adds eyelash yarn. At the top of the purse she adds a button made from retro jewelry found at garage sales or fashions a button from a gourd, then uses an elastic hair band as a button loop. The handles are made from recycled belts. A true creative artist, Blanche doesn't follow



a pattern. She often enters the purses with gourd buttons in juried gourd-art shows, along with other pieces such as lampshades and bowls. She sells her creations at arts-and-crafts shows in Casa Grande, Arizona; and Michigan City, Indiana.

#### 5. Mandala Artist

When Marlene Brown saw a rock mandala online at Pinterest, she decided to try making some. She already had an extensive collection of acrylic paints, brushes and styli from other projects, so all she needed was a bag of round river rocks from Home Depot.



Her first step is to use a stencil to draw a circle on the rock, then paint a dot in the center. From there, she paints a pattern of dots radiating toward the circumference. Finally, one coat of varnish is applied to give it a light sheen. She paints several mandalas at a time to avoid wasting paint. Occasionally, she paints a mini canvas to match. On oblong stones, she paints fish patterns. Marlene finds the process relaxing. She winters in Fort Myers, Florida, where she has taught classes in mandala painting.

#### 6. Travel Website Developers

Before retiring in 2007, Nan Miller was a freelance travel writer for 18 years. She and her husband, Earl, have been RVers since 1975. In 2012 they started describing their travels with emails sent twice a week to 32 friends. It has grown into a popular travel website, [www.nanmillertimes.com](http://www.nanmillertimes.com), with more than 1,500 page hits each week. Nan writes the narratives and Earl provides photographs. When new articles are posted, an email notification goes out to subscribers. There's no advertising on the site, nor is there a subscription fee. This website is a labor of love.

The Millers have explored Colorado, Oregon and Alaska. They tend to keep away from large cities and give exposure to smaller towns and lesser-known attractions. Nan has a knack for finding unusual bits of history about the places she visits. Earl's photographs are simply divine. Their readers say they feel like they're riding along with them.





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**7. Mixed-Media Wall Artist**

Sandy Pittman was approaching retirement three years ago, and the thought of all that idle time gave her panic attacks. As an avid crafter, it didn't take her long to fill her time with a multitude of art projects. Her favorite medium is crochet, so she routinely stows bags of yarn in their RV for "road work." Once they reach their destination, the projects get more complex. Recently she has been creating decorative wall art. She starts with a stretched canvas and applies chalk to it. Next, she applies Gelatos — creamy paint, not ice cream — with her fingers to help move the chalk. She calls this the "funnest" part. Once she's satisfied with the background, she positions items such as photographs, feathers, raffia, fabric and scrapbooking cutouts where she wants them, then glues them on. These unique art pieces make great gifts.

**8. Pinewood Derby Car Builder**

At 9 a.m. on a Saturday in 2009, Jack Koons' grandchildren asked him to make pinewood derby cars for them. At 3 p.m. that afternoon, the grandchildren, ages



8 and 9, entered Jack's cars in a race. Their cars came in first and second. Clearly Jack had a knack for this, which isn't surprising since he used to own a racetrack for radio-controlled cars. In the ensuing years, he's made 10 more cars, and still has five of them. Now he races the cars himself at Pinewood Derbies in Arizona and South Dakota. After winning both the stock and modified races in 2015 and 2016, he plans to retire the two championship cars and build new ones this year.

To build a car, he buys a kit with four wheels, four axles and a block of wood. He shapes the wood with a band saw, sands it with a sand belt, paints it and then assembles the finished product. Each car takes about 14 to 15 hours to make.



### 9. Cricuteer

A Cricut is a personal electronic cutting machine used to make greeting cards, scrapbook items, cutouts for T-shirts and anything else creative minds can imagine. Debbie Wilson is an avid Cricuteer. When she and her "dearest hubby" were in the market for a new RV, they bought one with a bunkroom. They took out the bunk beds and replaced them with a desk

with enough storage for her Cricut and various supplies, including paper, vinyl and glue. They call this room "Debbie's Craft Cave." She said, "It's like playing Tetris to pack it up when we travel."

Debbie enjoys making 3-D sculptures, cards, vinyl signs and iron-on designs for T-shirts. She imports cutting files with intricate designs to her Cricut Explore Air. She made a 3-D haunted house for her grandchildren that won a Cricut-sponsored contest. The light weight of these decorative items is an additional benefit in an RV.



### 10. "Arm" Knitter

On a personal note, when a friend gave me an arm-knitted cowl for Christmas last year, I couldn't wait to try it. That night I Googled "arm knitting," watched a YouTube video, read some instructions and made one with some spare yarn I had in the closet. I was hooked on my own hobby. Within a couple of months, I made 45 cowls for friends and strangers (I donated some of them to a charity), and one for a friend's dog. Using two strands of yarn and my arms as big knitting needles, each scarf takes about an hour to complete. It was a great way to pass the time while riding in the motorhome on our winter's journey to warmer weather. **M**

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### ➦ More Hobbies

Are you enthusiastic about your RV hobbies? If you'd like to be considered for inclusion in next year's article, send an email to [mary@adventuresoftheheart.com](mailto:mary@adventuresoftheheart.com).



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- 2016 MotorHome Reader's Choice Awards
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# SIMPLY THE BEST



THE VOTES ARE IN: HERE ARE THE WINNERS OF *MOTORHOME'S* 2016 READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

**P**laying favorites may be frowned upon for things like business transactions and parenting, but it's the ideal practice when it comes to selecting a motorhome, a reliable RV tire or even an RV resort. We all know RVers are a tight-knit community, so the kind of word-of-mouth product/service endorsements that are discussed with fellow owners are a fabulous tool for enhancing the overall motorhome experience. RVers know what we want, and we know how it needs to work to benefit our travels, on the road and in camp. In short, RVers love playing favorites.

That's why *MotorHome's* annual Readers' Choice awards are so well-received year after year. As always, we've polled our readers and directly report the results here, which means the companies listed on the following pages are the best of the best in your eyes. From the top Class A motorhomes all the way to the best dinghy tow bar, these awards are a direct result of you sitting around the digital campfire and sharing your first-hand accounts about what your favorites really are. Turns out playing favorites can be a very good thing.

## CLASS A MOTORHOME



### ● GOLD: Tiffin Motorhomes

Tiffin's Class A motorhomes are often heralded for their craftsmanship and attention to detail. But the Red Bay, Alabama-based company also offers a family-like atmosphere, dating back to the first motorhome built in 1972. Today, members of the Tiffin family remain working on-site, with the Allegro Breeze, Allegro Red, Allegro Bus, Phaeton and Zephyr joining the original Allegro as part of the lineup.

256-356-8661 | [www.tiffinmotorhomes.com](http://www.tiffinmotorhomes.com)

● SILVER: Winnebago Industries  
641-585-3535 | [www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com)

● BRONZE: Newmar Corp.  
800-263-5634 | [www.newmar.com](http://www.newmar.com)

## CLASS B MOTORHOME



### ● GOLD: Leisure Travel Vans

Based in Winkler, Manitoba, Canada, Leisure Travel Vans has been manufacturing motorhomes for more than 45 years. Leisure's Class B motorhomes, like the Unity shown, are built using in-house steel fabrication and hand-crafted fiberglass molds as part of what the company calls vertical integration, meaning it has complete control over every step of the construction process. Leisure also makes the Serenity and the Wonder motorhomes.

877-992-9906 | [www.leisurevans.com](http://www.leisurevans.com)

● SILVER: Winnebago Industries  
641-585-3535 | [www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com)

● BRONZE: Roadtrek  
888-762-3873 | [www.roadtrek.com](http://www.roadtrek.com)

## CLASS C MOTORHOME



### ● GOLD: Winnebago Industries

Winnebago's Class C lineup begins with the Minnie Winnie/Spirit built on a Ford E-350 and E-450 chassis and known for their versatile livability. The Aspect/Cambria are built on the E-450 chassis and offer many of the amenities and features of a Class A motorhome. The Trend/Fuse offers good fuel economy and handling. The View/Navion is built on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis and integrates a strong body design and state-of-the-art electronics.

641-585-3535 | [www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com)

● SILVER: Jayco Inc.  
574-825-5861 | [www.jayco.com](http://www.jayco.com)

● BRONZE: Thor Motor Coach  
800-860-5658 | [www.thormotorcoach.com](http://www.thormotorcoach.com)

**DINGHY AUXILIARY BRAKING SYSTEM**



**GOLD: SMI Manufacturing**

An auxiliary dinghy-braking device will dramatically improve the stopping distance of a motorhome and dinghy combo. SMI offers a trio of systems to help slow your combo's roll. The Air Force One is designed for diesel motorhomes with air brakes; the Stay-IN-Play Duo for hydraulic brakes; and the Delta Force is the company's portable braking system. This wide range of functionality no doubt led to SMI taking home the gold.  
800-893-3763 | [www.smibrake.com](http://www.smibrake.com)

- SILVER: Roadmaster Inc.  
800-669-9690 | [www.roadmasterinc.com](http://www.roadmasterinc.com)
- BRONZE: RVibrake  
800-815-2159 | [www.rvibrake.com](http://www.rvibrake.com)

**DINGHY VEHICLE**



**GOLD: Jeep Wrangler**

For 75 years, the Jeep Wrangler has been a favorite of off-pavement adventurers and commuters alike. The 2016 Wrangler continues that trend with 11 trim levels featuring a 3.6-liter V-6 and manual transmission standard; the Wrangler is also flat-towable with the available automatic transmission. The Wrangler's legendary 4WD capabilities will have you mudding and rock crawling like a pro, while the interior appointments and HD suspension (available on select models) will make trips from the campground to local attractions more refined than ever.  
[www.jeep.com](http://www.jeep.com)

- SILVER: Jeep Cherokee  
[www.jeep.com](http://www.jeep.com)
- BRONZE: Honda CR-V  
[www.automobiles.honda.com](http://www.automobiles.honda.com)

**FUEL ADDITIVE**



**GOLD: Lucas Oil Products**

Widely available at auto-parts stores and home centers across the country, Lucas Oil products are designed to improve the performance of your motorhome or dinghy vehicle. In addition to fuel additives — which include conditioners, octane boosters and stabilizers — Lucas offers motor oils, cleaners, greases and even products designed specifically for hunting and fishing gear maintenance.  
800-342-2512 | [www.lucasoil.com](http://www.lucasoil.com)

- SILVER: Gold Eagle Sta-Bil  
800-367-3245 | [www.goldeagle.com/brands/sta-bil](http://www.goldeagle.com/brands/sta-bil)
- BRONZE: Amsoil  
800-956-5695 | [www.amsoil.com](http://www.amsoil.com)

**FUEL STATION**



**GOLD: Pilot Flying J**

With more than 650 locations across the country, Pilot Flying J centers are likely a familiar sight to most RVers. Many of the centers offer RV-friendly amenities, including designated fueling lanes, overnight parking, LP-gas and dump stations. Add to that a variety of big-name dining options and exceptionally clean restrooms, and it's easy to see why Pilot Flying J takes home the

gold for 2016.  
877-866-7378 | [www.pilotflyingj.com](http://www.pilotflyingj.com)

- SILVER: Costco  
800-774-2678 | [www.costco.com](http://www.costco.com)
- BRONZE: Love's Travel Stops  
800-655-6837 | [www.loves.com](http://www.loves.com)

**HOLDING-TANK CHEMICALS**



**GOLD: Thetford**

Thetford's industry-leading Aqua-Kem and Eco-Smart brands come in a variety of sizes, scents and delivery methods (liquid, granular and toss-ins) to fill most every motorhome owner's need. The chemicals have been formulated to work around the clock and in all weather conditions, and provide powerful odor control and the ability to liquefy waste fast, all while being 100 percent biodegradable.  
800-543-1219 | [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

- SILVER: Camco Manufacturing  
800-334-2004 | [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)
- BRONZE: Happy Camper  
928-478-4537 | [www.1-happycamper.com](http://www.1-happycamper.com)

**MOTORHOME AWNING**



**GOLD: Carefree of Colorado**

Carefree of Colorado has been increasing outdoor comfort since RV enthusiast Gene Upton introduced the first truly automatic roll-up awning for RVs some 45 years ago. And from day one, Carefree's focus has been on the design, development and innovation of RV awnings and related accessories. The company claims its notable achievements also include

the first motion-based wind sensor, the first slideout awnings and the first open-frame lateral-arm awnings. Carefree has had millions of awnings installed worldwide, and enjoys a rich tradition of quality, value, performance and style.

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

● **SILVER:** Dometic

800-544-4881 | [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)

● **BRONZE:** Girard Systems

800-382-8442 | [www.girardrv.com](http://www.girardrv.com)

## MOTORHOME CHASSIS



● **GOLD:** Freightliner Custom Chassis

Freightliner's chassis have long been a favorite among RVers, and 2016 was no exception. The XC chassis, designed for Class A diesels, offers a variety of frame-rail configurations and can be found on nearly 80 percent of such motorhomes, according to the company. The SL offers even more options for high-end motorhomes, with up to 600-hp engines and a 54,000-pound GVWR.

864-487-1700 | [www.freightlinerchassis.com](http://www.freightlinerchassis.com)

● **SILVER:** Ford

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

● **BRONZE:** Spartan Chassis

517-543-6400 | [www.spartanchassis.com](http://www.spartanchassis.com)

## PERFORMANCE-ENHANCING PRODUCT



● **GOLD:** 5 Star Tuning

5 Star Tuning is a family-run business in Florence, South Carolina, that specializes in custom tuning for motorhome and towable applications. With a 5 Star

tuner, users can unlock their vehicle's hidden potential with additional torque, increased horsepower, improved efficiency and improved shifting, according to the company — all of which makes for a pleasant motorhome experience, even while driving through mountainous terrain.

843-536-1244 | [www.5startuning.com](http://www.5startuning.com)

● **SILVER:** Banks Power

800-601-8072 | [www.bankspower.com](http://www.bankspower.com)

● **BRONZE:** BD Diesel Performance

800-887-5030 | [www.bddieselperformance.com](http://www.bddieselperformance.com)

## RV BATTERY



● **GOLD:** Interstate Batteries

You likely never even notice the batteries in your motorhome until they stop working and you're left in the dark without some of your favorite RV amenities. It's important to select the right model that works for your application. Interstate offers 6-volt deep cycle (house batteries) and 12-volt starting/house batteries, all designed specifically for RVs. Interstate also offers a sealed AGM dual-purpose battery that won't leak and can be mounted in almost any position.

866-842-5368 | [www.interstatebatteries.com](http://www.interstatebatteries.com)

● **SILVER:** Trojan Battery Co.

800-423-6569 | [www.trojanbattery.com](http://www.trojanbattery.com)

● **BRONZE:** Lifeline Batteries

909-599-7816 | [www.lifelinebatteries.com](http://www.lifelinebatteries.com)

## RV CAMPGROUND/RESORT



● **GOLD:** Pala Casino RV Resort

Pala's new 10-acre resort in Southern

California offers 100 full-hookup sites with grass lawns and picnic tables. RV-park visitors can keep busy by swimming in the heated pool or soaking in one of the two spas, or they can take advantage of the five barbecue grill areas, table tennis, horseshoe pit or fenced dog park. There's also a billiard table, card tables, three flat-screen TVs and a laundromat on-site. And the fact that the park is just a few steps away from the gold-winning Pala Casino makes winning that much sweeter.

877-946-7252 | [www.palacasino.com](http://www.palacasino.com)

● **SILVER:** Pechanga RV Resort

877-711-2946 | [www.pechanga.com](http://www.pechanga.com)

● **BRONZE:** The Campsites at Disney's Fort Wilderness

407-939-7723 | [www.disneyworldcamping.com](http://www.disneyworldcamping.com)

## RV CASINO/RESORT



● **GOLD:** Pala Casino Spa Resort

After relaxing at the gold-medal winning Pala Casino RV Resort, try your luck at one of Pala Casino's 2,000 state-of-the-art slot and video machines, 87 game tables and 13-table poker room that hosts live play and tournaments. Dining options include a buffet, a world-class steakhouse, a traditional Asian restaurant and multiple cafés, or visitors can partake of the unique CAVE dining experience, with a Mediterranean-style menu and a tour through an underground wine cave. The casino is said to offer more live entertainment than any other in California.

877-946-7252 | [www.palacasino.com](http://www.palacasino.com)

● **SILVER:** Pechanga RV Resort

877-711-2946 | [www.pechanga.com](http://www.pechanga.com)

● **BRONZE:** Seven Feathers RV Resort

541-839-3599 | [www.sevenfeathersrvresort.com](http://www.sevenfeathersrvresort.com)

**RV CLEANING PRODUCT**



**GOLD: Meguiar's**

Keeping your motorhome clean is a necessity, both to extend the life of its many critical systems and to display pride of ownership. Meguiar's has been offering automotive cleaning products for more than 100 years, including washes, waxes, air fresheners and conditioners. Products like the Heavy Oxidation Scrub and Spider & Bird Residue Remover keep the outside looking great between washes, while products like the Heavy Duty Vinyl Cleaner can be used to keep the motorhome's interior neat and tidy.  
800-347-5700 | [www.meguiars.com](http://www.meguiars.com)

**SILVER: Protect All**

800-543-1219 | [www.protectall.com](http://www.protectall.com)

**BRONZE: Wash Wax ALL (Aero Cosmetics)**

800-927-4929 | [www.washwax.com](http://www.washwax.com)

**RV COVER**



**GOLD: ADCO**

For more than 60 years ADCO has remained the dominant supplier of protective products in the RV industry. ADCO is a fourth-generation family-owned business that prides itself on delivering high-quality protective-cover options to RVers. ADCO's Designer Series Tyvek Plus Wind RV covers utilize a unique and patent-pending Slip-Seam Strapping System, which cinches tightly for a snug fit while minimizing wind impact.  
800-541-2326 | [www.adcoprod.com](http://www.adcoprod.com)

**SILVER: Calmark Cover Co.**

800-838-7236 | [www.calmarkcovers.com](http://www.calmarkcovers.com)

**BRONZE: Elements (Camping World)**  
888-626-7576 | [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)

**RV ENGINE OIL**



**GOLD: Mobil 1**

Mobil 1 motor oils have been engineered to deliver top-notch performance and engine protection under all driving conditions. Mobil 1 Advanced Synthetic Oil is designed to remain heat-resistant at high operating temperatures, help prevent deposits and sludge build-up, aid in fuel economy and promote quick cold-weather starting to reduce overall stress on the starting components.  
[www.mobil1.com](http://www.mobil1.com)

**SILVER: Shell Rotella**

[www.rotella.shell.com](http://www.rotella.shell.com)

**BRONZE: AMSOIL**

800-956-5695 | [www.amsoil.com](http://www.amsoil.com)

**RV GENERATOR**



**GOLD: Cummins Onan**

If your motorhome came standard with an AC-generator, chances are it's a Cummins Onan. And, with more than 50 years powering up RVs, it's no wonder the manufacturer has repeated as the gold-winning manufacturer. With more than 10 generators available for RV-applications, Cummins Onan can meet your power needs for off-the-grid adventures.  
[www.powersystems.cummins.com](http://www.powersystems.cummins.com)

**SILVER: Honda**

770-497-6400 | [www.powerequipment.honda.com](http://www.powerequipment.honda.com)

**BRONZE: Generac**

888-436-3722 | [www.generac.com](http://www.generac.com)

**RV REFRIGERATOR**



**GOLD: Dometic**

Dometic refrigerators are designed specifically for use in RV applications. Available in a variety of sizes, from double-door residential built-ins to single-door freestanding units to a dual-door 2+2 model with an in-door water dispenser and a divider-less freezer compartment, Dometic refrigerators offer attractive cooling options to upgrade any motorhome kitchen.  
800-544-4881 | [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)

**SILVER: Norcold**

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

**BRONZE: Whirlpool**

866-698-2538 | [www.whirlpool.com](http://www.whirlpool.com)

**RV RETAILER**



**GOLD: Camping World**

With 120 Supercenters nationwide, Camping World is the one-stop destination for all things RV, from motorhomes to campsite gear, and for RV repair and maintenance services. Plus, you can visit any one of the stores or log on to the website to gain access to thousands of RV-related deals, not to mention to explore the many RV services that joining the Good Sam Club will provide.  
888-626-7576 | [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)



# *Explore with Wonder*

Built on the new Ford Transit chassis, the all-new Wonder is filled with smarter space solutions that combine superior design with innovative functionality. From the residential queen-size Murphy Bed to an abundance of interior and exterior storage, every inch is utilized to its maximum potential in the Wonder, allowing you the freedom to go wherever your "wonders" may lead you. Explore the all-new Wonder and the rest of LTV's award winning lineup at:

**LEISUREVANS.COM**



**LEISURE**  
TRAVEL VANS

Leisure Travel Vans, Circle 134 on Reader Service Card

- SILVER: Local dealer
- BRONZE: Amazon  
[www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

**RV TIRES**



● **GOLD: Michelin**  
Ensuring your motorhome's tires are in good working order is one of the most important maintenance tasks, as they are called upon to absorb all the pits, dips and grooves that the highway has to offer. Michelin XRV tires feature multiple siping for a dependable grip and to promote long, even wear. The wide grooves help with efficient drainage while driving in wet conditions, while the XRV's stable tread and cool running compound help improve handling and increase longevity.  
866-866-6605 | [www.michelinman.com](http://www.michelinman.com)

- SILVER: Goodyear  
800-667-8138 | [www.goodyear.com](http://www.goodyear.com)
- BRONZE: Toyo Tires  
800-442-8696 | [www.toyotires.com](http://www.toyotires.com)

**RV TOILET**



● **GOLD: Thetford**  
Thetford's Aqua-Magic lineup features a bowl to fill most every motorhome-toilet replacement need. In addition to quality and reliability, Thetford thrones are known for comfort and style. Available in high and low profiles, all Thetford toilets have a powerful flush that yields full-bowl coverage, according to the company.  
800-543-1219 | [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

- SILVER: Dometic  
800-544-4881 | [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)
- BRONZE: N/A

**SATELLITE HARDWARE**



● **GOLD: Winegard**  
Since its incorporation in 1954, Winegard has designed more than 1,000 antenna models and has been granted more than 80 U.S. patents. Built with the same certified reflector used in residential homes, the Trav'ler antenna (shown) provides increased signal strength and reliability, making it a great choice for RVing families who use multiple TVs. According to Winegard, the Trav'ler is the only automatic antenna to work with the DISH Hopper, is the only way to get DirecTV HD with an automatic satellite mobile TV antenna, and is the top HD and multi-TV viewing solution for Canadian RVers.  
800-288-8094 | [www.winegard.com](http://www.winegard.com)

- SILVER: KING  
952-922-6889 | [www.kingconnect.com](http://www.kingconnect.com)
- BRONZE: DISH Tailgater (KING)  
952-922-6889 | [www.kingconnect.com](http://www.kingconnect.com)

**SATELLITE PROVIDER**



● **GOLD: DirecTV**  
Watching TV while in an RV may be frowned upon by camping purists, but it's a luxury that has become a necessity in most motorhomes. What better way to wind down after a long day of sightseeing than to catch the local

news or a favorite flick? DirecTV makes it easy with a variety of packages, allowing RVers to receive many of the same channels they do in their residential setups, including multiple-TV viewing, HD channels and DVR services.  
888-777-2454 | [www.directv.com](http://www.directv.com)

- SILVER: DISH Network  
877-625-1763 | [www.dish.com](http://www.dish.com)
- BRONZE: Shaw Direct  
888-554-7827 | [www.shawdirect.ca](http://www.shawdirect.ca)

**SIT-DOWN RESTAURANT**



● **GOLD: Cracker Barrel**  
The first Cracker Barrel Old Country Store opened its doors in 1969, and has been serving delicious dishes from handed-down recipes ever since. Cracker Barrel offers down-home vittles ranging from meatloaf to burgers to taters and gravy. And after filling up their personal tanks, visitors can top off their meals with a visit to the gift shop for a wide selection of Americana.  
800-333-9566 | [www.crackerbarrel.com](http://www.crackerbarrel.com)

- SILVER: Applebee's  
888-592-7753 | [www.applebees.com](http://www.applebees.com)
- BRONZE: Chili's (Brinker International)  
972-980-9917 | [www.chilis.com](http://www.chilis.com)

**STATE IN WHICH TO RV**



Photo: Don Rodenroth

● **GOLD: Florida**  
The United States is filled with world-class destinations, so selecting a favorite may be a difficult decision. Or not, as Florida remains the top destination as voted on by our readers, combining a number of unique ecosystems with world-famous theme parks and sultry

Made by hand.  
So they can experience everything  
in the world that isn't.



MADE TO MOVE YOU.

[TIFFINMOTORHOMES.COM](http://TIFFINMOTORHOMES.COM)



Tiffin Motor Homes, Circle 133 on Reader Service Card



**TIFFIN**  
MOTORHOMES

tropical weather. Plus, spending the day on a white-sand beach listening to the waves lap against the shore is tough to beat in terms of relaxation.  
850-205-3815 | [www.visitflorida.com](http://www.visitflorida.com)

- SILVER: Oregon  
800-547-7842 | [www.traveloregon.com](http://www.traveloregon.com)
- BRONZE: Utah  
800-200-1160 | [www.visitutah.com](http://www.visitutah.com)

**TIRE-PRESSURE-MONITORING SYSTEM (TPMS)**



- GOLD: TireMinder  
Minder Research prides itself on outstanding customer service and constant innovation. The company's TireMinder TPMS, which has won Gold here for the

last five years, was the first RV TPMS to offer replaceable sensor batteries, and Minder the only TPMS manufacturer to provide customers with a free battery replacement program, according to the company. The 2016 year saw the introduction of the TireMinder Smart TPMS, which allows users to monitor the tires from a smartphone or tablet.  
772-463-6522 | [www.minderresearch.com](http://www.minderresearch.com)

- SILVER: Hawkshead Systems  
888-321-8767 | [www.tpms.ca](http://www.tpms.ca)
- BRONZE: TireTraker  
866-200-9773 | [www.tiretraker.com](http://www.tiretraker.com)

**TOW BAR**

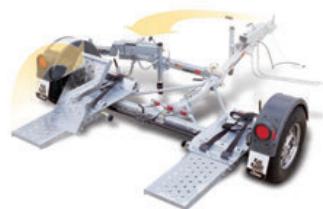


- GOLD: Blue Ox  
Blue Ox is once again the gold-

winning choice for dinghy-towing hardware and accessories. The Avail tow bar is 2 inches longer than standard tow bars, which helps provide a smoother tow over rough roads, can accommodate wide or narrow towed vehicles, allows for safe maneuvers around objects like fuel-station pumps, and keeps the dinghy vehicle safely away from the motorhome in tight turns, according to the company. Blue Ox designed the Avail's low-profile, non-binding latch to release easily under any conditions, including on uneven terrain.  
800-228-9289 | [www.blueox.com](http://www.blueox.com)

- SILVER: Roadmaster Inc.  
800-669-9690 | [www.roadmasterinc.com](http://www.roadmasterinc.com)
- BRONZE: Demco  
800-543-3626 | [www.demco-products.com](http://www.demco-products.com)

**TOW DOLLY**



- GOLD: Demco  
A tow dolly is a valuable accessory for owners of dinghy vehicles that aren't approved for four-down towing, and also for those who don't wish to attach the requisite mounting hardware to the motorhome or dinghy. Demco's Kar Kaddy remains the gold standard for *MotorHome* readers for 2016. The Kar Kaddy is available in two models, both of which feature a 4,700-pound weight rating. The Kar Kaddy SS features a galvanized finish, while the Kar Kaddy 3, has a black powdercoat finish; both are outfitted with an EZ-Latch coupler and disc brakes.  
800-543-3626 | [www.demco-products.com](http://www.demco-products.com)

- SILVER: Master Tow  
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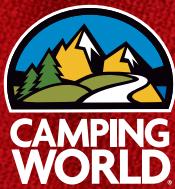


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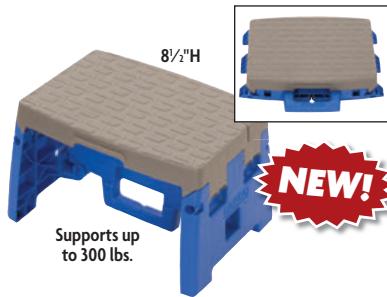
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Grey #90969

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8½"H



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**Club SALE \$44.97** Reg. \$59.99



21"W

Includes carry bag

250 lb. capacity

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**\$49.97**



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Grey #90248 Blue #74235 Brown #42645  
Cushy padded chair is covered in 600-denier polyester. Heavy-duty tubular steel frame. Reg. \$58.99 | 🚚 | ❤️

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

150 lb. capacity

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# Getting Aktiv

German manufacturer Hymer enters the North American market with a Class B that uses European ingenuity to lure enthusiasts into the versatility of a compact motorhome **By Barb Riley**

**T**he RV industry has seen a lot of shifts in the manufacturer scene over the last few years. Mostly, companies have either been swallowed up by a larger entity, have gone out of business or have been started up from scratch. But there is one that's a little different, having entered the North American market as a newcomer, but that's already established and successful halfway across the globe. Germany-based Erwin Hymer Group (EHG) has a significant, long-standing presence in the European caravan market and made itself known stateside when it inked a collaboration deal with Class B Canadian manufacturer Roadtrek in the fall of 2015, before buying Roadtrek outright in February 2016. Company officials say Hymer-brand RVs will be marketed alongside existing Roadtrek models, complementing one another rather than competing, with Hymer lines bringing European styling with lightweight, high-quality concepts.

After a guided tour of the brand-new Hymer Aktiv at its display during the 2016 Elkhart Open House and a necessary predelivery inspection and service by American RV Sales &

Service in Grand Rapids, Michigan — nearly two hours from Elkhart, Indiana — the Hymer was ready for our test trek.

The trip to the dealership was long, but the time behind the wheel allowed for quick acclimation. The Aktiv is built on a RAM ProMaster 2500 chassis, which makes for a pretty smooth and stable ride; it handled the bumps and bruises of oft-patched country roads with grace, and easily held the 70-mph-limit Michigan highways on a rainy, blustery day. Its 3.6-liter V-6 engine accelerated and decelerated smoothly, and was able to keep up with high-speed traffic. Visibility was good; the Aktiv sits up high, and we appreciated the independent power positioning on all four side mirrors (two on each side). Backing in anywhere was made easy, as the lower mirrors can be pointed toward the ground for a clear view to the sides of the motorhome.

Inside, it's obvious that Hymer intended for the driver and passenger to be as comfortable as possible in the buttery-soft leather captain's chairs; I've never seen vehicle seats more customizable. In addition to the standard seat-angle

**ABOVE:** The Aktiv is a motorhome that is ideal for two people — one or two more if you get the front-mattress option — taking shorter trips rather than extensive exploration. The word "aktiv" is not only a homophone for the English word "active," it's also the German translation of it.

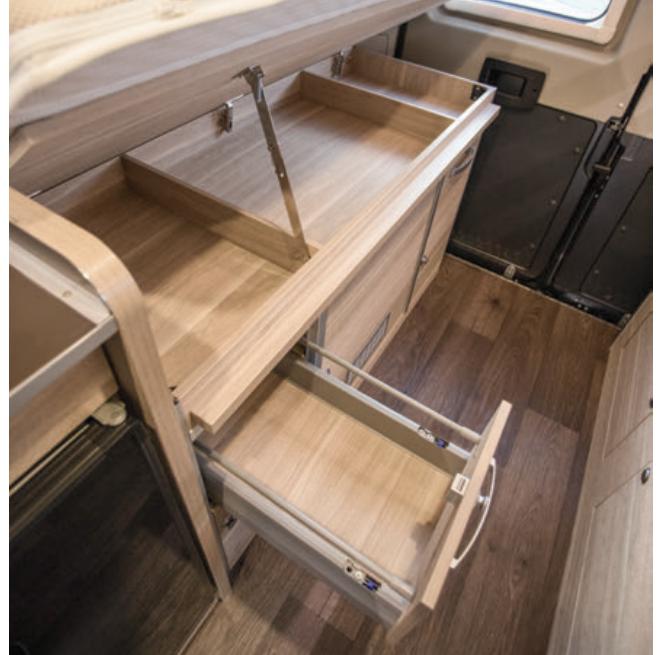
The Aktiv offers a decent amount of storage for a Class B, with cabinets below the sleeping area and underbed storage. Due to the location of the refrigerator, we found it best to sleep with our heads on the opposite side.

lever, there are two tilt dials and an adjustable lumbar support, and there's even a dial in the armrests that lets you set individual base height and angle. There is no doorside armrest on either seat, which was uncomfortable during driving, as was the lack of steering-wheel tilt. At 5 feet 2 inches I'm at the low end of driver height and reach range, but the wheel's sunny-side-up angle made it difficult to place my hands at the 10-and-2 position without scooting the seat up so far that my legs were uncomfortably bent, and I really wanted my hands there for added leverage on that windy day. The taller co-driver didn't have a problem with that, nor with the seat belts cutting into his neck a bit as I did.

The center console and cockpit area are well appointed; elements include two USB charging ports and auxiliary cord jack, a detachable clipboard, assorted shelves and compartments, and deep pockets on the doors. There's also a screen for the backup camera and navigation system, as well as a host of other functions such as the U-Connect system, which ostensibly allows for device sync and voice commands.

We had a love/hate relationship with the skylight above the cockpit. With the phone on speaker at maximum volume, it was barely possible to hear it due to the excessive road and wind noise coming through the skylight, with more coming from the dinette window behind the driver's seat. The good news: it wasn't as bad during slower off-highway driving, and there was surprisingly little road-rattle noise.

Our first stop was a tailgating event, where many curious visitors stopped to ask about the motorhome and take a peek inside. The main attraction was the side screen door, which remains one of my favorites, too, in spite of its reluctance to slide easily. Right inside the door is the dinette with a wall-mounted HDTV. From outside, we could keep an eye on the game; while inside, we could enjoy the air without the bugs. Lounging inside, the skylight was actually a favorite feature. Its nice, wide dimensions allow in plenty of light and its adjustability allows users to control how much air it to let in. The day/night shades give even more control over both.



On tailgating day, we discovered an unexpected use for the rear sleeping area. The Aktiv has a center-aisle floorplan, with storage cabinets against the walls in the back of the unit and mattresses on top, but not in the form of twin beds; there's a hinged frame that drops down, forming a bridge across the aisle to support the unfolded mattress pieces to make a single bed. Three pieces ride on the streetside ledge and one on the curbside, but the use of that fourth piece with the others makes into a long stretch of open "tabletop" space upon which to lay out snacks, binoculars, books, etc. One of the under-storage cabinets was big enough for larger items. A thoughtful extra door provided access to that cabinet from the rear of the vehicle as well as the aisle, which was the perfect spot for our canopy to ride during transit.

The power steps outside the side patio door (standard) and the ones at the driver and passenger doors (optional) are unique and interesting (especially the latter), but after a short while, they just got in the way. If you're ducking into the cockpit for something, it's possible to get jabbed with the step if you're not mindful to jump aside, and it's too slow most of the time to be an entry/exit assist. We learned to just jump over it while exiting the cab, and stepped on it halfway

**Below:** Additional counterspace is created in the galley when the sink and cooktop covers are in place. The lav utilizes a space-saving fold-down sink tray and a cassette toilet that's easy to empty. The dinette can seat three, but a fourth diner would have to sit in the copilot's seat across the aisle.



# Specifications

## Chassis

Model	Ram ProMaster 2500
Engine	3.6-liter V-6 gas
SAE Hp	280 @ 6,400 rpm
Torque	260 lb-ft @ 352 rpm
Transmission	Automatic 6-speed
Axle Ratio	3.86:1
Front Tires	LT225/75R16E
Rear Tires	LT225/75R16E
Wheelbase	159"
Brakes	Anti-lock four-wheel disc
Suspension F/R	MacPherson with stabilizer bar/solid axle with leaf spring
Fuel Capacity	24 gal
Fuel Economy	25 mpg, highway
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles basic; 5 years/100,000 miles powertrain

## Coach

Exterior Length	19' 7"
Exterior Width	6' 11"
Exterior Height	9.5' with A/C
Interior Width	6' 4"
Interior Height	6' 2"
Construction	Steel van body
Freshwater Capacity	30 gal
Black-water Capacity	4.62 gal Cassette
Gray-water Capacity	22.9 gal
Water-heater Capacity	2.64 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	5.9 gal
Air Conditioner (1)	11,000 Btu
Furnace	14,300 Btu
Refrigerator	3.1 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	2,000 watts/16.7 amp
Batteries	(1) 12-volt chassis; (2) 6-volt house
AC Generator	3.36 kW
Base MSRP	\$90,994
MSRP as tested	\$105,000
Warranty	6 years unlimited mileage

## Wet Weight

(Water & heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; No supplies or passengers. Actual weight may vary, as the vehicle tested was a prototype)

Front Axle	3,590 lbs
Rear Axle	3,722 lbs
Total	7,312 lbs

## Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,629/5,291 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	9,350/11,550 lbs
ROCCC	2,038 lbs

GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combined Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (full water, no passengers)

deployed coming in. Unfortunately, there is no way to turn off the steps; the one switch holds the porch step in place whether the side door is open or closed, but there is no switch to prevent them from extending in the first place.

Once we arrived at the campground, it took a good half hour to employ the leveling jacks, hook up the utilities and set the awnings (one large one and two smaller ones, all manual). Once set up, it was relatively easy to break camp to tour the surrounding area. The Aktiv utilizes a cartridge toilet, which is very popular in Europe. Rather than using a holding tank, the toilet has a cartridge that's easy to pull out from a compartment door on the exterior side of the motorhome. We found the cartridge simple to pull out of the unit, roll to the dump site and empty.

With the nuts and bolts handled, we could really dig in and poke around inside the Aktiv, which was home to three of us. We pushed every button and pulled open every cabinet. We watched TV, played cards, cooked and ate, cleaned and relaxed. I sent the boys off while I sat at the dinette and got some work done. The dinette was spacious enough for me to spread out with my notes and plug a laptop into the nearby outlet (all outlets include a USB port).

There was also enough room at the table for game play and dinner dishes, though longer pull-out supports under the extension would keep it from sagging slightly at the end. And though the dinette can seat two on the adjacent cushion and one more with the driver's captain chair swiveled around, a fourth person would have to sit on the passenger cockpit seat, making it a little far from the table. We did find that

## WHAT'S HOT

Side screen door and window screen-shades; skylight, while parked; extra "counterspace" in the bedroom area; good use of storage and bathroom space.

## WHAT'S NOT

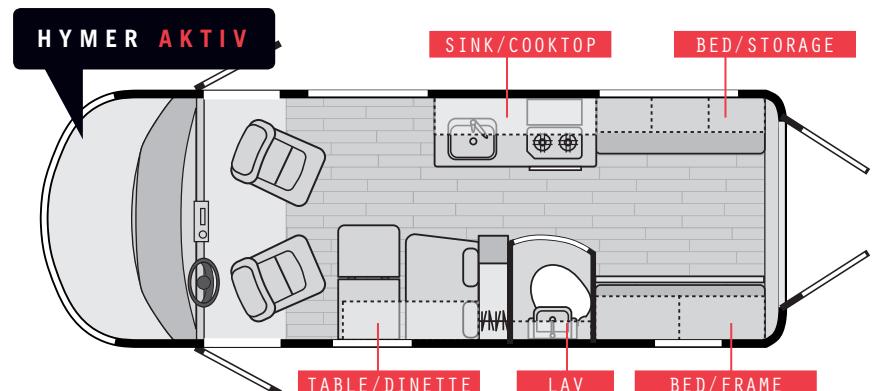
Only one armrest on captain's chairs; no steering-wheel tilt; skylight, while driving; uncomfortable bed height and mattress.



the cab area needs lighting, as there currently is none and the boys couldn't see their cards very well during our nighttime games.

The northern-Indiana weather led us to need the air conditioner and the furnace, and both worked like a charm, although the somewhat noisy rear-area roof air conditioner didn't quite pump cold air all the way to the front. The Truma system, which provides hot water and comfort heating using LP-gas, electric or both, did a fantastic job. While boondocking, the solar panels contributed to longer battery life, but on occasion we still had to run the engine to recharge the batteries.

The kitchen is equipped with a small turntable microwave and 3.1-cubic-foot refrigerator, which made ice and kept popsicles frozen at the highest setting, but also froze the eggs stored on the top shelf. There also wasn't room for a half-gallon jug of milk, even in the door. But



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**HYMER AKTIV**



Above left: The wooden bed frame flips up when not in use; to deploy the bed, flip the frame down, place the cushions over the bridge and you have a comfortable, albeit firm, sleeping space. Above right: The powered steps are a nice touch, though the functionality may need some refinement.

we all enjoyed using the flush-top sink and two-burner LP-gas cooktop.

Remember that tabletop space created by moving the mattress pieces all to one side? It was especially helpful at dinnertime, as the space could be used as a countertop for food prep and staging. There's no place for a trash bin, but owners could put one in the bathroom right behind the galley during dinner prep, and behind the passenger seat the rest of the time.

The Aktiv's bed is a neat trick of engineering. When a floorplan footprint is so confined, designers must think vertically, so putting storage cabinets below and the sleeping area above them — with more overhead cabinets above that — is a good way to make the most of the available space. Still, there's a give-and-take; here, the "take" is that the top of the mattress, with no bedding on top of it, is nearly 3 feet off the ground, so some folks may need a stepstool to climb up.

While the bed area is well engineered, the mattress is excessively firm, and a good night's sleep was dependent on the addition of two comforters to soften the surface. The dimensions make it necessary to sleep side-to-side rather than parallel with the motorhome; it worked best with our heads streetside. Proud of our creative space-finding prowess, a clever "nightstand" area was discovered on the kitchen counter just on the other side of the bedroom wall, but that's also where the compressor-type refrigerator is located. With one sleeper's head next to it, both the sound and vibrations coming through the wall and mattress woke that person continually through the night, even with

foam earplugs. Once we switched our heads to the other side, and had those extra comforters between us and the mattress, we did much better.

Another aspect of the interior we appreciated about the bed space is its independence of the dinette, so that those who like to get up early to make coffee and read the newspaper can do so without unfairly roasting those who like to snooze a bit longer.

The bathroom is small, but with a compact unit like this, users are conditioned to dance around the toilet while taking a Navy shower. The door, like the porch screen, didn't slide easily, but it's solid for privacy; and the fold-down tray sink is brilliant. Moving the bathroom light switch to a more convenient spot other than around the kitchen-counter corner would be a good improvement.

For those who are new to RVing, the Aktiv is a good way to get acclimated to the lifestyle without going full bore and perhaps getting overwhelmed. For experienced and bigger-scale RVers who want to downsize without losing too many of the comforts they're used to, it could make an ideal transition unit. The livability was better than expected for such a compact motorhome.

The stylish Aktiv is light and modern, and more mobile and less clunky than larger motorhomes. While there are still some kinks to work out, and some European design elements to translate better for North American culture and tastes, Hymer is on the right track to capture the attention of the burgeoning Class B demographic.

Welcome to the Americas, Hymer. **M**

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# New for 2017

Manufacturers continue to develop more fully equipped, easy-to-drive motorhomes, while consumers also see the return of some old favorites

If you need any more convincing that comfortable camping is back in vogue, consider this: the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) — the trade group that, among other things, works to promote the RV industry nationally through its public relations efforts and its Go RVing campaign — estimates that more than 400,000 RVs were shipped to dealers by the end of 2016.

That's a number that hasn't been seen since RVIA began reporting on wholesale shipments in 1978.

Granted, the majority of RVs are towable units, but motorized models continue to grow in popularity among outdoor enthusiasts — particularly Class B and Class B-plus motorhomes. In fact, while Elkhart, Indiana-based Thor Motor Coach (TMC) has branded its Class B-plus Gemini and Compass and even its 25- to 27-foot Class A Axis and Vegas lines as recreational utility vehicles (RUVs), the Class B segment as a whole is fast becoming a viable alternative to traditional sport utility vehicles.

There are a number of reasons for this, not the least of which is a Class B's maneuverability. With a footprint about the size of a traditional full-size SUV and oftentimes diesel-powered, they're also more economical to drive — and without the typical graphics treatments found on the exterior of Class A and Class C motorhomes, they tend to pass through neighborhoods without undue notice.

And, let's face it: they are smaller than the stereotypical motorhome. While there will always be a market for larger motorhomes, the downsizing trend continues to propel the RV

industry — even though these smaller motorhomes, unlike towables, may not represent the greatest bang for the buck. Many of them, however, are equipped as opulently as a high-end Class A — but just try parking a big diesel pusher at the grocery store.

Insofar as debuting new models across the motorized spectrum, 2017 isn't exactly a high-water mark. Following a dramatic surge last year — TMC, for example, introduced five different brands last fall — the focus for the coming season appears primarily to be one of refinement as OEMs fine-tune existing nameplates with more amenities and floorplans. However, we did spy a cache of new designs at September's Hershey Show in Pennsylvania and Indiana's Elkhart RV Open House trade show.

These included the new **Legend** from 15-year-old Midwest Automotive Designs, an Elkhart-based upfitter that originally specialized in luxury vehicle conversions and business-class limos on Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis before later turning to the Class B market.

"We debuted the Daycruiser two years ago, and at first people didn't understand why it didn't have a shower

The Midwest Automotive Designs Legend is built on the Ram ProMaster chassis and is available with a shower.



in it," said Jason Sullivan, an East Coast sales representative for the firm. "But it's a growing segment of the market, enough so that we also are debuting a similar floorplan on a Ram ProMaster — our first. We call it the Legend. We feel that we'll sell most of them without showers, but we're offering a shower option. So we've brought our high-end fit-and-finish to the market on a chassis that's around \$20,000 less (than the Sprinter) and we feel that we can pick up another, different buyer segment from the B market." MSRP on the Legend starts at about \$105,000.



Eliminating last year's Country Coach as part of its name, for 2017 Coachmen RV introduced a new-and-improved **Sportscoach** Class A diesel pusher that is a "luxury coach competing in the entry-level diesel engine market," said Joe Mullen, Coachmen's Sportscoach account manager for the East Coast.

The Sportscoach debuts with five floorplans, all on Freightliner chassis: two 36-foot-long straight-rail SRS models in the retail range of about \$280,000, with a 340-hp Cummins ISP engine and gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 26,000 pounds; and three 40-foot raised-rail models with a 31,000-pound GVWR at about the \$300,000 price point, but with a 360-hp Cummins ISP engine.

A newly designed front cap with a slide-out generator tray gives the Sportscoach a bus look, Mullen pointed out. With a host of features — including glazed porcelain tile flooring, Sentrel shower walls, Sikkens-brand high-end automotive paint with four clear coats, myRV systems control, three wood choices for the glazed cabinetry, induction cooktops, convection microwave, optional 15,000-Btu air

conditioners with heat pumps and a 10-gallon gas/electric water heater, among other items — the Sportscoach has created a buzz among consumers and dealers, according to Mullen.



Building on the popularity of its Sprinter-based Galleria — the first true Class B from a Forest River company — Coachmen RV also debuted its new Prism Elite. According to Mike Bear, Class B-C general manager for Coachmen RV, the top of the Class B market took about a \$10,000 step up in 2015 — leaving a price void in the market that the manufacturer filled with the **Prism Elite**, a \$100,000 (MSRP) unit on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis. Augmenting Coachmen's Prism lineup, the Elite debuts with three floorplans, including the 24EV with its slide-in-a-slide, curbside galley and cabover bed. The full-wall streetside slideout houses a U-shaped dinette in the living area and a large bed in the rear bedroom. In between the dinette and bed is the slide-within-the-full-wall slide, which actually retracts into the motorhome and houses the TV, stereo and additional storage.



After taking a yearlong hiatus from Class C production, Decatur, Indiana-based REV Recreation Group (parent company of Fleetwood RV, Holiday Rambler, Monaco and American Coach) is applying its skills at building

higher-end Class A's to its new Class C offerings, the Fleetwood **Jamboree** and Holiday Rambler Vesta.

"When we talked about getting back into building Class C's, our goal was to not necessarily be that entry-level," said Jamie Buckmeier, REV director of product development, engineering and design. "We felt that there was a market for people who wanted nicer features in a Class C — things that owners in the diesel market or high-end gas Class A's were used to."

The changes are apparent outside, where the Ford E-450-based motorhome sports a rounded, aerodynamic front cap "versus the typical side walls and just sticking a nose front on it; it makes it more appealing, more automotive-like," Buckmeier said. The Jamboree/Vesta also features an integrated roof awning and Class A-style baggage doors.

Upgrades include all hardwood raised-panel cabinets, solid-surface countertops, solid-surface sink covers, glass tops above the range, a whole-house water-filtration system and flush-mount LED lighting throughout. Fleetwood also upgraded the Ford cockpit by removing the dash fascia and sending it out to be dipped in a process similar to that used by high-end automobiles. MSRP for the Jamboree is about \$119,000, with a pair of two-slideout floorplans currently available — the 30D bunk model and the 31U.



Entegra Coach, a division of Middlebury, Indiana-based Jayco, both of which were acquired by Thor Industries last summer, reintroduced the new **Insignia** to its lineup. The Insignia nameplate had been dropped by Entegra about four years ago, but according to Tadd Jenkins, president

of the Jayco Motorhome Group, changes and upgrades to Entegra's former "entry-level" diesel pusher, the Aspire, caused it to move into a higher price point. The Insignia, with its \$400,000 MSRP, is priced about \$35,000 less than the Aspire.

The Insignia debuts with two 44-foot, 11-inch floorplans — the 44B and the 44W — both built on a Spartan K2 raised-rail chassis with a GVWR of 47,660 pounds and powered by a Cummins ISL turbocharged 450-hp diesel engine backed up by an Allison 3000MH six-speed automatic transmission. Both have four slides and offer 1½ bathrooms, while the 44B features an L-shaped sofa in the living area and the 44W comes with opposing sofas and a televator TV behind the curbside couch.

The Insignia offers a choice of three interior color combinations and four full-body paint schemes. Features include wood-grain porcelain floor tiles, Aqua-Hot hydronic water and heating system (with in-floor heat throughout), three 13,500-Btu air conditioners with heat pumps, a 3,000-watt true sine-wave power inverter, keyless entry, multiplex-controlled lighting, LED-lit solid-surface countertops and a residential Whirlpool 20-cubic-foot refrigerator.



For 2017, Jayco also added the **36T** floorplan to its four-model **Precept** lineup, giving the manufacturer a four-slide, two-full-bath unit that can sleep up to nine people thanks in part to its bunk-bed configuration. Built on Ford's F-53 chassis with a GVWR of 24,000 pounds, the 36T is 38 feet, 2 inches long with an MSRP at about \$160,000 depending on options, which include theater seating in place of the sofa, cabover bed and a bump up from the standard 8-cubic-foot refrigerator to a

22-cubic-foot residential model.

"It will sleep a big family, and it's just so spacious, with a place for everything," said Jenkins, adding that the newest Precept features the company's JRide Plus ride and handling package.



The folks at Roadtrek — now a brand under Kitchener, Ontario-based Erwin Hymer Group North America (EHGNA), — believe their new **Simplicity SRT** on the Ram ProMaster 3500 chassis is a "game changer" for the Class B market.

With a base MSRP of about \$69,550, EHGNA President and CEO Jim Hammill said the Simplicity SRT puts a well-appointed Class B within reach of anyone who can afford a monthly payment of about \$300-\$350 a month. Features of the entry-level model include a full galley with two-burner cooktop, microwave, 5-cubic-foot refrigerator and plenty of storage with a space-saving slide-out pantry and large pot drawer. The motorhome offers seating for five passengers and a rear power sofa that easily converts to a king-size bed.

Hammill noted that being part of the EHG corporate umbrella, which buys some 36,000 ProMaster chassis annually, allowed Roadtrek to debut the Simplicity SRT at the lower price point.



Meanwhile, EHGNA has also fulfilled its promise to begin bringing stateside products from one of 10 different towable and motorized manufacturers

under the German-based company's corporate umbrella.

The first of those imported products — modified for the North American market — is the Hymer **Aktiv** Class B motorhome, already in production at EHGNA's facilities in Kitchener, Ontario. Built on a Ram ProMaster chassis, the Hymer Aktiv boasts an open-aisle floorplan and comes equipped with a full galley, entertainment system, ample interior storage, premium mattress for the queen-size bed and a spacious full bathroom with shower. The Aktiv exterior sports European design and warm butter cream interior tones. Base MSRP is about \$90,994. For more on the Aktiv, check out the test on page 42.



Since motorhome purchases tend to be a compromise between what you want and what you can afford, for 2017 REV Recreation Group also has taken the most popular floorplan in its more expensive 40-foot Fleetwood Discovery LXE, moved it down a price point and created the Fleetwood **Discovery 39G**.

"No one offers a family-style floorplan quite like this," said Lenny Razo, vice president of sales. "Up front, you have a nice residential kitchen/living room area with big sofa, big U-shaped dinette and the TV is in the center of the coach — so when the slides are closed and you're in transit the kids can be buckled in and still watch a movie behind the driver."

The 39 G's bunk room rides in a full-wall slide along with the rear king-size bed and, up front, the sofa and dinette. An opposing streetside slide houses the galley.

The bathroom, by the way, also has three doors, with access not only from the kid's bunks but from the rear master suite and the front cabin.



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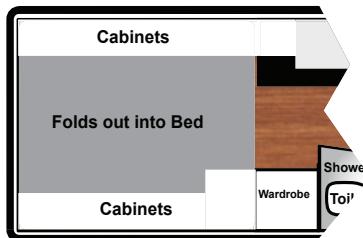
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New for 2017

Built on a Freightliner chassis with a 36,400-pound GVWR and a 360-hp Cummins, the 39-foot, 11-inch 39G retails for about \$296,000.



Winnebago Industries was one of the first manufacturers to build on the new Ford Transit when the company debuted the Class C Fuse. For 2017, the Forest City, Iowa, manufacturer turned its attention to the Class B market with the Transit-based Paseo.

Winnebago started with a fully powered and equipped 310-hp Transit van with a 10,360-pound GVWR (including the Ford Sync 3 touchscreen navigation system and lane-keeping assist) and included extra insulation before adding a raft of molded plastic inserts.

Retailing for about \$120,000 "well-equipped," the rear dinette 48P floorplan includes a 19-inch HDTV in back, with Corian countertops throughout. The galley is equipped with a two-burner range, microwave/convection oven, dual-powered refrigerator/freezer and cold-water filtration system. There's also a Truma Combi eco plus heating system, 13,500-Btu roof air conditioner, 45-amp converter/charger, 2.8-kW Cummins Onan AC generator and powered patio awning with LED lighting. The bath/shower location is forward, just behind the driver's seat, along with a wardrobe.



The first of the new-wave Chinook motorhomes are the Countryside and

its business-class Bayside cousin.

Built on a Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis in a variety of wood finishes and seat color options, the Countryside is fitted with high-end componentry — and a number of unique upgrades.

"We have a lot of redundancy in my vans," said Phil Rizzio, owner of Chinook. "I have installed the largest set of batteries of any van that's out there (what they call a Lifeline 8D battery) and Countryside uses two of them, along with a 3,000-watt inverter that will run everything inside this van while you're not hooked up to electricity."

The Countryside also includes an onboard generator and 13,500-Btu roof air-conditioning system, "but probably the most important part is what we call ProAir. The ProAir system runs off of the engine, so when you're driving down the road you have a 60,000-Btu air conditioning and heating system that runs off of the engine. So you're not having to run the generator, and the system is charging everything."

All this is not without cost. According to Rizzio, MSRPs will run from \$165,000 to \$250,000.



Thor Motor Coach continues the Italian-themed monikers for its diesel motorhomes with the debut of the Aria, a new midlevel motorhome that, pricewise, fits within TMC's lineup above the Palazzo but below the Venetian.

The Aria is available in two floorplans, the 3901 (\$281,330 MSRP) and the 3601 (\$265,930 MSRP), both riding on a 360-hp Cummins ISB-XT-powered Freightliner raised-rail chassis. The primary difference between the two is size — the 3601 stretches 36 feet, 3 inches, versus the 39-foot, 11-inch 3901 — though there

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New for 2017

also are significant floorplan differences. The smaller coach features four slides, with opposing slides in both the main cabin and rear master bedroom, while the three-slide 3901 sports a full-wall slide curbside.

Both versions boast similar componentry and accessories, from the rear king beds and multiple TVs (32-inch LED in the bedroom, 40-inch LED exterior unit and a 43-inch LED HDTV above the fireplace in the main cabin) to the optional power drop-down hide-away overhead bunk above the cockpit.

The 3901 also offers a few key features not found on the smaller model, including a retractable 50-inch LED TV in the living area and a Tilt-A-View inclining king-size bed.



According to Brian Clemens, general manager of Forest River’s Dynamax division, the Elkhart-based OEM is familiar with building the **Isata** on the Ford E-450 chassis, “but we’re basically reintroducing it at a better price point under the 4 Series badge.”

When it came time for the redesign, however, Clemens’ crew took a novel approach.

“Instead of us doing the redesign, we reached out to the dealer body and said, ‘OK, what do you want to see?’” he said.

Based on the feedback, one of the things that Isata previously lacked was full pass-through storage — so the new 4 Series has three separate pass-through storage locations.

“We now have roughly 140 cubic feet of exterior storage on a 30-foot Class C with double slides,” said Clemens. Retail on the Isata 4 Series starts at about \$105,000, but Clemens

believes most buyers will opt for the unit fully equipped with four-point leveling jacks, solar-power system and Dynamax’s well-known automotive-type paint schemes, all of which would push the MSRP to about \$130,000.



Jayco chose the 2016 fall California RV Show in Pomona to introduce a new **Envoy** brand of higher-end Class C motorhomes that, if all goes according to plan, will ultimately evolve into a new line of low-profile gas-powered Class A’s and perhaps lower-priced diesel pushers.

“We can offer some things in the Envoy that we aren’t offering in the traditional Jayco Class C,” said Nic Martin, national sales manager for the manufacturer’s new Jayco Envoy Division.

Primary among them is a 30-by-80-inch panoramic windshield built into a fiberglass front cap reinforced with aluminum for greater front-end integrity.

The new lineup currently consists of two series — the entry-level Envoy 100, available in three 27½-foot and 31½-foot floorplans, and the Envoy 200 with two 31-foot layouts.

Both are built on Ford F-450 chassis with a GVWR of 14,500 pounds and equipped with V-10 Triton engines. A 300 Series Class C expected to be available in the spring will be mounted on a diesel-powered Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis.

With a contemporary maple interior, the 100 features recessed LED lighting and power shades for MSRPs beginning at \$95,000. Equipped with solid-surface countertops, raised-panel cabinets and rear back-up cameras, the 200 retails from \$115,000. **M**



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GRAS1428 - 0916

By Chris Hemer

# N'ICE BOX

Dometic's Super Hybrid refrigerator brings new features and flexibility to meet the demands of today's motorhome owner



**I**n a motorhome, versatility is key. The needs brought about by travel to unfamiliar places and the desire to entertain friends and family require that a motorhome adapt to the situation at hand, which is why we've all grown accustomed to a choice of shorepower or AC-generator, couch or pullout bed. And all RV refrigerators (with the exception of residential models) can switch from 120-volt AC to LP-gas power automatically or at the touch of a button — but beyond that, they're not terribly flexible or technologically advanced. In fact, it's safe to say that, beyond larger models and different door configurations, RV refrigerators haven't changed much in the last 30 years (or more) — but then again, they haven't had to. The average RVer takes less than half a dozen trips a year, and as long as food and beverages stay cold during their outing, they're satisfied. But as motorhomes continue to evolve and deliver more of the high-tech features we expect in our homes, an "average" RV refrigerator has begun to look out of place, especially in Class A models that cost well north of \$150,000. The time for a truly new advancement in RV refrigerators is long overdue, and one solution is the Super Hybrid refrigera-

tor from the RV experts at Dometic. To develop a refrigerator worthy of RVer acclaim, engineers first had to take a fresh look at how motorhome owners use them. Obviously, the refrigerator is used far more often than the freezer — yet it requires the user to bend down to access it, while the freezer is at eye level. And, most motorhome freezers don't have enough space for those occasions when more storage is required, anyway.

The Super Hybrid addresses both of these issues. First, the traditional refrigerator/freezer locations have been swapped, so you can now stand upright as you scan the shelves for that last soda. And, it offers far greater flexibility in the motorhome environment thanks to independent cooling systems. The refrigerator section uses traditional absorption refrigeration technology suitable for dry camping, while the modular



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[1, 2] After closing the valve on the LP-gas tank, the first step is to carefully crack the LP-gas supply line, followed by disconnection of the 12-volt DC power leads. [3] This particular refrigerator was equipped with an icemaker that was no longer functioning. If yours is so equipped, disconnect the water-supply line next. [4] Remove all screws and/or bolts that secure the refrigerator to the cabinet on either side.



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bottom drawer uses 120-volt AC or 12-volt DC variable-speed compressor technology that can deep-freeze, refrigerate or even be turned off so it can be used for dry storage.

It also addresses the age-old problem of slow cooling thanks to an evaporator that is three times the size of a standard fridge unit, as well as a unique technology that pulls temperature down in half the time. A so-called "ChillChannel" covers the fin pack at the back of the refrigerator — and as air behind the cover cools, it drops and pulls warmer air at the top down. This creates a thermal air current, cooling the unit

[5, 6] Next, step inside and start removing screws from the trim around the refrigerator from top to bottom. [7] Don't forget that there may be additional mounting screws beneath the trim.



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[8, 9] Removing the freezer and refrigerator doors makes pulling the unit easier for two reasons. One, it makes the refrigerator lighter and less awkward to handle; and two, it gives you and your helper more places to hold onto when you begin moving it out of the motorhome. The doors are secured by a bolt on top and a pin on the bottom, so after removing the top bolt, simply lift up on the doors to remove them. [10, 11] At this point, the refrigerator should have been ready for removal, but after a few sharp tugs, it felt like it was stuck in the top of the cabinet. We suspected that the refrigerator was secured by another bracket on top somewhere out of view — and after peering down the refrigerator vent, we found the culprit: an L-bracket secured to the top of the refrigerator by two small screws. To access them, the refrigerator vent screws unfortunately had to be removed first, and all of the old sealant scraped off and replaced after the new refrigerator was installed. This increased the time of the project considerably. [12] Finally, the refrigerator could be liberated from its cabinet. [13, 14] The new Dometic Super Hybrid was considerably taller than the original, so about 4 inches of exterior trim had to be cut off. Blue masking tape was used to mark the line to be cut, as this was far more visible than scribing a line with a pen or pencil.



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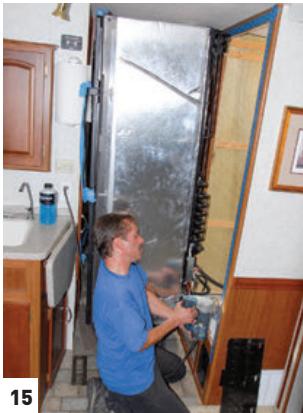


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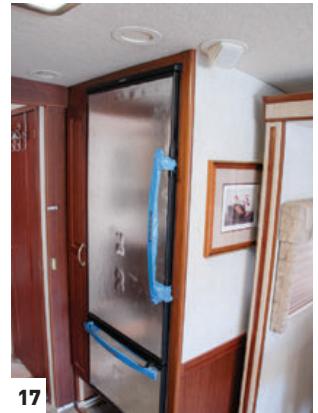
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more efficiently — even when food is pushed against the fin pack.

Measuring a generous 9 cubic feet, the Super Hybrid delivers some other thoughtful features as well, including black powdercoated aluminum handles, a versatile racking system, clear bins/crispers, a hidden control panel and an easy-opening latch system with integrated airing position to prevent mold/mildew buildup when the motorhome is in storage.

To test the Super Hybrid, we installed one in a 2005 Itasca Sunrise with a failing original unit of the same size. Retrofitting an older motorhome with new appliances, especially those not designed for direct replacement,

[15] The original width measurements were correct, but after our first attempt at installing the new refrigerator, we realized a little extra wiggle room would make things a lot easier — so approximately ½ inch was trimmed from the side, again using blue masking tape as a cutting guide. [16] The 12-volt DC leads and LP-gas connection were in different locations than on the original refrigerator, but did not cause any installation difficulties. [17] The new Super Hybrid refrigerator fits like a glove in its new home.



18

[18] The bottom compartment can function as a freezer or refrigerator, and has heavy-duty baskets that can be slid forward/back to make room for larger items underneath. [19] The top compartment features clear bins and crisper drawers, as well as multiple shelves for storage versatility.

is never easy, but with some careful measurement and about four hours of time, the unit was in and running. And true to Dometic's claim, the refrigerator did get to temperature in roughly half the time of the original when it was in good condition.

Aside from first confirming

The Super Hybrid refrigerator features a lower drawer that can freeze, refrigerate or be turned off with the touch of a button. It can also hold up to 60 pounds on its stainless-steel guides for maximum storage potential.



19



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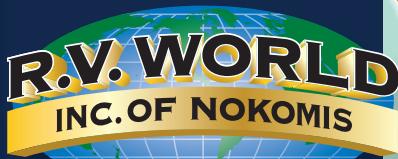
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the Super Hybrid will fit in your motorhome, it's a good idea to consider how you'll be using it. If you'll be dry camping a lot and using the freezer section on 12-volt DC, you should have a substantial battery bank if you expect it to run all day — particularly if there is no solar system to keep the batteries topped off. Otherwise, the freezer portion would be best used when plugged in to shorepower.

The Super Hybrid retails for approximately \$2,500, which is a pretty penny — but considering that an average replacement 9-cubic-footer costs about \$1,500 and a residential refrigerator conversion can cost several thousand dollars once you work in the costs of extra batteries, an inverter and labor, the Super Hybrid is a viable option that effectively meets the needs of today's RVer. **M**

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21



22

[20] Part of the Super Hybrid's clean appearance can be attributed to its control panel, which is hidden behind the freezer door. For better grip during installation, we had removed the freezer door, which required the control panel to be moved aside. When reinstalling, carefully tuck the wires behind the panel. [21] Because we wanted a sleek, modern look for this installation, we had a local glass shop cut custom panels for the freezer and refrigerator doors out of smoked glass. They dropped right into place. [22] The finished installation looks great and provides much more flexibility than the original unit.

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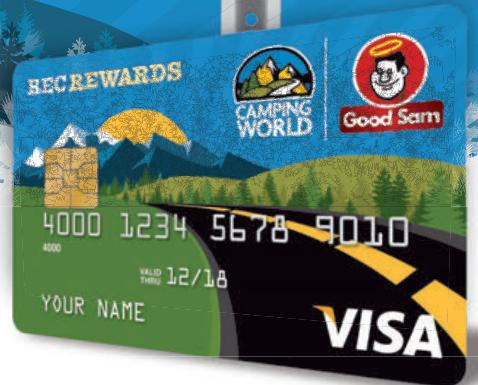
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Map#	Event Name	Dates	Venue
1	Colorado RV Adventure Travel Show	January 5-7	Colorado Convention Center
2	South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville	January 6-8	TD Convention Center
3	Wisconsin RV Super Show	January 6-8	Wisconsin Center
4	Knoxville RV Super Show	January 6-8	Sevierville Convention Center
5	Mid-America RV Show	January 12-15	Bartle Hall at Kansas City Convention Center
6	Washington Camping RV Expo	January 13-15	Dulles Expo Center
7	New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison	January 20-22	New Jersey Convention & Expo Center
8	Chattanooga RV Super Show	January 20-22	Chattanooga Convention Center
9	Cincinnati-Dayton RV Super Show	February 2-5	Airport Expo Center
10	Minneapolis/St. Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show	February 9-12	Minneapolis Convention Center
11	Richmond Camping RV Expo	February 10-12	Richmond International Raceway Complex
12	Columbus RV Super Show	February 10-12	Greater Columbus Convention Center
13	Atlantic City RV & Camping Show	February 17-19	Atlantic City Convention Center
14	Harrisburg RV & Camping Show	February 23-26	PA Farm Show Complex & Expo Center
15	Good Sam RV Super Show	February 23-26	Phoenix International Raceway
16	Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show	March 2-5	National Western Complex
17	Rhode Island RV & Camping Show & Sale	March 3-5	Rhode Island Convention Center
18	Virginia RV Show	March 10-12	Hampton Roads Convention Center

\*Good Sam Club members save 50% on up to two (2) adult admission tickets.



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By Ann Eichenmuller

## COMPACT COMFORT

A RETIRED COUPLE FINDS THAT A 2007 ITASCA NAVION 23J CLASS C MOTORHOME MAKES FOR AN EASY TRANSITION TO THE RV LIFESTYLE

*This article is one in a continuing series demonstrating that some motorhomes, like fine wines, really do get better with age. They may have miles under their wheels, but these motorhomes can still make dreams come true. That is why each one has earned the right to be called "the classic ride."*

If there is one sentence that could sum up the major shift in motorhome design in the last 20 years, it might be "Good things come in small packages." The movement toward more compact touring units began back in the 1990s with motorhomes like the Winnebago Rialta ("Rialta Reality," October 2016). It came of age a decade later with the production of sleek, well-equipped motorhomes like the Itasca Navion. With the power and reliability of a turbodiesel engine and a focus on providing the quality, workmanship

and creature comforts of a full-sized motorhome, the Navion 23J was designed with a new generation of buyers in mind.

That was in 2006. Now one of these decade-old units on the used market is an excellent — and economical — choice for first-time buyers like Jim Altoft and his wife, Kyle Wixson, who have found their 23J to be a perfect introduction to the RV lifestyle.

"A Class A just seemed too big, too much like a bus," Wixson says. Altoft was a reluctant sell on



Above: Jim Altoft, Kyle Wixson and their faithful companion Lucy share adventures aboard their 2007 Navion 23J.

buying a motorhome at all. The couple had recently retired and already had homes in New York and Florida, and he just wasn't sure they had room in their lives for an RV. Wixson, who had grown up traveling and wanted to make the most of their new free time, made the decision for them.

"I got up one day and said, 'We're going shopping,'" she laughed.

They decided that a pre-owned motorhome was the best choice since

# The Classic Ride



Above: The dinette doubles as an extra bed for guests. Warm cherry woodwork, graceful curved cabinetry and stainless-steel appliances give the galley a modern feel.

they were really “trying out” the whole concept of RV travel, and they were drawn to Class C’s because both felt the truck-like design would help them more easily make the transition to driving a motorhome. That was three years ago, and having witnessed the wildly fluctuating fuel prices of the past, they were looking for something that got reasonable fuel economy. This led them to consider a diesel, which Altoft felt was a better choice in terms of power, fuel consumption and longevity. Their only other criteria? A motorhome that was well-maintained and had a dedicated bed.

The couple found the Navion on their first visit to a local dealership. Made by Winnebago Industries under the Itasca badge, the motorhome has steel and aluminum framing, interlocking joints, patented Thermo-Panel side walls and a one-piece crowned fiberglass roof. Built on a Sprinter chassis, its Mercedes-Benz five-cylinder, 2.7-liter turbodiesel engine boasts 17-19 MPG, and had just over 40,000 miles on the odometer. The

unit has a five-speed transmission, four-wheel ABS disc brakes and independent front suspension, all of which promised the comfortable handling the couple was seeking. While they were impressed with what they found under the hood, they were also pleasantly surprised by the interior.

Altoft and Wixson knew there would be trade-offs when choosing a smaller motorhome, so they were excited to find that the Navion included a driver’s-side slideout in the dinette area. Along with swiveling driver and passenger seats, this provided ample room, making the interior feel open and uncrowded. The galley is fully equipped with a three-burner LP-gas stove, stainless-steel range hood, stainless-steel convection microwave and a large stainless-steel paneled two-door Norcold refrigerator. The rear bath is split, with the sink open to the bedroom while the shower and toilet are enclosed in the aft corner, a feature they both liked. Systems include an Onan 3.6-kW generator; a roof-mount air condi-

tioner with heat pump; an LP-gas furnace; and 34-gallon freshwater, 31-gallon black-water and 38-gallon gray-water tanks.

In terms of décor, the color scheme of the Navion is muted, with light-gray carpet, sand tile and countertops, and a maroon-and-brown print upholstery. The honey-cherry finish of the cabinetry and the molding framing the slideout gives the cabin a rich look that’s somewhat uncommon for a small Class C. The couple remains impressed by the interior workmanship, pointing out that some of the other units they saw seemed cheaply made by comparison.

“We just felt like everything was built to a high-quality level,” Altoft says. “The cabinetry, the woodwork, furniture all looked more high-end, well-made.”

One of the final selling points for the Navion was the storage space. There are fully extending sliding drawers in the galley, and this model also includes cabinets over the cab in place of a bunk.

“There is literally tons of storage up there,” Wixson notes, adding that there is also pass-through storage under the rear bedroom. And yes, there is even a standard dedicated 49-by-75-inch corner bed.

The list price of the Navion in 2007 was \$87,988. They bought the 6-year-old 23J for \$54,000, certain that it was a sound motorhome but still not certain how or even if their new addition would fit into their life. The answer to that question was clear when we met Altoft and Wixson early last fall in a campground in Bar

## NEED A NAVION?

One advantage to any model that has been produced for a decade or more is the ability to research its track record and to find support and advice from owner’s groups. As with all used motorhomes, condition is a significant factor in price. A 2007 Itasca Navion 23J can be found on the used market for as little as \$36,400 to as much as \$55,000, with the average selling price hovering just under \$44,000. Compare this to the new 2017 24J (now equipped with two slideouts) with a base MSRP of \$115,244.

▶ The 2007 Itasca Navion 23J is built on the Sprinter chassis and offers a single driver’s side slideout to help expand the dining area.



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# The Classic Ride

Harbor, Maine.

"We're on the road a lot," Altoft says with a smile, recounting one westward trip that included the Grand Canyon, Mount Rushmore, Salt Lake City, Yellowstone and the Grand Tetons.

In addition to longer trips, the couple also uses the Navion to move between their winter and summer homes, with sightseeing excursions along the way. They move so much that Altoft says they seldom are in one place long enough to even put out the awning.

"There's just so much we want to see. We make all these plans!" Wixson laughs.

Now that they have put another 20,000 miles under the wheels, are they content with their "starter" RV?

"We've realized we'd really like another 4 feet," Wixson admits, though they both agree that adding length would also mean losing some of the benefits the Navion offers.

Their main complaints have to do with the space around the rear bed. Because of its tight corner location, they have found it is actually easier to open the exterior side storage area — which allows direct access to the side of the mattress — in order to make the bed. They have also found the under-bed storage area, which is accessed by lifting the mattress, to be difficult to use. One modification they are considering is putting cabinet doors on the bed's base that would be easier to open. A modification they have made is adding a curtain between the rear bedroom and the main living area for increased privacy. Still, these are small things, and they are outweighed by the motorhome's dependability. Thus far, except for routine maintenance, the only thing that has needed service was the generator. In that case, bees had built a hive inside, and once the bees were removed, everything worked perfectly.

The couple did find that, even

with the Navion's smaller size and ease of handling, constantly breaking camp to go off and sightsee was a bit of a nuisance. Since the Navion is equipped to tow up to 3,500 pounds, they added a Chevrolet Tracker to their caravan. They had just returned from Acadia National Park in their dinghy and appreciated the convenience a second vehicle could offer.

Sitting in the cool shade of the trees overlooking the water, Altoft agreed that Wixson had made the right decision when she told him it was time to pick out an RV.

"I would definitely recommend it," he says with a twinkle in his eye. As for the Navion, with 60,000 miles on the engine, he adds, "It's barely broken in."

In the Itasca Navion, combining diesel power with modern trends in design and construction, yesterday's innovation has become an affordable gateway to the RV dream, and today's — and tomorrow's — classic ride. **M**

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Onan 5,000 Watt generator, frameless windows, G-Range tires.

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\$68,989	<b>\$52,995</b>	\$15,994	<b>\$359 P/Month</b>

**Jayco**  
**REDHAWK 29XK**  
2 YEAR WARRANTY

Frameless windows, 7' interior height, rear back-up camera.

List Price	Sale Price	Savings	
\$90,504	<b>\$64,995</b>	\$25,509	<b>\$399 P/Month</b>

**Jayco**  
**ALANTE 31V**  
2 YEAR WARRANTY

J-Ride handling package, power overhead bunk, MCD shades.

List Price	Sale Price	Savings	
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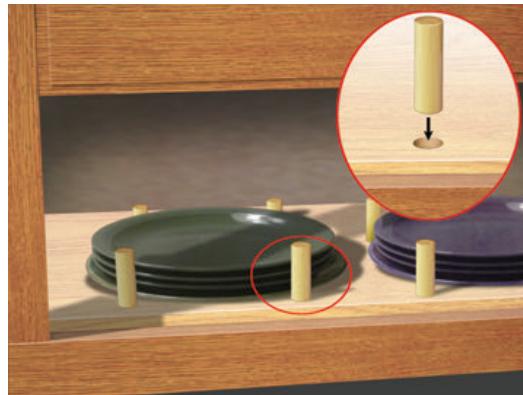
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## Dish Defender

In our motorhome, nothing in the cabinets stayed in place while we were on the road. I came up with a good solution. I started with a ¾-inch-thick white pine board and trimmed it to the depth of the cabinets. I then took ¾-inch-diameter wooden dowel rods and cut them down to 4-inch segments. Next I placed the cups, dishes and bowls in the cabinets and marked where I wanted to put the dowel rods. Then I used a drill press to make holes all the way through the pine-board base. I used four rods placed equally around each plate, cup or bowl. This allows for securing a stack of plates without shifting. Now when we set up camp, we pull one or two rods out of the board for total access to the cabinet items.

**Eric Matlack** | Via email



## Plastic Protection

We live full-time in our motorhome and have relatively little space for storing important documents. So, we began using resealable plastic freezer bags to store the papers. The bags are durable and water- and spill-proof, thus allowing storage anywhere in the motorhome, including little-used spaces such as under drawers and other nooks and crannies.

**Dan Griswold** | Tampa, Florida



## Step Up

We use our aerobic stepper as an entry step to our motorhome, and as an aerobic stepper to stay fit while on the road. We like using the stepper as an entry step as opposed to a folding step due to the overall size of the step, its non-slip surface, the fact that it's lightweight and easy to clean — plus, its large footprint (compared to the four little legs on traditional steps) eliminates tipping. The aerobic step does not dig into our patio mat and is also height adjustable. You can find these steps at yard sales and flea markets if you do not want to purchase a new one.

**John Holdos** | Saltington, Pennsylvania



## Memory Jog

After accidentally trying to "tow" the house a few times (we use our RV year-round so it is parked in the driveway, plugged in to electricity when we are not traveling) with an extension cord, it was obvious my memory needed some backup. Such an oversight can be embarrassing, not to mention how tough it can be on power cords and plugs.

Hanging a triple-tap cord on the steering wheel has eliminated the problem (as long as I remember to hang the cord as soon as I turn off the ignition). While simply putting the cord through the steering wheel and plugging it together works, I like to also loop the cord around the shift lever. That way I am not going anywhere without unplugging the cord and taking it off the shift lever.

**Jim Magowan** | Anchorage, Alaska



### Have an Idea?

Quick Tips is looking for submissions. Please send your DIY ideas to: *MotorHome* Quick Tips, 2750 Park View Ct., Ste. 240, Oxnard, CA 93036, or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com). Be sure to include any photos, illustrations or drawings. If your tip is selected for publication, you will receive \$35. All payments require an FEIN or SSN.

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**72" x 60" MOVING BLANKET**

HeatWaxTech

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63505/62418

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6075/60714

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**4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**

drillmaster

ITEM 60626 Show

9357/809545

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**12 VOLT, 10/250 AMP BATTERY CHARGER/ENGINE STARTER**

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**4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER**

drillmaster

ITEM 60626 Show

9357/809545

**SAVE 40%**

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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**3200 RUNNING WATTS 6.5 HP (212 CC) GAS GENERATOR**

ITEM 66976/66972/66906/65306

66976/66972/66906/65306

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Customer Rating **★★★★★**

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**6.5 HP (212 CC) OHV HORIZONTAL SHAFT GAS ENGINES FEEDATOR**

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# Mobile-Repair Make-Good



Attempting to secure compensation from his extended-warranty company to honor a repair made without prior approval, a reader contacted Hot Line. He wrote:

“ I am 68 years old and live on the road fulltime. Last July, my 2014 Forest River Berkshire motorhome suffered a catastrophic breakdown of the hydraulic system on all of the slides. I found a mobile repairman in the area and paid \$1,589 to fix the problem.

I have an extended warranty through American Guardian Warranty Services Inc. (AGWS). I contacted the company and spoke with Dennis Delano, who told me to send in all of the paperwork. I do know that I need preapproval, but Delano didn't say that AGWS would deny my claim, or that I might have done this a different way. And, yes, it was my fault, but you can imagine my frustration when this happened.

Sometime later, I received a letter denying my claim because I didn't get prior authorization before proceeding with the repairs.

Again, I admit my fault in the matter, but I would have thought that a warranty company would have a little human compassion for my situation.

**John Kosick | Williamstown, New Jersey**

Hot Line passed on Kosick's plea to AGWS for its review and further consideration. We heard back from AGWS and Kosick as follows:

I am in receipt of your inquiry into a complaint communicated by John Kosick. AGWS is the claims administrator and obligor for the Compass RV Protection vehicle service contract that Kosick purchased. Our records show that AGWS received a letter from Kosick regarding repair costs he incurred around August 3, 2016.

In this case, Kozick submitted his claim without obtaining prior repair authorization, which is a clear breach of the contract and the claim was properly declined. When contacted in advance of a claim, AGWS will work with the consumer and his selected mobile RV repairer and request their credentials in order to protect the consumer and

ourselves.

Also, I would like to draw your attention to the terms and conditions of the service contract in Section VIII, "What To Do If Repairs Are Needed." It states in bold print "Mobile Repairers are not permitted unless authorized by the Administrator, at its sole and exclusive discretion."

We have contacted the consumer as a result of receiving this inquiry and have addressed the claim with him. We are issuing a check along with a copy of this explanation to the consumer under separate cover.

**John Wendt | VP Claims and Underwriting, AGWS | Warrenville, Illinois**

“ I just got a call from my warranty company with an offer to split the bill. I really appreciate Hot Line's help. J.K.

## Set Up for the Future

Beyond his refrigerator manufacturer's warranty, but hoping to receive assistance with a repair, a reader requested the intervention of Hot Line:

“ In 2010, I replaced a defective Norcold RV refrigerator with a new Dometic refrigerator. Recently, the cooling unit on the Dometic failed and needs to be replaced. I know Dometic had a recall on some of its units, but I was told that my 2010 unit is out of warranty and Dometic will not help me. Can you help?

**Christopher Williams | Albany, New York**

We contacted Dometic to see if the company could offer any assistance to Williams. Sometime later, we received an email from Williams, which explained the conclusion of his case.

“ Maybe it was your letter to Dometic, or maybe it was mine, but the company contacted me and offered to supply the cooling system for my refrigerator as long as I, or my extended-service-contract provider, paid for the labor. I thanked the rep from Dometic, but told him that while I was waiting to hear back from the company, I purchased a new RV. I asked him if the offer still applies should I need it in the future, and he said it would, so I thanked him again. C.W. M

## Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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By Ken Freund

## Mouseproofing

The season for motorhome mouse-invasion is here. I wanted to share what we found in our 2002 Fleetwood Fiesta a few years ago. After owning it for a few years with no mouse problems, in the fall of 2012 we had mice. I searched everywhere to find an entry location, even using a creeper with lights and mirrors to look underneath, but I couldn't find anything. Then my wife observed that the mouse "evidence" was always in the passenger foot space. Taking a closer look, I could see that the chassis heater outlet led directly to the outside air inlet, under the hood, when the heater control was not in the "recirculate" position. The mice had a direct highway from outside to



inside. I closed this off with steel screening and we have not seen mice since.

**John Foede | Madison Lake, Minnesota**

Good sleuthing job, John! Who would have thought of that route but a mouse? Thanks for writing; this could help a lot of folks out there.

### Ford F-53 Rain Ingestion and Oil-gauge Tip

**Q** In 2000 we purchased a new Fleetwood Bounder 32WB on the Ford chassis with a V-10 engine. Over the years we have solved a variety of problems, except one vexing situation: When driving in the rain, the air intake brings water up the vertical air intake and into the filter. The filter is a truncated cone with a plastic hemisphere at the bottom. Thinking I could avoid the hemispherical cup from filling with water, I drilled a ¼-inch hole. Now the water drains out but the filter element still becomes completely saturated. When this happens, the engine will intermittently cough. Fearing damage, such as hydraulic lock, I will have to change the filter (usually in the rain) and can only drive a few miles farther before a repeat. I am stymied as to what can be done. Do you have any ideas?

Also, here is a tip for Ford owners: The oil-pressure gauge is not a gauge. It is an idiot light in disguise. I lost an engine due to low oil pressure after a check-valve spring collapsed in the oil pump. There was enough pressure to show normal,

but the gauge would pulse at idle. RV owners who have this situation should do as I did: Install an aftermarket oil-pressure gauge. All it takes are appropriate fittings to be installed at the base where the oil filter is installed. A tube is routed into the passenger compartment and attached to the gauge. The gauge-mounting bracket can be attached to the lower lip of the instrument panel. You will then have a functioning idiot gauge, and a real gauge.

**Gary Blackburn | Palo Alto, California**

**A** Thanks for the tip on the oil-pressure indicators. This is also true on many Ford vans and pickups of the era.

Over the years Ford has had several different fixes for the water-ingestion problem. Ford published technical service bulletin (TSB) 02-9-9 and issued a part No. YC3Z-9K635-AA for a shield kit. However, many owners reported that the earlier "fixes" didn't solve the problem; they still drew air down low, where water got sucked in. I suggest that you simply modify your engine's air intake so that you can slip a clothes-dryer-vent hose over the stock air pick-up and route it so that it's above the grille opening. Hold it in place with large cable ties and hose

clamps. Route it so there's a low spot where water can collect, and add drain holes on the bottom.

### Genset Quits

**Q** The Onan Microquiet 4000 genset in my 2008 Fleetwood Class C will typically start and run fine for about 15 minutes, but then will surge for a few seconds and shut off. After that it won't restart until some time has passed. I took it to an Onan service center and they said they couldn't fix a problem that doesn't exist — they ran it twice, for an hour each time, with no problems. I was told to make sure to prime it for about 30 seconds, and to run it often and long. When I got home, it did the same thing to me.

My research leads me to hypothesize that it has an overheating issue, but it didn't overheat at the service center. I have run it several times under no load, under load with the A/C fan only and with the A/C full auto, all with the same result, sometimes longer and sometimes shorter, but it always ends up shutting down on its own. I've put in a new fuel filter, the air filter is clean and services are up to date.

**Scott David | Saugus, California**

**A** Don't you hate that when you take something in for a problem and it doesn't malfunction when you need it to? I think you are very likely correct in your guess about overheating. You live in an area where it gets very hot in summer, and that's probably contributing to the problem. These gensets have an automatic shutdown which will stop the engine if excessively high temperatures are detected, and also if a low oil level is detected. Both rely on sensors, which of course can go bad completely or just out of range.

Always start by checking the oil level. Then, inspect for anything that might cause a restriction of cooling airflow, such as dirt and crud, trash, critter nests, etc. Make sure there's enough gas in the tank.

If everything looks good, I suggest you have the shop replace the temperature sensor, just in case it has started to fail. Ask the mechanic to look the genset over for any other possible causes of the problem while it's there. In the future, when testing it, do so in the hot sun with the air-conditioner compressor cycled on to create a significant load. The shop may have tested it on a cool day, parked in the shade, and/or without much load.

## Tire Recall

In 2012 I bought a 2013 Class C Itasca with Michelin LT tires; the unit was new on a Ford E-series chassis. Later that year I read about a tire recall by Michelin for tread separation and rapid deflation (blow out). All seven tires on the unit were replaced free of charge. I did not get a notification from Itasca or Michelin about the recall. It could be that the problem Kent Williams ("Tire Failures," September 2016) had was due to the recall. The Michelin website lists the date codes involved. Maybe this is too late to help Williams, but maybe it will help other RVers. Tires were replaced by Uniroyal, which is owned by Michelin. I wasn't too happy about that, but no new Michelins were available at the time. Hope this helps.

**Michael Nemzek | Dublin, Georgia**

(continued on page 79)

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Thanks for writing. Owners are supposed to be notified, using sales records and DMV records. If you moved, it's possible that notification was not received. Anyway, I'm glad you got some new tires for free. Folks with tire problems would be wise to check with the manufacturer and also the NHTSA recall site online at [www.nhtsa.gov/Vehicle+Safety/Recalls+&+Defects](http://www.nhtsa.gov/Vehicle+Safety/Recalls+&+Defects).

## Rough-riding Ford Chassis Revisited

**Q** I own a 33-foot 2015 motorhome with a 2014 Ford F-53 chassis and Bilstein shocks. I love the engine and transmission. The ride is OK, but it makes a terrible noise when roads are not perfect. I, like others, was very interested in the Sumo Springs, etc., to help the ride of this chassis. I wish I had spoken to the techs, as Mr. Herman (October 2016) did, so I could have saved myself \$1,000.

I read your advice in the October 2016 issue about checking the tire pressures, and will try that. Also, you discourage lifting the wheels off the ground with the leveling jacks. The Sumo Springs installations instructions recommend you do this when installing the springs. I did such, but added additional support with bottle jacks, etc. I am a bit exasperated, as we seem to get a mixed bag of technical information.

**Thomas Clark | League City, Texas**

**A** Let me clear the air on the leveling jacks first. They are not designed for continuous use, as you would have if you leave them extended during long-term or winter storage. Using them to briefly support the motorhome is not the same. The leveling jacks are likely used to take the pressure off the springs, and the wheels are not lifted off the ground. We do not recommend using bottle jacks to stabilize a chassis; only use jack stands. Having said that, we also don't have any control over what Sumo Springs provides in its instruction manual. Any questions about that should be addressed to the company.

Regarding ride quality, noise and

aftermarket products, there's a large variation between motorhome models, depending on overhang, insulation, GVWR, load, etc. Some rattle terribly, while others are much quieter even though they're on the same Ford chassis, depending on how they're constructed. Drivers can react differently to these factors of ride quality and noise, also. Some are really bothered, while others are fine with it; it's difficult to measure and quantify. That is why there are so many differences of opinion on this subject, resulting in, as you call it, a "mixed bag of technical information."

## Rough-riding Revisit, Take 2

**Q** I found the October 2016 question on the Ford chassis very interesting, and would like to add some input. I purchased a new 2015 Itasca 35F, which is on the Ford F-53 chassis, and experienced a rough ride immediately. The dealer advised me that I may need a break-in period or, possibly to be satisfied, I may need to upgrade to better shock absorbers. (I had owned a Gulf Stream with Bilstein shocks and was very satisfied with the ride).

When I took the unit for an annual inspection, the mechanic acknowledged the rough ride and recommended I take it to a Ford dealer. I found a dealer (45 miles away) that could handle the warranty. One of the mechanics noticed the shocks were yellow in color and not standard equipment on the Ford chassis. Upon inspection of shocks and after measurements were taken, the bolts on the shocks were found to be loose by two turns on the nuts. After a test ride, they felt the unit was repaired.

The ride is much improved, but because they were of the opinion that the manufacturer of the coach or the dealer had changed the shocks, it was not covered under warranty and I was presented with a bill for \$110, which I paid. This has raised questions in my mind: Is this a recall issue and is Ford not making the dealer aware of motorhome-chassis upgrades?

**Bob Bullock | Dallas, Pennsylvania**

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## COACH & POWERTRAIN

**A** The fact that the shock-absorber mounting fasteners were loose is quite puzzling. If the nuts were only two turns loose, it shouldn't have affected the ride significantly, and is likely it only caused some rattling or chattering. It really doesn't make much sense that anyone would remove the original shocks and install others that are better, and then leave the fasteners loose. Perhaps you have a case that could go to our Hot Line for resolution, maybe for reimbursement of labor charges, but I'm glad you are happy with your motorhome now.

### Transfer Switches

Thank you for your thorough answer to my letter ("Transfer-switch Issue?") in the September 2016 issue. Since the incident that I wrote about, it got worse and then finally completely failed. So, we just spent \$600 to replace the transfer switch on our 2014 Fleetwood Bounder. The old switch always hummed, but the new one doesn't make any noise. Maybe that's a good sign? I have asked before about changing the wiring, as you suggest, and was told that it would cost more than several transfer switches to do that.

**Diane Brush | Jackson, Michigan**

Thanks for the follow up. A noisy hum may indicate an impending relay failure within the transfer switch.

### Cold Shower — Comment

While reading my October 2016 issue I came across the "Cold-shower Tip." I, too, have had this problem, so I went to a local RV-supply house and bought a high-end showerhead with a shut off. It leaked as well. When I returned it, I was told all RV showerheads are that way due to RV building requirements. When they leak, the hot water is replaced with cold so when you turn it back on you are not scalded with hot water. I put my original one back on. A couple of weeks later, thinking the technician must have been mistaken, I went to a local residential plumbing-supply house and asked them about the shower heads.



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They confirmed the story, and said it applied to residential homes as well.  
**Joe Ortiz | San Diego, California**

Thanks for writing in and sharing that information with us, Joe.

## Hardwood Floors

**Q** Is it a good idea to install hardwood floors in a motorhome? What are your thoughts on this subject?  
**Fred Hommes | Shelby Township, Michigan**

**A** Full thickness hardwood is not an option because of its size and weight, but there are other options. If you really like the look and feel of hardwood, Bruce Engineered wood flooring is built in layers, which makes it more resistant to changes in temperatures and humidity than solid wood. Bruce hardwood flooring is relatively thin and can be installed in most RVs, even those with slideouts, if done correctly. There is also a wide range of vinyl laminate floors available that closely simulate hardwoods from companies like LaSalle Bristol, an RV supplier, and others like Shaw and Armstrong. BeauFlor is another popular RV option because of its durability.

It's usually best to secure the flooring product to the subfloor in a motorhome rather than use a floating system because of safety concerns in the event of a rollover accident. Many of these floors can be glued, stapled or nailed successfully, but check with the flooring manufacturer first.

Also, don't forget to take weight into consideration, especially if you're replacing a lighter-weight material for a heavier one. It can affect cargo and passenger weight capacity. **M**

## Have a Tech Question?

### Contact our experts:

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



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# Hope Springs

Florida's natural springs provide relief to the winter-weary soul

By Alan Rider

**A**bout this time every year I settle into a nice funk. I've had it up to my eyeballs with winter. Spring cannot possibly arrive soon enough, period. And then I remember a place where hope springs eternal. The very thought of which puts a spring in my step.

I'm talking here about the natural springs in the state of Florida. Dozens of places where crystal-clear waters bubble up from underground to form the most picture-perfect swimming holes you'll ever see (interesting side note: the state actually has roughly 1,000 total springs; for a list of the most popular ones, visit [www.florida-springs.org](http://www.florida-springs.org)).

The mere existence of these brilliantly blue slices of heaven scattered across northern and central Florida is a balm to my winter-weary soul. While I know it's still below freezing outside, memories of the times I've spent exploring the Sunshine State's springs make me feel warm inside.

Ah, you say, there he goes being overly sentimental again. Perhaps you're right. But I defy you to visit some of these places and not come away with a new definition of wonder.

I know this because I thought much the same thing the first time I saw a re-creation of one of these rare bodies of water in a manatee rescue exhibit at a marine theme park. My immediate reaction was "There's no way they could look like that in the real world, it

looks like a swimming pool."

Well, it turns out I was wrong. Florida's springs look exactly like well-landscaped swimming pools, with improbably aquamarine water surrounded by bald cypress trees, pine-scrub forest, and rare orchids and lilies.

Which helps explain why they've been drawing visitors here for more than 100 years. They're really something you have to see to believe.

Speaking of which, the inhabitants of one of the most famous springs may have you not believing your eyes. I'm talking here about the mermaids of Weeki Wachee Springs on Florida's left coast, where you can see young women with tail flukes performing an underwater ballet 365 days a year, just as they have since 1947.

Of course, my favorite thing about

many of Florida's springs is that they're home to the real-life creatures that somehow spawned that mermaid myth. Each year about this time, nearly 1,000 manatees gather in the warm-water springs that flow into Kings Bay near the town of Crystal River. If you've ever had a desire to meet a manatee face-to-face, I highly recommend that you search out my friend Bill "Bird" Oestreich, owner of the dive shop and manatee tour operation known as Bird's Underwater (352-563-2763, [www.birdsunderwater.com](http://www.birdsunderwater.com)). I guarantee you it will be the most mind-blowing wildlife encounter you'll ever have.

Like Crystal River's picturesque Three Sisters Spring, each of Florida's most noteworthy springs have their own unique *je ne sais quoi*. The one quality they all share at this time of year, however, is a peacefulness that can be hard to come by in other parts of the state. To really appreciate their serenity, go on a weekday in the next few months and you're liable to have the whole place to yourself.

In the final measure, which of the springs you visit matters less than the fact that you decide to leave winter behind and take the time to visit at least some of them. When you do, I think you may well discover why I say hope — like these stunning crystal-clear waters — springs eternal along The Road Ahead. **M**

**“ I've had it up to my eyeballs with winter .... And then I remember a place where hope springs eternal. ”**

## Swimmin' Holes ☺

With nearly 1,000 springs to choose from, Florida visitors are sure to find a way to beat the winter blues, from a dip in the crystal-clear waters to a manatee meet-and-greet.



Photos: Alan Rider and Bill Oestreich



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