

YOUR FAVORITES REVEALED: READERS' CHOICE AWARDS

MotorHome

Travel, Tech, Lifestyle – For the RV Enthusiast

BIG TIME

Luxurious Allegro Bus 45 OPP



**HOW TO
CHOOSE THE BEST
MOTORHOME
CHASSIS**

Pg. 34

WATER WORLD

Clearsource
RV filter
system

A TREK WORTH TAKING

Hiking
California's
Mt. Whitney



Key West!

**HEADING SOUTH
IN SEARCH OF
HEMINGWAY'S
HIDEOUTS**



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Key West, Florida, is well-known for its sunshine and sandy beaches, but this quirky island is also filled with Hemingway history (see page 19).



Chassis selection is an often-overlooked aspect of the motorhome buying process. We break down the different models and manufacturers. **Pg. 34**

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ON THE COVER

The ride and handling of Tiffin's upscale Allegro Bus matches its long list of residential amenities to make some beautiful motorhome music (see test on page 44). Photo by Shawn Spence.





By Kristopher Bunker

Welcome to Adventure

Reboots seem to be all the rage these days. From TV shows to movies to fashion trends and even motorhomes, putting a fresh spin on something that's already established is an important part of staying ahead of the curve. And, with technology evolving faster than ever, changing on the fly is a common occurrence, and one that is often embraced with open arms.

With that said, you may notice some changes to the front section of *MotorHome*: More adventure, more activities and more out-of-the-box thinking. Many of us selected our mobile lifestyles to get more in tune with nature, and our new content is "more" focused on doing just that.

The reboot brings along a new voice who will pen *Trek*, a monthly column detailing his nature-focused lifestyle and adventures. Chuck Graham is a freelance writer and photographer based in Carpinteria, California, where he's been a lifeguard on the beach for 26 years. Graham also leads kayak tours at Channel Islands National Park, and has been paddling the chain for a quarter century. His exploits have been published in a variety of outdoor-centric, national publications, and we think Graham and his expert insights make the perfect addition to the *MotorHome* family.

Another new addition is the Outfit department. Inspired by the *Trek* column, Outfit will feature apparel and accessories one might need to partake

of a similar adventure, or that would be equally at home in a closet or storage compartment of your motorhome.

Eagle-eyed readers will also notice something different about P.O. Box. As you know, we feature a Question of the Month in every issue, asking for input on personal experiences. For a look at the lighter side of things, we have enlisted illustrator Joe Schmidt to include his own humorous take on each question. Schmidt has been a motorhome owner for more than 40 years, and began illustrating, as he puts it, "Since I could put a pencil in my hand." He fell in love with the outdoors at an early age, and continues to explore the country along with his wife, Sue, from the comfort of their 33-foot Winnebago Adventurer.

In addition to some new faces, this issue also includes an old favorite, one that focuses on, well, favorites. Beginning on page 24, we hand out the gold, silver and bronze medals for RV products,

services and accessories, as voted on by our readers. The "2018 Readers' Choice Awards" features a number of repeat winners, and a couple of surprises as well. Let the debates begin!

As the times are changing, so, too, is *MotorHome*, but there are certain things that won't ever change. *MotorHome* will always continue to find its center on the latest and greatest in new motorhomes and accessories, with expert tips on maintenance and installations, in addition to premier destinations from coast to coast (and sometimes beyond).

This month's test vehicle — the Tiffin Allegro Bus 45 OPP (page 44) — represents the kind of balance between on-road performance and upscale luxury we love to see, while "Finding Hemingway," beginning on page 19, is exactly the type of enriching destination we enjoy exploring.

This is an exciting time for *MotorHome* and the RV industry in general, as we continue to evolve to meet the needs — and expectations — of our valuable readers. We'd like to hear your thoughts on the reboot, or on anything motorhome-related. Please send comments to info-motorhome@goodsam.com. **M**

“Many of us selected our mobile lifestyles to get more in tune with nature.”

Contributors | January



Ann Eichenmuller is a Virginia writer who loves traveling with husband, Eric, in their Minnie Winnie. Ann is the author of four books, including her recent mystery, *The Lies We Are* (www.hightidepublications.com).



Chuck Graham is a freelance writer and photographer. His work has been published in national publications such as "Backpacker," "Canoe & Kayak" and "Outdoor Photographer." www.chuckgrahamphoto.com



Chris Hemer has been an RV journalist and photographer for nearly 20 years. An avid outdoor enthusiast, he enjoys camping, motorcycle riding, mountain biking and hiking. <http://chrishemer.com>

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

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

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

Printed in the United States.

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If your motorhome is equipped with a corner bed — or even if you have such a setup in your stick home — do you have any tips and tricks on how to easily (and effectively) install the bottom sheet?

That's the question we asked in the October 2018 issue, and here are some of the responses we received.

Easier Said Than Done?

My advice to A. D. Elliott regarding a bottom sheet — buy another motorhome that doesn't have a cut-corner bed. We had a rear slide and it was almost as bad, so we just bought a bigger motorhome that has a side slide where the bed is easier to make.

Linda Davidson | Benton, Louisiana

Lazy Days (and Nights)

We have a 26-foot Winnebago Aspect Class C with a corner short queen bed. After an extended trip, my husband, who is an avid carpenter and woodworker, commented on how the 84-inch-wide booth/dinette

was neither comfortable to sit in or sleep on. To make a long story short, he removed the booth, which is on a slide, and finished it out with two Bradd and Hall Lambricht Lazy Relaxor Recliners with optional folding side tables. We solved our problems in a very comfortable way.

Jim and Linda Gill | via email

Spin Cycle

I put the sheet on one side top and bottom, turn the mattress and do the other side. I realize you might not be able to do this, but our mattress is only 6 inches high so it's quite easy to do. Hope this helps.

Michele Dehann | via email

Queen Me

I have a 2015 Winnebago Minnie Winnie 22R Class C with a chopped-off corner bed, but I have no problem making my corner bed. I have a queen-size bed pad with elastic straps to hold onto the corners (for the "chopped-off" corner, I just tuck it in underneath). On top of that, I have a queen-size Trivasak that has sheets that are held in with hook-and-loop fastener. It is easy to make the bed, I just zip up the sides, straighten it out a little and I'm done. I have a throw blanket that I put on top of the Trivasak to "dress up" the bed and cover the mattress and bed pad. For me, making the bed is painless!

Armand Vaquer | Jamestown, New Mexico

Featured Letter

You Sew and Sew

We have a 2002 Four Winds Class C with a corner bed that has always been a challenge to make. There is no way to crawl to the top of the bed, tuck in the sheets and back off the bed without messing up the bed again.

Our solution requires three steps: 1) Attach pieces of heavy-duty hook-and-loop tape with adhesive backing to the three walls surrounding the bed, just below the top of the mattress, so they do not show over the mattress. We placed two pieces on the wall at the top of the mattress, and two pieces under the bottom edge of the mattress. 2) Using a twin flat sheet, sew the corresponding hook-and-loop tape (without adhesive) to the spots near the edges of the sheet that correspond to the placement on the walls. The twin sheet fits well over the queen bed since the sheet is not actually tucked under the mattress, and stays taut because of being attached to the hook-and-loop tape. That solves the bottom sheet problem. 3) We sewed a matching queen

sheet to the flat sheet across the bottom (with pleats to take up the extra width and allow foot comfort) and partway up each side. This makes a sort of sleeping bag that we can easily get into, and washes easily because it is just two sheets, not like a bulky sleeping bag.

Just to make the arrangement more versatile, we keep the mattress covered underneath with a matching fitted queen sheet so we will not have a bare mattress at times when we don't have our regular sheets on. We use navy sheets that match the window dressings and don't look like an unmade bed.

It might sound complicated, but the bed looks better and there is no more frustration with tucking in the sheets to keep them looking neat.

Margaret McKechnie | Columbia, South Carolina



Visual Letter to the Editor

by Joe Schmidt



Burrito Bedding

My wife and I own a 2018 Airstream Interstate. We enjoy all the comforts and adventures that come with owning a motorhome, but dread making the bed! Here's our solution when dealing with a rear cut-corner bed.

Measure the inside width and length with the bed in the open position. Purchase a 2-inch-thick piece of foam rubber and cut it to the exact size of your inside dimensions. Then purchase a padded, fitted mattress cover. In our case, the cut foam pad fit perfectly flat inside a king-size fitted mattress cover.

Now, picture a very large pillowcase: Take two flat sheets and cut them down to fit over the foam and pad. Allow an extra 5 inches of sheet on either side of the pad, as well as one end. Sew the two sides and the one end together.

Turn the sewn sheets inside out for a clean-looking seam. The extra width of the sheets allows for the thickness of the foam and mattress cover, as well as easily inserting the pad when it's bedtime. Add two pillows and a cover sheet and it's bedtime, no problem.

When traveling, the foam rolls up and fits nicely into a large industrial trash bag. The "pillowcase" sheet and mattress cover fold and store in an overhead storage. When ready for use, open your bed, unroll the foam on top of the bed, place the mattress cover and pillowcase sheet in place over the foam, done!

No tucking, no ends popping up; just a comfortable night's sleep.

Judy and Al Naar | via email

Custom Corner

We had a motorhome that had a corner bed. "Had" because I hated that bed — it was hard to make and even harder to crawl over my husband to get out of it.

To deal with making the bed, I modified my sheet set. I took the fitted sheet and cut the elastic out of the bottom two corners, leaving only the two top fitted corners. Then I sewed the top sheet to the bottom sheet, along the bottom. This way I only had to tuck the two top corners in and flatten out the rest of it into the appropriate place. There was extra material, leaving plenty of room to stretch out your feet while your sleep. Our next motorhome will have a walkaround bed.

Linda DeSalvo | via email

Bottoms Up

We sacrificed our queen walk-around bed in order to downsize to our 25-foot Class C. We like to have guests, so I always want our bed to look nice. I start with my fitted sheet tucked under the edge of our foam topper. To make the bed, I first line up, tug or shift the bedding at the foot of the bed. Then I kneel on the head of the bed to put the rest of the sheets and covers in place. I can smooth out the valleys and hills after that. I gave up on our bed being a showcase. It looks decent now.

We also removed our bathroom door because the thickness of the bedding on the edge of the mattress made it impossible to open or close. I made a ceiling-to-floor curtain at the foot of our bed on a tension rod that we use for privacy.

Karen Knorr | Longview, Washington

Florida Jewels

After reading "50 More Snowbird Parks" in the October 2018 issue, I noticed that the listing for Florida omits two really great RV parks in Naples, Florida: Pelican Lake Motorcoach Resort and Silver Lakes Golf & RV Resort. These two RV parks are in a great Florida location for snowbirds and both are upscale, gated communities. Silver Lakes has three swimming pools, its own golf course and two clubhouses with more activities than

anyone can do. Pelican Lake is a Class A-only community.

Ernest Maier | via email

Room with No View

Why don't RV manufacturers install larger windows on the passenger side of a motorhome? I want to look at my own patio area more than that of my neighbor's.

Pat Haidet | Oxnard, California 

Question of the Month

Do you own a motorhome (or know of one) that has a large window on the passenger side that allows a great view of your patio area? And, would you consider window size and placement an important part of the selection process?

Send your comments to:

MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com



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Moraine Lake [Banff National Park]

Surrounded by some of the most magnificent scenery in the Canadian Rockies, Moraine Lake dazzles with its turquoise waters nestled in the Valley of the Ten Peaks in Alberta's Banff National Park. The brilliant blue-green hue is the result of light refracting off the fine particles of rock in the glacier run-off that flows into the lake. The road to Moraine Lake is closed during winter and generally reopens the third week of May, so planning ahead well in advance is key due to the lake's popularity and the limited parking (especially during peak days in late June). The secret is to arrive early; we pulled in at 7 a.m. and got the last RV parking spot. Once settled in, we then took a few of the many walking/hiking trails through the woods and around the lake. — *Morey Edelman*

For more information: 403-762-8421, www.banfflakelouise.com



DID YOU KNOW?

Mount Whitney is named for American geologist Josiah Dwight Whitney.

By Chuck Graham

Turning Around

While driving north on U.S. Highway 395, along California's Eastern Sierra, I was contemplating the snow conditions and scenarios that could occur scaling Mount Whitney, the Lower 48's tallest summit at 14,505 feet. Winter offers a whole other set of challenges when attempting to reach its lofty summit.

I was doing what I normally do with a busy work schedule (leading kayak tours and backpacking trips at Channel Islands National Park off the California coast). I drove straight from work, getting off the boat in the afternoon in Ventura Harbor, and by 7 p.m. I was stretched out in the back of my truck, all wrapped up in my sleeping bag. Gazing at a starlit night, crisp and clear, I was all geared up for another ascent up Mount Whitney. This time, though, I was alone on the mountain, not another car at the trailhead. It was December and winter had settled in.

At 11 p.m. I was anxious and found myself on the Mount Whitney Trail, mentally preparing for another one-day summit run. However, I was in knee-deep snow at roughly 10,000 feet just above Outpost Camp, and 2½ hours later I was at Trail Camp at 12,000 feet. The Eastern Sierra had already received two significant snowfalls. My

“By this point sunrise had peeked above the daunting Inyo Mountains to the east.”

crampons searched for solid snow, my ice axe was easily posting half its length. The recent snowfall had covered most, if not all the seemingly endless switchbacks above Trail Camp and snow conditions continued to worsen as I cut my own steps on a steepening ascent toward the Trail Crest at 13,000 feet. I was consistently finding myself in chest-deep snow, and my pace had slowed considerably.

By this point sunrise had peeked above the daunting Inyo Mountains to the east. The expanse of the Owens Valley stretched out below and dark shadows retreated into the narrowest canyons, while the breathtaking Alabama Hills clustered to the west. I carried my 300mm lens up with me and took a moment to fire off a few frames of the stone-walled, tin-roofed summit hut on Mount Whitney. It looked lonely at the top, especially knowing I was a solo climber on the mountain.

Unfortunately, it was approaching 9 a.m. and I was still just below the Trail Crest. I was basically swimming in snow at that point and my pace had dwindled to that of a snail, or so it seemed. Fatigue was setting in. Eventually I deemed my situation unsafe. To go for the summit would've put me there by late afternoon at best, a foolish decision. I still had to climb down safely, so I turned around, slightly disappointed, but by managing risk I didn't place myself in harm's way. After all, the mountain wasn't going anywhere, and I would be back.

Above: Mount Whitney is the most frequently climbed peak in California's Sierra Nevada; adventurers need to obtain a permit before making the climb.



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Ⓢ Petzl Summit Ice Axe is designed for classic mountaineering in winter conditions. The lightweight axe offers anchoring performance of both the head and the spike. The curved design allows for increased clearance for steep ice. The pick and adze are both made of hot-forged steel, and the handle is cut into the adze for a better grip. The aluminum shaft features anodized finish for durability. MSRP: \$149.95. Petzl America, 801-926-1500, www.petzl.com

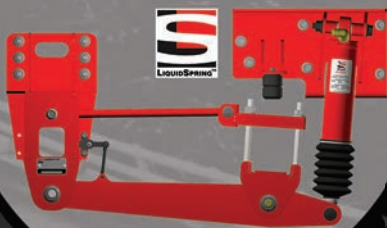


Ⓢ Performance Tool's Storm LED Flashlight & Knife Combo is a great choice for outdoor adventure and safety. The knife's 3-inch blade includes an inline lock/release mechanism and thumb stud for easy operation. The flashlight runs on three AAA batteries (not included) and delivers 65 lumens of LED light output for up to 6.5 hours between battery changes. Submersible up to 1 meter for increased versatility. MSRP: \$9.99. Camping World, 888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com

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Guilt-free Campfire

Smoke from a campfire can be intrusive to neighbors, but an LP-gas-fired pit can lessen the unwanted side effects. The Voyager Portable Fire Pit from Suburban is lightweight (less than 20 pounds), features foldable and locking legs for easy storage and is said to produce up to 54,000 Btu of smoke-free flames. An 8-foot hose with attached LP-gas regulator is included, and the 15-inch-diameter burner is adjustable for flame flexibility. The unit comes standard with white natural pumice stones, but optional fire glass is available for an additional cost.

Suburban, a division of Airxcel | 423-775-2131, www.airxcel.com/suburban



Instant Access

Staying connected while on the road remains an important part of modern RVing. We depend on a reliable signal and Wi-Fi routing for many of our everyday activities, from watching TV to checking emails to keeping up with social media. Furrion has announced two products designed to work together to keep the stream strong and buffer-free. The Access (\$109.95) is a 360-degree rooftop-mounted device featuring dual 4G antennas for a strong signal. The LTE Wi-Fi Router (\$349.95) provides speeds up to 150Mbps and has a 4G booster for improved signal strength and a range of up to 400 feet. It is equipped with a 2-GB Ethernet connection to provide wired connections to multiple devices. Both products have been designed to work in tandem with Furrion flexible full-coverage 4G LTE data plans.

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Be Cool

Dometic's new generation RMD 10 series refrigerator is now available to consumers. Previously available only at the manufacturer level, the popular RMD 10 features a patented double-hinged door allowing the fridge to be opened from either side. The door handle extends along the entire height of the refrigerator and enables easy opening. A new TFT display ensures a clear view of refrigerator settings and is controlled with an ergonomic knob. Fitted with an improved cooling unit, the RMD 10 achieves the best cooling performance in its class; the freezer can achieve sub-zero temperatures while operating in near 90 degree heat, according to the company. The RMD 10's versatile interior space can be arranged with an accessory package of smart dividers and containers, allowing for better organization and improved visibility of refrigerator contents. MSRP: N/A as of press time.



Dometic Corp. | 800-366-3842, www.dometic.com

Magic Touch

The new Jensen JRV4100 Touchscreen Multimedia System is designed to perform double duty in a motorhome cockpit, with both audio and rear-camera capabilities. The receiver is a fully loaded in-dash stereo featuring a 6.2-inch TFT touch screen display for easy control. The unit is Bluetooth compatible, offers MP3 and WMA playback via USB, has a front auxiliary input and radio with 18 presets for favorite stations. Audio on the 4100 is rated for four channels at 40 watts each. But the unit is also a full-color observation monitor, featuring a rear-camera input and auto-trigger wire that make this multimedia system compatible with virtually any wired Voyager camera. The triggering technology automatically shows the camera image on the screen when the motorhome is put in reverse, allowing the driver to see what's behind the RV without having to adjust any settings.



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The water around Key West is warm and clear, which is why snorkeling and diving are popular activities.

Finding Hemingway

On the trail of the famous author's favorite hangouts in Florida's Key West for a delicious and rewarding journey through a tropical paradise

By Ann Eichenmuller

There are dozens of reasons to visit Key West, Florida, among them palm trees, turquoise water and unparalleled sunsets. But not for me. I came in search of Hemingway.

The free-spirited author of such classics as "A Farewell to Arms" is central to the history and mystique of this quirky island. Key West is a town that embraces its past, making it possible to walk the same sidewalks, drink at the same bars and even lounge by the same pool as the famous writer. There was just one obstacle to finding Hemingway — RV parking.

We had left our dinghy vehicle behind on this trip, and there is no public parking for oversized vehicles in Old Town Key West. We saw a few Class B's squeezed into spots, but nothing to fit a 30-foot motorhome. Another camper saved the day by suggesting Fort Zachary Taylor State Park. Located an easy bike ride from the historic district, our entrance fee

of \$6.50 (per vehicle) gave us a spot for the day in a waterfront lot complete with a beach, shady picnic area and bathrooms. And pedaling turned out to be the perfect way to explore Key West's narrow streets.

Our first stop was the Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum at 907 Whitehead Street, in the heart of Old Town Key West. A Spanish Colonial built in 1851, it was renovated by Hemingway and his second wife, Pauline, in 1931. Visitors can take a guided tour of the main house,



Getting There ➔

Key West is about a three-hour drive from Miami; four hours from Fort Lauderdale. Take U.S. Highway 1 south into the Florida Keys. Just north of Key Largo, Highway 1 becomes the Overseas Highway, a designated All American Road. Mile marker signs designate each mile and line the side of the road. Numbers run from 127, south of Florida City, down to 0 in Key West.

GETAWAY

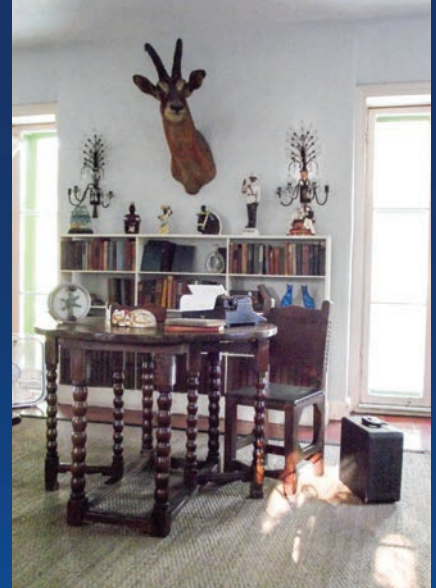
KEY WEST, FLORIDA

Hemingway's writing studio and the grounds, which include exotic trees and flowers as well as the famed 60-foot-long swimming pool. Dug into solid coral and complete with brilliant underwater lights, poet Elizabeth Bishop wrote that it "must be visible to Mars."

As beautiful as the gardens were, the highlight for me was seeing the desk where Hemingway wrote. Imagine him sitting there, musing over a word or phrase! Though I must admit, I was equally fascinated by the cats — literally four-dozen of them, most polydactyl and believed to be descendants of Hemingway's

own six-toed Snow White. While our guide cautioned us against sitting on beds or chairs, the felines stretched out everywhere, having made the museum their home.

From here we biked past Blue Heaven, a restaurant on Thomas Street that served as a bar and boxing arena in the 1930s, where Hemingway was known to referee matches. Next came Duval Street and another famous watering hole, Sloppy Joe's. Reportedly "Papa's" favorite drinking spot, it is actually two locations — the bar opened by Hemingway's friend "Sloppy Joe" Russell sat at 428 Greene Street until 1937, when



The tour includes a look at Hemingway's writing studio, overlooking the pool and gardens.

Hemingway's Spanish Colonial home was built in 1851 and renovated by the author and his second wife in 1931. Visitors can tour the main home and check out the famous swimming pool and lovely garden area.



“ As beautiful as the gardens were, the highlight for me was seeing the desk where Hemingway wrote. Imagine him sitting there, musing over a word or phrase! ”



Hemingway and his fishing buddies were stranded at Fort Jefferson for 17 days on Garden Key, one of seven islands in Dry Tortugas National Park.



From far left: Captain Tony's, the original home of Sloppy Joe's, is a funky bar with a haunted history. Street musicians share their talents in the area surrounding Mallory Square.

Photos: Eric Eichemuller

it moved to Duval. The original site is now Captain Tony's Saloon, an eclectic little bar with a tree growing through it that, according to legend, was a "hanging tree" where 17 people were executed. The building also once served as a morgue, making it a prime draw for ghost hunters.

The latter Sloppy Joe's is a required tourist stop, known for its sizable portions, ambiance and live music. It also provides a front row seat to the eclectic parade of visitors sightseeing up and down Duval Street. There we did some "people watching" while dining on an appetizer of conch fritters. We followed this up with lunch at a tiny alley café, where we had a taste of Havana — a Cuban sandwich (with the pulled pork that is

a Key West staple) followed by a piece of famous Key Lime pie.

Our search for Hemingway continued in Mallory Square with a walk through the Key West Memorial Sculpture Garden. There I posed beside my idol, the famous writer's bronze bust in the company of sculptures of other famous locals. From there we made our way to the Custom House Museum, stopping to

listen to the Caribbean beat of one of the many street musicians that play in the open spaces around Mallory Square.

At the Key West Art and Historical Society Custom House Museum, which was getting a facelift when we visited, you can get a history lesson on the Florida Keys through more than 25,000 objects, from postcards, photographs and paintings, to artifacts,

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GETAWAY
KEY WEST, FLORIDA



Entrants take part in the Bull Run, part of the annual Hemingway Look-Alike Contest.

Photo: Andy Newman courtesy Florida Keys Department of Tourism

textiles and ordnance, all part of the Museum's permanent collection. There is a permanent Hemingway exhibit as well as changing exhibitions, like the one we saw on sculptor Stanley Papiro, known as the Junkyard Rebel.

We couldn't help but notice that many of the volunteers and workers we encountered in Old Town bore a striking resemblance to Hemingway himself. I mentioned this to a gentleman who bore the nametag George, and he laughed.

"If you think there are a lot of us now, come back in July," he said.

It turns out that there is a Hemingway Look-Alike contest then, part of the annual Hemingway Days Festival that coincides with July 21st, the date of the author's birth. While white-haired, bearded men come from across the country to participate, many of the contestants are local residents who aspire to be Papa's double year-round.

We hoped to end our visit by booking a ferry trip to Dry Tortugas National Park, a desert island home to Fort Jefferson. Hemingway and his fishing buddies were stranded there for 17 days during a tropical storm, and it seemed a great place to get in touch with the real Hemingway. But wind and waves did not cooperate, and that adventure had to be left for another time. Perhaps next July — I can't wait to see a street full of Hemingways. **M**

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The campfire is a great way to end a day of RVing, reliving the events of the day with s'mores, music and even story time. But, as the chatter continues, chances are the subject will eventually turn to favorites, as in "What's your favorite motorhome?" or "Where's your favorite place to visit?" Now, we all have our favorites, and debating them while the flames lick at the toes of our boots beneath the stars is one of the things that makes motorhome life so fine. That's why

we ask our readers every year for their favorites of all types of motorhome-related subjects, from vehicles to accessories to electronics to dining facilities. And while your own opinions may vary, we can offer you at least a starting point for the next fireside discussion. So, grab a drink, stoke the fire, pull up a camp chair and relax. We've tallied more than 6,300 entries and, without further ado, present the winners for *MotorHome's* 2018 Readers' Choice Awards.

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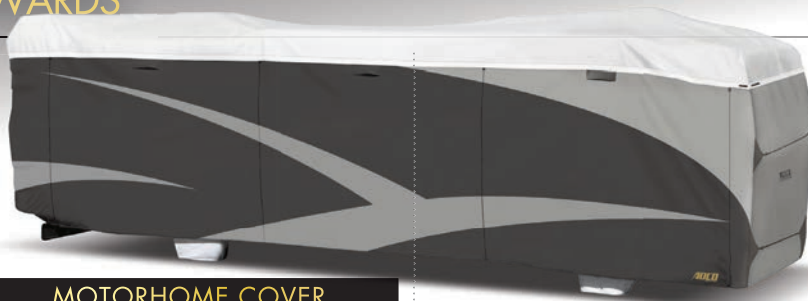
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● PECHANGA RESORT & CASINO

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CHASSIS CONNECTION

OFTEN TAKEN FOR GRANTED, MOTORHOME UNDERPINNINGS ARE KEY TO RIDE QUALITY, WEIGHT HANDLING, PERFORMANCE AND FUEL ECONOMY

When most of us look at a motorhome, our tour starts and ends with the interior. After all, that's where we'll be spending the bulk of our time with friends and family, so we want it to be well equipped, comfortable and suitable for the lifestyle we plan to lead. It's easy to be swept away by leather furniture, solid-surface countertops and stainless-steel appliances, but what about the driving experience? Most consumers only take a short test drive before purchasing, and worse yet, some don't even take their desired motorhome off the lot before signing on the dotted line. Once you take possession, it would be a shame to realize later on that you could have had something better, wouldn't it?

There are hundreds of motorhomes to choose from, ranging from compact Class B's to 45-plus-foot diesel pushers, all based on what seems like a handful of available chassis by comparison. But it's important to understand that, while they may be built by the same manufacturer, they may not all be the same. For example, one motorhome manufacturer may order 100 chassis from Ford equipped a certain way, while another may order it outfitted another way — so you may have two competitive motorhomes, one with a better-equipped chassis than the other. Some motorhome manufacturers might also add their own touches to a particular chassis to make it ride/handle better, and more insulation to ensure a quieter ride. As you climb higher up the price ladder, the differences can become more pronounced, as chassis

manufacturers offer their customers more latitude to add special or even exclusive features. Here, it becomes even more important to conduct your own due diligence and shop around.

To give you some idea of what's available, we've compiled this handy chassis guide with the most pertinent specifications, and a short overview of each, based on our own experiences. Reading this may not be as inspiring as luxury décor or full-body paint schemes, but it could prevent buyer's remorse and lead to a long, happy relationship with a new motorhome.

FORD E-350/E-450

Engine(s): 6.2-liter V-8, 331 hp/356 lb-ft;

6.8-liter V-10, 305 hp/420 lb-ft

Transmission: Six-speed TorqShift automatic transmission with tow/haul mode and SelectShift

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension front/rear: Twin I-Beam independent front suspension (IFS) with coil springs and gas shock absorbers/

multi-leaf springs with gas shock absorbers

Brakes: Four-wheel disc with ABS

Wheelbases: 138", 158", 176" (E-350); 158", 176" (E-450)

Fuel capacity: 40 gal (Std. on E-350); 55 gal (Opt. w/158" DRW E-350 only); 55 gal (Std. on E-450); 40 gal (Opt. on E-450)

GVWR: 10,050 lbs SRW w/138" or 158" WB (E-350); 11,500 lbs DRW w/138" WB



(E-350); 12,500 lbs DRW w/158" or 176" WB (E-350); 14,000 lbs 6.2-liter, 14,200 lbs/14,500 lbs 6.8-liter (E-450)

GCWR: 18,500 lbs-22,000 lbs

Tow rating: See dealer/RV manufacturer info

Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles

➔ **Our take:** Despite Ford's 2014 announcement that it would cease production on the aging E-Series passenger/cargo van to make way for the all-new Transit, the E-350/450 cutaway chassis soldiers on. A popular and cost-effective choice for the RV and commercial vehicle industries, the E-Series remains a decent Class C motorhome chassis, despite its age. With the V-10 engine moved farther forward than in the F-53 Class A chassis, engine sound volume tends to be less pronounced, and the overall chassis dynamics are good, especially in moderately sized motorhomes. Depending, of course, on the motorhome manufacturer, overall length, weight balance and the amount of rear overhang, some E-Series-based motorhomes exhibit more confident handling than others. Make sure you drive a few different models with the same underpinnings before making a choice.

What we'd like to see:

Some advanced tech from the Super Duty migrating into the E-Series chassis: a dynamic driver information display, better steering wheel, Sync 3, satellite radio, etc. We know it's a commercial platform, but motorhome owners should have more luxury options.

FORD F-53

Engine: 6.8-liter V-10, 320 hp/460 lb-ft

Transmission: Six-speed TorqShift automatic transmission with tow/haul mode and SelectShift

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension front/rear: Solid axle with leaf springs and gas shock absorbers/solid axle with leaf springs and gas shock absorbers

Brakes: Four-wheel disc brakes with ABS

Wheelbases: 158"/178"/190" (16,000-lb GVWR model); 208"/228" (20,500-lb GVWR model); 208"/228"/242" (22,000-lb GVWR model); 228"/242"/252" (24,000-lb/26,000-lb GVWR models)

Fuel capacity: 80 gal

GVWR: 16,000-26,000 lbs

GCWR: 23,000-30,000 lbs

Tow rating: 4,000-7,000 lbs

Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles basic

➔ **Our take:** One of the longest-standing motorhome chassis on the market, and the only gas Class A chassis currently available. In many applications, it can be seen as rough riding for those accustomed to more sophisticated suspension design and the V-10 engine can be underpowered depending on body size, requiring frequent full-throttle, high rpm applications, at which point the engine sound levels can become loud enough to inhibit conversation on long grades. Trying several different motorhomes on the same

FORD TRANSIT

Engine(s): 3.7-liter V-6, 275 hp/260 lb-ft; 3.5-liter EcoBoost V-6, 310 hp/400 lb-ft; 3.2-liter inline five-cylinder Power Stroke turbodiesel, 185 hp/350 lb-ft

Transmission: Six-speed SelectShift automatic

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension front/rear: Independent MacPherson strut/leaf springs

Brakes: Four-wheel disc with ABS

Wheelbases: 148" (van) 138"/156"/178" (cutaway chassis)

Fuel capacity: 25 gal

GVWR: 9,400 lbs (SRW)/10,360 lbs (DRW) (van); 9,500 lbs (SRW) 10,360 lbs (DRW) (cutaway chassis)

GCWR: Max 11,200 lbs (van); Max 13,500 lbs (cutaway chassis)

Tow rating: 4,700 lbs (van) 7,500 lbs (cutaway chassis)

Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles basic

➔ **Our take:** We can't say enough good things about the Transit chassis, van or



chassis can pay off, as some manufacturers mitigate some of the negatives with suspension/handling components and extra insulation around the doghouse area. There's a plethora of aftermarket upgrades for the F-53, however, so if you love a particular motorhome built on the F-53 but the handling or power is less than ideal, you'll have options for improving both areas.

What we'd like to see: Ford has a very capable 6.7-liter Power Stroke diesel engine that it uses in its Super Duty trucks that is far more powerful, quiet and would likely be more fuel efficient in a motorhome application than the V-10. Combined with an updated, intelligent transmission and useful features like an integrated exhaust brake, this powertrain would keep the F-53 viable for years to come. It would increase the cost (by at least \$10,000 if the Power Stroke option in the Super Duty trucks is any indication) but we'd bet that many motorhome owners would be willing to ante up considering the benefits.

cutaway. It's available in a multitude of configurations, can be had with excellent gas/diesel engine options, and chassis dynamics are superlative. If you're on the fence whether to choose a comparable Transit or Sprinter-based motorhome, drive both and we think the choice will be easy.

What we'd like to see: Nothing, really. Ford did its homework on this one.



FREIGHTLINER CUSTOM CHASSIS-XC/SL SERIES

Engine(s) (XC): Cummins ISB 6.7-liter turbodiesel 300 hp/660 lb-ft; 340 hp/700 lb-ft; 360 hp/800 lb-ft; Cummins ISL 8.3-liter turbodiesel, 380 hp/1,050 lb-ft; Cummins ISL 8.9-liter turbodiesel, 380 hp/1,150 lb-ft; 400 hp/1,250 lb-ft

Engine(s) (SL): Cummins ISX12 turbodiesel, 500 hp/1,645 lb-ft; Cummins ISX15 turbodiesel, 600 hp/1,950 lb-ft; Detroit DD13 turbodiesel, 500 hp/1,650 lb-ft

Transmissions (XC): Allison 2500MH, 3000MH six-speed

Transmission (SL): Allison 4000MH

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension options front/rear (XC): Detroit Wide-Track I-Beam front axle; Neway AS120 two-spring; ZF independent front suspension/Single-axle Neway ADL transverse beam with air bags; V-Ride Rear Suspension System

Brakes: Air

Wheelbases: 208"-294" (XC)

Fuel capacity: Custom

GVWR: Up to 47,000 lbs

GCWR: Based on finished vehicle

Tow rating: Based on finished vehicle

Warranty: 3 years/50,000 miles

⊕ **Our take:** You can't argue with success. Freightliner, part of the Daimler family, uses its commercial roots and engineering expertise to continually improve its Class A diesel chassis offerings. Combined with a variety of Cummins diesel engine power levels, frame configurations and weight ratings, not to mention a nationwide dealer/

FREIGHTLINER XCR



support network, and it's no small wonder that more than 80 percent of all Class A diesel motorhomes ride on the XC chassis, according to Freightliner. The fact that Freightliner builds the XC in four different frame rail configurations (XCS, XCL, XCR and XCM) to provide motorhome manufacturers with a multitude of design options can't hurt, either. While there are no obvious shortcomings, keep in mind that larger coaches on this platform may feel underpowered, as the maximum horsepower rating is 400.

The SL chassis is designed for coaches at the higher end of the luxury spectrum, and therefore, its custom frame allows manufacturers to choose from nearly any floorplan or length, while a choice of raised or modular frame rails provides additional design options like a flat floor throughout, pass-through basement storage and other benefits. Not surprisingly, the SL also brings with it higher horsepower ratings — a 500-hp Detroit Diesel, or a Cummins in 500-hp or 600-hp designations.

What we'd like to see: From our experience, these chassis are well-sorted and trouble-free.



FREIGHTLINER CUSTOM CHASSIS S2RV

Engine(s): Cummins B6.7-liter turbodiesel, 300 hp/660 lb-ft; 340 hp/700 lb-ft; 360 hp/800 lb-ft

Transmission(s): Allison 2500MH or 3000MH six-speed automatic

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension front/rear: Detroit axles with custom-taper leaf spring suspension/Detroit rear axle with Airliner air ride suspension

Brakes: Air

Wheelbase(s): 179"-279"

Fuel capacity: 60 gal or 100 gal

GVWR: 26,000-33,000 lbs

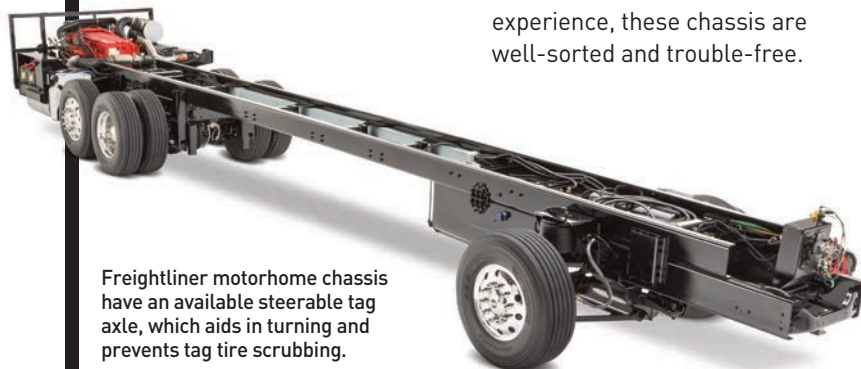
GCWR: Based on finished vehicle (30,000-lbs-plus)

Tow Rating: Based on finished vehicle

Warranty: 3 years/50,000 miles

⊕ **Our take:** If we're being honest, the main reason some of us love diesels can be traced back to childhood, gawking at hulking 18-wheelers at rest areas and truck stops, wondering what it must be like to drive one. If you never had your chance, the Freightliner S2RV chassis serves two purposes: It's a strong foundation for a home on wheels, and it's about as close to a commercial truck as you're going to get, without actually driving one. We love climbing into the cab, turning the key and experiencing the visceral sensation of that diesel coming to life under the sloping hood. Commercial roots mean this chassis is designed for the long haul.

What we'd like to see: More power. The 6.7-liter HO Cummins available in Ram HD trucks makes more power and torque than the top offering in the S2RV. Offering a 400-hp with 1,000 lb-ft of torque would have a nice ring to it.



Freightliner motorhome chassis have an available steerable tag axle, which aids in turning and prevents tag tire scrubbing.

“

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CHASSIS CONNECTION

GM/CHEVROLET

Engine: 6.0-liter Vortec V-8, 341 hp/373 lb-ft
Transmission: Six-speed automatic
Drive system: Rear wheel drive
Suspension front/rear: Independent/leaf spring
Brakes: 4-wheel disc with ABS
Wheelbase(s): 159", 177"
Fuel capacity: 33 gal
GVWR: 14,200 lbs
GCWR: 20,000 lbs
Tow Rating: Based on finished vehicle
Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles

⊕ **Our take:** Built by Navistar for GM and branded as a Chevrolet product, the Express 4500 cutaway chassis packs GM's smooth, strong-running 6.0-liter V-8 engine and



available options like OnStar 4G LTE with built-in hot spot and available Chevrolet MyLink with Navigation. A recent test of a motorhome on this chassis revealed some fitment issues that we felt could be improved upon. If you're a Chevy fan, this is your likely choice, but keep an open mind and drive the Ford E-Series as well.

What we'd like to see: Better build quality. Some of the tech from their other lines migrating into the motorhome chassis.



MERCEDES-BENZ (SPRINTER)

Engine: 3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel, 188 hp/325 lb-ft
Transmission: Five-speed automatic
Drive system: Rear wheel drive (cutaway chassis); Rear wheel drive/four wheel drive (van)
Suspension front/rear: Independent, strut/beam axle with leaf springs
Brakes: 4-wheel disc brakes with ABS
Wheelbase(s): 144", 170"
Fuel capacity: 26.4 gal (cutaway chassis) 24.5 gal (van)
GVWR: Max 11,030 lbs (cutaway chassis) 9,330 lbs (van)
GCWR: Max 15,250 lbs (cutaway chassis) 13,550 lbs (van)
Tow Rating: 7,500 lbs (cutaway chassis) 5,000 lbs (van)
Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles

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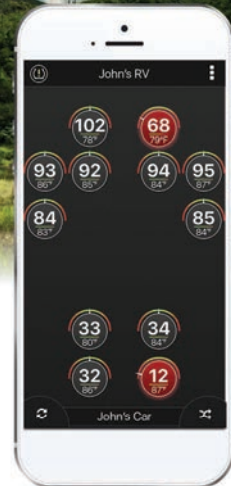


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➔ **Our take:** It's got the cache of the three-pointed star, which many manufacturers and consumers alike tend to covet — and it is the only product of its type to be offered with 4WD. But from this author's experiences, this chassis could use some improvement. The diesel engine options offer adequate power, but the steering feels numb on center, the brakes are a bit spongy and, depending on the unit and how it was loaded, the handling doesn't inspire confidence. Not everyone on staff feels the same way, which underscores the fact that chassis dynamics can be subjective. For years, the Sprinter had a firm grip on the Class B chassis crown, but now that the Ford Transit is here, we'd recommend you try both and decide what works best for you.

What we'd like to see: A better Sprinter. The American-built 2019 model is on its way (at press time), with an available gasoline engine, two diesel engine choices, a seven-speed automatic transmission and a revised interior with a new infotainment system. Time (and testing) will tell how well Mercedes is responding to the competition.



RAM PROMASTER

Engine: 3.6-liter V-6, 280 hp/260 lb-ft

Transmission: Six-speed automatic

Drive system: Front wheel drive

Suspension front/rear: Independent, strut/beam axle leaf springs

Brakes: 4-wheel disc brakes with ABS

Wheelbases: 136", 159" (cutaway chassis); 118", 136", 159" (van)

Fuel capacity: 24 gal

GVWR: Max 9,350 lbs (van and cutaway chassis)

GCWR: 11,500 lbs (gas)/ N/A (diesel)

Max towing: 5,100 lbs

Warranty: 3 years/36,000 miles

➔ **Our take:** There's no gentle way to say this ... in my opinion the RAM ProMaster is the ugly duckling of the van chassis ranks, but what it lacks in good looks it could well make up for in practicality for the right buyer. First and foremost, the ProMaster is the only van chassis

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CHASSIS CONNECTION

in its class with front wheel drive, which could be beneficial to four-season enthusiasts who may encounter icy/snowy roads. Torque steer — or the influence of engine torque on the steering wheel — can be an issue under hard throttle, but otherwise the chassis is well-sorted. In addition, Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) claims that having the drivetrain beneath the cab keeps the cargo load floor and step-in height very low. Available in 18 configurations, the 2019 ProMaster also offers several claimed best-in-class features, including the most available horsepower and the highest payload ratings.

What we'd like to see: We're not the superficial type, but this baby could use a nose job. Just saying.

SPARTAN

Engine(s): Cummins X15 turbodiesel, 605 hp/1,950 lb-ft (K3 and K4 605 chassis); Cummins ISX12 turbodiesel, 500 hp/1,645 lb-ft (K3 500 chassis); Cummins L9 turbodiesel, 450 hp/1,250 lb-ft (K2 450 chassis); Cummins B6.7 turbodiesel, 360 hp/800 lb-ft (K1 360 chassis).

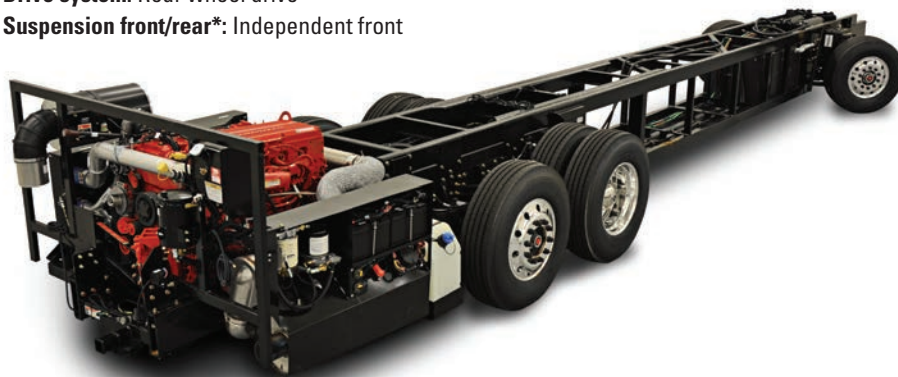
Transmission(s): Allison 4000MH six-speed (K3 and K4 605 chassis, K3 500 chassis); Allison 3000MH (K2 450 chassis, K1 360 chassis)

Drive system: Rear wheel drive

Suspension front/rear*: Independent front

air suspension/non-torque reactive parallelogram air suspension and integrated passive steering tag axle (K3 and K4 605 chassis, K3 500 chassis, K2 450 tag axle chassis); Independent front air suspension/non-torque reactive parallelogram air suspension (K2 450 chassis); Hendrickson independent front suspension/Hendrickson HTB210 parallelogram (K1 360 chassis)

Brakes: Air disc with ABS, all axles (K3 and



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1. National Highway Transportation Safety Administration, 2015. 2. Daylight only. 3. Optional, not available for all vehicles.
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K4 605 chassis, K3 500 chassis); air disc front, air drum drive and tag axles with ABS (K2 450 tag axle chassis), front/rear air disc with ABS (K2 450 chassis); air disc front/air drum rear with ABS (K1 360 chassis)

Wheelbases*: 316" (K3 and K4 605 chassis); 270"/318" (K3 500 chassis); 276"/312" (K2 450 tag axle chassis) 261" (K2 450 chassis); 236" (K1 360 chassis)

Fuel capacity: 200 gal (K4 605 chassis); 150 gal-200 gal (K3 605 chassis); 150 gal (K3 500 chassis) 100 gal-150 gal (K2 450 chassis); 100 gal (K1 360 chassis)

GVWR: 32,000-54,000 lbs

GCWR: 42,000-74,000 lbs

Tow rating: 10,000-20,000 lbs

Warranty: 3 years/50,000 miles

*Specifications may vary depending on coach manufacturer

➔ **Our take:** With a manufacturing portfolio that includes a wide range of emergency response, defense,

fleet and specialty chassis manufacturing, Spartan Chassis' reputation is pretty much beyond reproach. Spartan offers a variety of chassis to the RV industry as well, catering to some high-end manufacturers like Foretravel, Entegra, Newmar, Tiffin and others. In all, Spartan offers six chassis for RV manufacturers, ranging from the K1 360 with a single rear axle to the K4 605 with a Passive Steer Tag Axle. Spartan chassis provide confident handling, a velvety ride and powerful brakes. Suffice it to say, we don't have room to list the features and benefits of every chassis in Spartan's line, but the company website offers detailed information on each of its chassis and which manufacturers use them as the basis for their products.

What we'd like to see: With impressive build quality, a great ride and an array of smart features, we honestly can't think of anything. **M**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Ford
www.ford.com/commercial-trucks/
stripped-chassis

Freightliner Custom Chassis
www.freightlinerchassis.com

GM/Chevrolet
www.gmfleet.com/chevrolet/silverado-
chassis-cab-lineup.html

Mercedes-Benz Sprinter
www.mbvans.com/sprinter/commercial-
vans/cab-chassis

RAM ProMaster
www.ramtrucks.com/2019/ram-
promaster.html

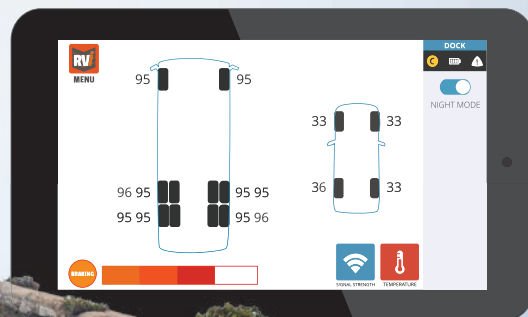
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Symphony on Wheels

Tiffin's design of its luxurious 2019 Allegro Bus 45 OPP makes beautiful music **By Chris Dougherty**

RVenthusiasts in the market for a high-dollar motorhome have certain expectations that must be met. A high-end coach should have exceptional design and quality, graceful lines, be a pleasure to drive and have the latest in amenities — not to mention high-tech features. The 2019 Tiffin Allegro Bus 45 OPP is a quad-slide coach that fits the bill exceptionally well; it's a veritable "Architectural Digest" on wheels.

The Inside Scoop

Stepping into the Allegro Bus is tantalizing. All the surfaces are befitting of the nearly \$500,000 as-tested MSRP. The front entry is adorned with ceramic wood-plank tile with marble tread nosing and chrome accents; a venerable grand staircase into a mobile manse. Entry to the locked coach is aided by an illuminated keyless touchpad that also operates other items such as basement door locks and awnings.

The driver's compartment is luxurious and well laid out. The entire coach is operated via a Spyder Controls multiplexing computer (\$2,240), which is easy to operate. The screens and touchpads are clear and simple to

navigate. Included is a complete digital dashboard with integrated JBL stereo (\$1,540), Garmin RV navigation and camera system. The six-way power driver's seat is clad in ultraleather and with the multi-position smart wheel steering wheel, promotes driver comfort. The digital dashboard display image appears on an LED screen, and the virtual gauges move vertically and side-to-side electronically to ensure a clear view to the driver. The panoramic windshield provides a glorious view of the road and passing scenery. The mirrors are easily seen, and cameras increase blind-spot visibility.

One note about the Spyder Controls system: it's great but lacks an available

app for smart devices. Coach Proxy is an aftermarket add-on that will allow connectivity from any computer, phone or tablet, according to the company.

A touch panel just inside the entry door incorporates many of the coach's available functions, including interior and exterior lighting, awning control, door locks, panel lights and battery control. This is super convenient for checking the status of the vehicle while in storage, adjusting the interior temperature and gaining access to all the basement compartments. The passenger has his or her own panel on the armrest with independent lighting, power shade, step cover and fan controls.

One feature that took us some time to discover was the front slideout controls. While the rear slides are controlled via the Spyder system, the front two are controlled by switches in the back edge of the driver and passenger seats. While this might seem a bit unusual, it's actually brilliant.

ABOVE: All LED exterior lighting, full-body paint and graceful lines make the Allegro Bus 45 OPP a real eye-catcher.

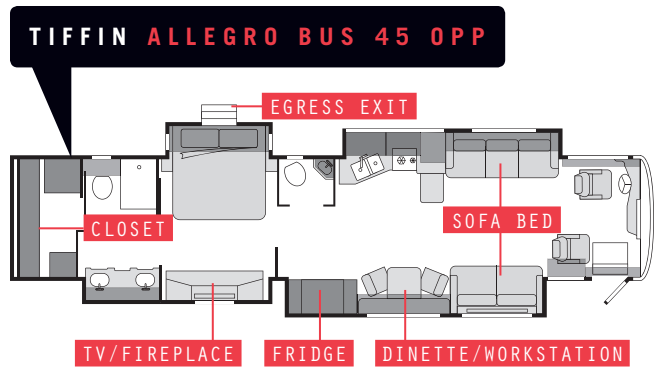
Many a front captain's chair and slideout have been damaged because the owner forgot to move the seats forward before operating the slideouts. This placement ensures that, as Spock would say, the operator is one with the seat and slide.

The captain's chairs, of course, can be rotated toward the living room, which can be customized at the factory, in many ways, to suit the client's taste. The test unit was equipped with opposing sofa beds, and an elevating TV behind the one on the passenger side. It also has a dinette with computer station, all of which are standard. However, recliners, theater seating, fireplaces and U-shaped dinettes are all options that can be selected to rearrange the living space. The floor is a seasoned wood plank tile with radiant heating (\$4,900) for a nice feel on chilly days and nights. The bright floor contrasts nicely with the solid cherry cabinetry (\$2,240) throughout the coach. All the furniture options in the living space are clad in ultraleather, including two heavy dining chairs that look and feel like those in high-end homes. Six species of wood and four interior appointments are available.

The dinette with its computer station is a fine example of space designed for multitasking. The allocated space makes it convenient to spread out and work, and the storage space below and above ensures everything has a place to live when not in use. Mate this to the Winegard Connect 2.0 mobile Wi-Fi extender with 4G LTE service, and your office, and the whole coach for that matter, are connected to the world.

The galley configuration has slightly less "fixed" counter-space than other motorhome galleys, but the large stainless-steel farmer's sink, optional Wolf induction cooktop (\$2,100) and a pull-out island make the trade-off viable. The cooktop and sink have solid-surface covers, so additional counter-space can be attained when they are not needed. The pull-out island adds considerably to the counterspace. A full tile mosaic backsplash is an attractive and utilitarian addition and creates a large rectangular tile surround for the recessed window opening. This window, as with all the others, is served by a power shade, controlled by the Spyder system.

Above the counter is a Sharp Carousel convection microwave with range vent, and an interesting overhead



cabinet with mini slide-out pantry, which reduces those hidden-in-the-way-back items we tend to forget about. Also, it serves as a kitchen shelf that's visible to the cook, but otherwise looks like fine cabinetry to the living area occupants when deployed. Again, nicely done.

Across from the galley is the stainless Maytag French door refrigerator/freezer with ice and water in the door, flanked by two automatic locking slide-out pantries. Floor-level accent lighting here and in the main galley is a nice touch.

Speaking of lighting, the entire motorhome is equipped with dimmable LED lighting, controlled via the Spyder system. The circuits are separated into logical zones, so the lighting can be custom set for any mood or need.

The 45 OPP is a bath-and-a-half floorplan; the forward half-bath shares the same deluxe décor as the galley, and is equipped with a Dometic Masterflush 8700 macerating toilet.

The master bedroom suite is configured masterfully, benefiting from additional capital expenditure on Tiffin's part.

Of course, bedrooms are primarily for sleeping, and the test coach featured an optional Power Smart king bed (\$1,680), which allows the mattress to be extended out from the slideout wall, making it easy to change sheets or raise the head for reading or watching TV — all controlled from a nearby touchpad. A major new feature is the optional rear emergency exit (\$1,680), which is a good investment for safety. Emergency exits have traditionally been problematic in RVs because in many cases, egress is difficult and

Right: A teak wall seat in the glass, tile and solid-surface shower with dual-residential shower heads adds the ultimate note of luxury. Middle: The forward half-bath is convenient for guests and helps maintain privacy. Far right: His and hers sinks with waterfall faucets make daily primping a breeze.





requires that the occupants dive out an opening to the ground. While this type of emergency exit meets code, it ultimately can lead to injuries. Tiffin has designed an airplane-style emergency exit located behind two of the headboard panels. In an emergency, while in bed or in the rear of the coach, these two panels are simply pulled off and set aside, the exit handle latch is then pulled and the door folds down to create a rudimentary staircase or ladder from which to exit. This is a true game changer, in our opinion, and we'd love to see this feature in every RV bedroom.

There is ample storage in the bedroom, both above and across from the bed. Here again, owners have a choice of layout. The test coach was fitted with a lift-up LED TV and fireplace for ambiance, along with drawers and shelves for storing essentials. A solid cherry multi-panel sliding door separates the bedroom suite from the rest of the coach, creating another living zone, and privacy when guests come calling.

The rear portion of the suite is the master bathroom and closet/dressing room. Some folks might find this area to be wasted space, but we would disagree. At 45 feet in length with four slides, interior space in the 45 OPP is not an issue, and this bathroom makes

daily routines, clothing care and storage much more enjoyable.

The lavatory shares a common theme with the rest of the motorhome in that the facilities are cast from the same solid-surface material, with the colonial carved edge. Deluxe wall-mounted waterfall faucets serve his and hers sinks, and are matched by independent vanity mirrors with medicine cabinets sitting atop a matching tile wall. Again, LED lighting in the soffit provides ample illumination, and there is adequate storage in the sink base.

The pièce de résistance in the rear bath is the huge walk-in shower, with solid glass surround and door, and mosaic tile design applied to the solid-surface surround. This is an amazing addition for the shower aficionado and is akin to the finest showers found in exclusive hotels and homes. Residential shower controls direct the water to a rainfall immersion head or a handheld shower massage head. The shower encourages taking very long hot showers, supported by the 100-gallon freshwater tank, 100-gallon gray-water tank and the Aqua-Hot instant hot water and heating system. With full hookups, you could theoretically soak in the rain shower all day.

The closet and dressing room is

WHAT'S HOT 

Driver's compartment layout, farmer's sink in galley, walk-in shower, emergency exit stair in bedroom

WHAT'S NOT 

Shower skylight cover, lack of standard app support for Spyder Controls multiplex system



another well-thought-out space, with a plethora of cabinets and cubbies. A portable seat, also in ultraleather, aids in dressing, and can also be used in the living room as a matching footstool.

Behind the Wheel

Another hallmark of an upscale motorcoach is how it handles on the road. The 45 OPP's road manners are impressive, courtesy of Tiffin's Powerglide chassis.

The 450-hp Cummins ISL powerplant puts out 1,250 lb-ft of torque, and mated with the Allison 3000MH six-speed automatic transmission with electronic touchpad controls, provides more than adequate power and acceleration for this size coach. With a gross vehicle weight rating of 51,000 pounds, this is a lot of bus to move around, so while it isn't a Ferrari, it will get the job done nicely. For those with a little heavier foot, the 45 OPP is available with an optional Cummins X15 that supplies 605 hp and 1,950 lb-ft of torque, mated to an Allison 4000MH six-speed gearbox. On the road, stability is good and the coach handles abrupt lane changes with aplomb. The turning radius of the 45 OPP is nothing short of amazing, and some tests in a parking lot proved that this 45-foot behemoth could make a turn onto a narrow two-lane without an issue. The tag axle on the Powerglide chassis raises automatically but can be overridden manually if needed.



Clockwise, from top left: With the captain's chairs rotated, the living room is a comfortable place for entertaining guests. When expanded, the galley has plenty of prep space. Innovative emergency exit is a great safety feature and should be on every RV. The master bedroom features a fireplace and elevated HDTV.

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TEST

TIFFIN ALLEGRO BUS 45 OPP

More important than accelerating a coach this heavy is stopping it. While the chassis features the customary engine brake and air service brakes, the test unit also employed the optional Mobileye collision avoidance system (\$1,540), which helps reduce the need for emergency stops.

The Outside Story

The exterior of the Allegro Bus is available in eight exterior color schemes, and while the schemes consist of the customary swirls and swooshes, the color combinations are attractive, and the paint is deep and mostly flawless. Dual electric lateral arm patio awnings — in addition to a matching entry-door awning — provide a generous amount of covered patio space.

A problem with many RV slideouts is that, in time, the seals on the slide box fail and leak, which leads to delamination and structural decay. Tiffin uses Seamless Slides, which is a completely watertight slideout system, according to the company. The slide boxes are made of one-piece formed fiberglass with special seals, and toppers are added to make the complete system. The Seamless System promises to be another Tiffin game-changer in slideout design and longevity.

Basement storage is plentiful and easy to access with the two optional power slide-out trays (\$3,150) and also features a Dometic chest refrigerator/freezer on its own tray, beneath the exterior entertainment center.

The Final Word

Over the years, Tiffin has become a company with a legendary reputation that stands tall against the competition. The 2019 Tiffin Allegro Bus 45 OPP is a coach designed for those who spend a lot of time on the road or live in it full time and expect exceptional style and quality. While no rig is perfect for everybody, this one should be on the list for a luxury motorcoach. If you think we're singing a high note for this Allegro, you'd be right. **M**

Tiffin Motorhomes Inc.

256-356-8661, www.tiffinmotorhomes.com

Specifications

Chassis

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Model | Tiffin Powerglide |
| Engine | Cummins ISL 8.9L I-6 |
| SAE Hp | 450 @ 2,100 rpm |
| Torque | 1,250 lb-ft @ 1,400-1,500 rpm |
| Transmission | Allison 3000MH 6-speed automatic |
| Axle Ratio | 4.63:1 |
| Tires | 315/80R 22.5 |
| Wheelbase | 323" |
| Brakes Front/Rear | Air ABS Disc |
| Suspension Front/Rear | Air |
| Fuel Capacity | 150 gal |
| DEF Capacity | 15 gal |
| Fuel Economy | 7.1 mpg |
| Warranty | 3 years/50,000 miles |

Coach

| | |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Exterior Length | 45' |
| Exterior Width | 8' 5" |
| Exterior Height | 13' 3" |
| Interior Width | 8' |
| Interior Height | 6' 11" |
| Construction | All laminated fiberglass, roof, walls, floors; Seamless System slideout boxes; steel and aluminum structure |
| Freshwater Capacity | 100 gal |
| Black-water Capacity | 55 gal |
| Gray-water Capacity | 100 gal |
| Water-heater Capacity | Instantaneous |
| LP-gas Capacity | N/A |
| Air Conditioner (3) | 15,000 Btu with heat pumps |
| Furnace | Aqua-Hot Hydronic, 65,600-Btu |
| Refrigerator | 21.7 cu-ft |
| Inverter/Charger | Magnum 2,800 watts/125 amps |
| Batteries (6) | 6-volt |
| AC Generator | Onan QD 10kW |
| MSRP | \$451,500 |
| MSRP As Tested | \$493,017 |
| Warranty | 1 year/12,000 miles; 10-year structural, 5-year delamination |

Wet Weight

(Water and water heater, fuel tank full; no supplies or passengers)

| | |
|-------------------|------------|
| Front Axle | 15,580 lbs |
| Rear and Tag Axle | 26,620 lbs |
| Total | 42,200 lbs |

Chassis Ratings

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| GAWR, F/R/Tag | 17,000 lbs/23,000lbs/11,000 lbs |
| GVWR/GCWR | 51,000 lbs/66,000 lbs |
| ROCCC | 8,800 lbs |
| GAWR | Gross Axle Weight Rating |
| GVWR | Gross Vehicle Weight Rating |
| GCWR | Gross Combination Weight Rating |
| ROCCC | Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (full water, no passengers) |

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By Bob Livingston

Water Filtration

Clearsource premium two-canister RV-specific system, tucked into a stout housing, removes much of the bad stuff while streamlining the process

Water is the lifeblood of any motorhome. Without this precious resource, it would be impossible to offer self-containment, and even though most owners take water for granted, and love the convenience, it can lead to acrimonious feelings. While water seems to be fairly unobtrusive, underlying factors can lead to bad taste, odor and even system failures, not to mention serious human illnesses.

Outside of water softeners to control total dissolved solids, many owners resort to filtering water that is fed via an RV park site hookup or when filling the onboard tank. Most common are 10-inch canisters that use replaceable filters. Shade-tree mechanics typically resort to Rube Goldberg-style "engineering" when it comes to building suitable supports for these canisters. It's not unusual to find milk crates and buckets modified to hold the canisters upright; they work, but Clearsource, a Southern California company that specializes in water filtration, has turned this process into an art form.

The company builds and markets premium water systems designed specifically for RVs. Single filter systems for RVs are helpful, but the use of two



Kit includes sediment and coconut shell activated carbon block filters. Plastic wrench, supplied with the system, is used to remove canisters and access filters.

cartridges offers much more protection. Handling two connected filters can be cumbersome, which encouraged Clearsource to house them in a stout chassis that's figuratively bulletproof, and to complement the system with high-end fittings and solid canisters.

Two oversize 10-inch canisters are mounted in a powder-coated, 15-inch tall by 14¼-inch wide by 7½-inch high metal chassis that exudes strength, which makes it somewhat bulky and seemingly heavy to manage. There's

no flex to the chassis and it can be positioned on the ground with total stability. After only a few uses, and transferring from the storage compartment to the ground, it became apparent that this heavy-duty system will undoubtedly last as long as the motorhome, and was actually easier to handle than expected.

The anatomy of the Clearsource system is impressive. Stainless-steel fittings mate the two canisters and offer corrosive-resistance connections



Clearsource external RV water filter system employs two oversize 10-inch canisters that are tucked into a stout, powder-coated metal chassis.

to the water hoses. Buttress threads and large O-rings offer a leak-free environment for the canisters, which can be tightened and removed with the provided plastic wrench. It's not necessary to over tighten the canisters, and the filters must be seated properly to prevent leaks.

Two high-quality filter cartridges are preinstalled in the system, which can be ordered directly from the company and shipped in rugged boxes. The leading filter is formed by a thermal bond process without using adhesives or binders. It's designed to remove sediment down to 5.0 microns. A four-layer structure does a good job of retaining particles, and after a short while it was evident (upon a visual inspection) that this media removes a large amount of unwanted contaminants, like silt and sediment. The filters are made of 100 percent polypropylene that meets FDA CFR Title 21 requirements for use with food and pharmaceuticals. The second stage filter employs acid-washed coconut-based activated carbon. High purity coconut shells and the 0.5 micron rating assure that pesticides, cryptosporidium and giardia cysts will be removed from the



1



2



3

[1] Filter must be seated properly in the bottom of the canister for proper operation and to prevent leaks. [2] Standard-size 10-inch filters will fit in the canister. Here, a new sediment filter is placed in the canister. Filter packs that include a sediment and carbon block cartridge are available from the company for \$29.95. Filters are rated at 2,000 gallons, which should serve casual motorhome travelers for a year. [3] Heavy O-rings provide a tight seal, but they can drop out easily when the canister is turned upside-down or on its side. The canisters will not seat properly, and leak profusely, if the O-rings are not in place. Replacement O-rings are available from the company.

this level of purification are available in the marketplace, and the water typically flows through an independent spigot, rather than supplying the entire house, which would not be practical.

ourselves, will likely replace filters every two or three months, although we found them to last quite a bit longer. Replacement filter packs sell for \$29.95.

Longer use of the filters may lead to a reduction in pressure, which is tested at the factory at 40 psi; flow rate is 6 gallons per minute. To test pressure consistency, we ran the filters for six months, which far exceeds recommendations, and experienced no significant drop in water pressure.

Storing the filters between trips is very simple. Non-use for up to two weeks requires no maintenance. We drained the water before storing the system in an outside compartment to prevent sloshing during travel. This was accomplished by turning the chassis on its side and allowing the water to flow out of the fittings. If the filters will be unused for a month or longer,

"The external system is on the pricey side, but the versatility is unsurpassed when it comes to water filtering and conditioning."

water, according to the company.

The filter combination makes it possible to drink water from the tap, with reasonably good taste and sans odor; ultimate purification will require a separate system designed for controlling contaminated water that can lead to serious illnesses. Products to achieve

Clearsource rates its filters to produce 2,000 gallons of water before needing replacement, so the filters can be used effectively for the entire water system. Under normal conditions, with typical use of a motorhome, that should provide coverage of up to a year before replacing the filters. Full-timers, like



4



5

[4] Buttress-thread canister housings are mounted to the chassis and connected with high-quality stainless-steel fittings. Canisters can be attached easily, without binding. [5] The company recently improved the system by adding stainless-steel rotating fittings for connecting the hoses.



[6] Before using the new system the first time, or after replacing the filters, water must be flushed through a faucet until it runs clear. [7] Hookup at an RV park with high concentrations of iron in the water leave telltale "rust" stains.

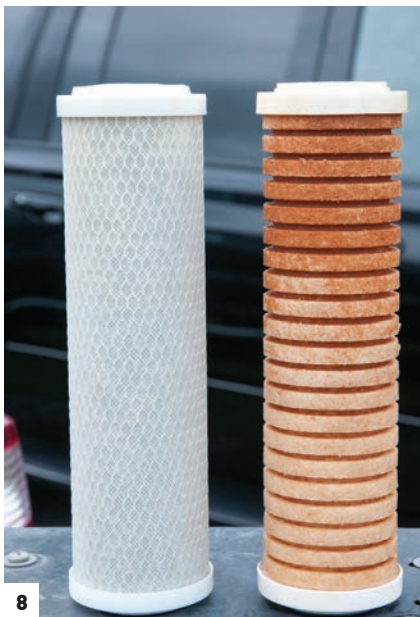


the canisters should be drained and the filters placed in dry storage. Once water is reintroduced, the filters will reactivate. Those who prefer to sanitize the canisters after long storage can use cleaning tablets sold for hydration bladders popular with hikers and bicyclists.

Owners concerned with possible theft can run a cable through the chassis and lock it to a logical place on the motorhome frame.

Although the hose fittings on the original test system were fixed and worked well, the company now provides improved rotating counterparts that make hookup even easier. It also improved the washers to prevent them from falling out when the hoses were removed. Quick-connect couplings speed up the hookup process and owners should use quality fittings to prevent unintentional disconnections.

The external system is on the pricey side (\$275), but the versatility is unsurpassed when it comes to water filtering and conditioning. For example, we spend time in RV parks located in the Midwest, where the water has a high concentration of iron. Consequently, "rust" staining makes a mess of the sinks, shower stall and toilet. Clear-



[8] After one week in service, the rust-inhibiting filter was stained badly, while the carbon block cartridge remained clean. There were no signs of rust staining on the sinks or toilet during the test period.

[9] Rust-colored staining on the hose inlet fitting was evident after only a few days. The fitting on the outlet side was clean, which is attributable to the rust-inhibiting filter used in lieu of the sediment filter while visiting the RV park.

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PRODUCT REVIEW CLEARSOURCE



10

[10] Onboard filter system (left) is quite a bit smaller and lighter than the external model. It's designed to be mounted in a utility compartment; it should not be installed in a storage compartment because of possible water leakage from burst hoses or worn gaskets. **[11]** Replacement filters are readily available from Clearsource. Shown from left to right are the rust-inhibiting cartridge, the standard two-filter pack originally provided with the system and the deionizing cartridge set.



11

source offers a rust-inhibiting filter that does a commendable job of reducing staining. We tested this filter over a period of one month and experienced virtually no staining. Previous visits to the area resulted in a toilet replacement and sustained scrubbing (think hard work) with products designed to remove "rust" staining. The rust-inhibiting media temporarily replaced the sediment filter while we were hooked up to the iron-heavy water. This filter sells for \$19.95.

As an external system, the Clearsource filters and chassis can be placed virtually anywhere outside the motorhome. It's always best to locate the filters out of the sun, which can be accomplished easily by scooting the system under the motorhome. It should not be used inside a compartment since a burst hose or bad gasket can lead to water damage.

Owners who have room in their utility compartment can consider the company's onboard system that's designed to be mounted on a wall. Using an equally stout chassis, albeit much smaller and lighter, kits are

available in two- or three-filter arrangements. The two-canister onboard system uses the same filters that are packaged with the external chassis; the three-canister product comes with an additional 0.2-micron filter that provides another layer of water cleaning. Those who have the room for three canisters can integrate a rust-inhibiting or other type of filter into the system, depending on conditions. A sulfur-reducing filter is available for \$19.95 and a deionizing product that reduces dissolved solids to almost zero sells for \$39.95. Deionizing filters have limited capacity, and are really designed to prevent water spotting when washing a vehicle. Two-stage onboard systems sell for \$275 and the three-filter configuration has a \$350 price tag.

Owners who appreciate high-quality products will enjoy using the Clearsource filter system. In most cases, bottled drinking water can be removed from the grocery list, and those who gloated over their homemade filter supports will have no problem making the switch. Sorry, Rube. **M**

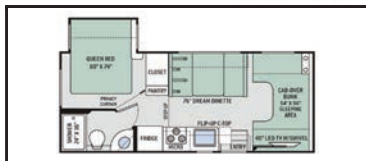
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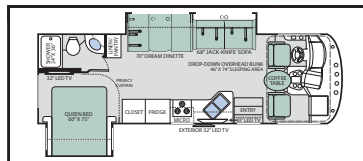
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QUITE THE TREK

AFTER AN EXTENSIVE RENOVATION PROCESS, A COUPLE IS ABLE TO ENJOY THE 1993 SAFARI TREK PATHMAKER OF THEIR DREAMS

Mark and Karen Souther are true “Trekkies” — not because they’re fans of Gene Roddenberry’s fictional starship, but because of their love for a 1993 Safari Trek Pathmaker. It is a relationship that has weathered a massive renovation project requiring patience, perseverance and even a few tears. If you’ve ever dreamed of breathing new life into a classic motorhome, theirs is an inspiring and cautionary tale.

The Southers have camped for as long as they can remember. As a couple, they’ve also owned their share of big RVs, most recently a 40-foot Monaco La Palma Class A motorhome. After an Alaska trip that saw them stuck in Anchorage for more than a month with a third

slideout repair, the couple decided it was time to downsize.

But after several trips to dealers and RV shows, they were disappointed.

“Everything was so large,” Mark said. “We could afford to buy any coach we wanted, but none of them were what we wanted.”

Not long after, they happened upon a 24-foot Trek at a local RV park. Built in the 1990s on an Isuzu truck chassis and powered by a turbocharged 4-cylinder diesel engine, the Safari had an unusually spacious living area thanks to its patented Electromajic bed, a queen-sized space saver that stored against the ceiling and lowered and raised with the push of a button.

“It had all the bells and whistles of a big coach, just in a smaller



While renovations can be a trial, Mark and Karen Souther wouldn’t trade their Safari Trek.

version,” Mark notes.

Having discovered the motorhome of their dreams, the challenge now was finding one for sale. Four-cylinder diesel Treks are a sought-after commodity, and they felt fortunate to pay just \$12,000 for their 1993 Pathmaker, despite its poor condition. The Southers knew it



The new dark-gray paint gives the 1993 Pathmaker a sleek, modern look.

The Classic Ride

was a good investment when they were offered \$19,000 for the same Trek just two weeks later.

"We told the man it wasn't for sale," Mark says with a smile.

Restoration began with finding a truck repair facility willing to do the mechanical work. No Isuzu shop would touch the motorhome because of potential liability for damage to the interior, despite assurances it was going to be gutted anyway. They finally found a repair facility willing to take the job, then faced exorbitant costs, extended delays and work that was either poorly done or never completed.

The Southers ended up going back for parts to Draco Isuzu, the first shop to turn their Safari away. After hearing their story, the owner agreed to help. His mechanics had to redo much of the costly work supposedly already done by the other shop, and Mark and Karen credit Draco with saving their Trek.

"Everything mechanically that needed attention was repaired or rebuilt. She's like new," Mark says.

With everything running smoothly, the Southers tackled their first major job, replacing the spongy roof — a task that included removing wet insulation, installing new wood bracing, adding metal sheathing, and caulking and sealing the seams with EternaBond tape. The obsolete shower skylight was replaced with a custom-made dome from a company in Maine. The couple also installed two new roof vents and repaired the air conditioner cover, finishing off the job with an application of Liquid Roof.

"Have you ever painted marshmallow fluff with a paint brush?" Karen jokes. "That's what it was like."

Confident the roof was now watertight, the Southers gutted much



The Trek's galley is unusually spacious for a small motorhome, complete with a 6-foot-long countertop. The rear bath has a new skylight and toilet, along with a refinished shower and sink.

of the interior, stripping wallpaper with a blow dryer, repairing water-damaged walls and ceilings, and sending the furniture out for re-upholstering. They installed a new headliner and used iron-on veneer to cover wall panel joints. A new Dometic toilet fit easily in the bathroom, but no replacements could be found for the odd-sized shower stall and sink, so they were refinished. New glued-down industrial-grade wood laminate flooring was installed, as well as quarter-round molding along the floor and ceiling.

In the kitchen, the Formica countertop, four-burner LP-gas stove, convection microwave and refrigerator were all in good condition. The couple added a tin-look backsplash, sanded the cabinets and applied fresh varnish, and replaced drawer pulls and hinges. Karen also made a Roman-style shade to fit the kitchen window.

The Southers removed the worn blinds and valances throughout the interior, replacing them with either tab or sliding curtains fashioned from Ikea panels. They even fashioned their own rods from dowels and doorknob pulls.

Clearing space around the windows "opened up the living space so much more," Karen notes.

Other changes included removing the old tube-type TV up front, reconfiguring the cabinets and installing a flat-screen TV on a folding ceiling-mount. They also replaced all the lights on board with LEDs — and they're fairly certain that's not everything.

Karen laughs, "There are so many things we've done to her, we can't keep track of them all!"

Having completed most of this major renovation themselves, they decided their "little girl" needed one refit they couldn't do — exterior paint. They chose a shop that "seemed" to be

SOUTHER COMFORT

A 24-foot Safari Trek Pathmaker diesel on the used market can run anywhere from \$11,000 - \$30,000, depending on condition. Expect to pay a little more for the 28-foot model. The Southers estimate they spent \$30,000 on renovations and new paint, far less than they would pay for a comparable new motorhome, and in return they have a pristine coach customized to fit their needs.

► The Southers' Trek with its original weathered and dated exterior.





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The Classic Ride



The open floorplan makes the Trek feel much bigger than its size. The Electromajic bed is stored in the ceiling of the living area above the sofa and chairs.

the perfect fit, experienced with trucks and trailers and equipped with a huge bay, only later realizing the staff had never actually painted a motorhome. The Southers dropped their Trek off on August 28, 2017, with the promise she'd be done in a month.

Time dragged on until finally, in November, the shop called to say the Trek was prepped to paint. The Southers went to check it out and found that none of the caulking had been removed — a necessary part of the prep. Remedying that took another month, and it was nearly Christmas when the Southers' Pathmaker was painted. Their first view of the finished product was disheartening: paint missing where tape had been pulled from around the windows and locks over sprayed, making keys useless. In addition, the front windshield couldn't be reinstalled because the shop lost the gaskets.

Karen and Mark were able to track down new gaskets, but then the shop broke the driver's-side window during installation, causing further delays. After the Southers brought their motorhome home, they found additional problems. A rear bumper had been painted but never repaired. Hardware had been lost and replaced with rusty, poorly fitting substitutes. On one compartment latch, long bolts were substituted for rivets; when these kept the compartment door from shutting, the workers drilled four holes to make room rather than find fasteners that would fit!

In April 2018, after numerous return trips to the paint shop, the Southers thought all issues had been resolved. However, on their first road trip they found that their two new Velvac side mirrors, the last available anywhere, had been broken and stuffed with paper to "fix" them. In addition, the shop had attempted to remove overspray from the backup camera's plexiglass lens with a solvent, ruining visibility.

It was, all in all, a heartbreaking experience, one they hope no other motorhome owner has to repeat. They stress that you should research a paint shop thoroughly, and ask for references, before you sign a contract.

"When you take your beauty to the beauty parlor, make sure you have done your homework," Karen said.

The painting experience aside, these Trekkies have no regrets about the time and effort spent on their Pathmaker. They recently drove her from the West Coast to their new home in Maine, accompanied by their five rescue cats. Mark was confident about traveling across the country in a decades-old RV; after all the work they have done, he says he and Karen "know that coach inside and out."

Their hard work has drawn accolades from RV enthusiasts.

"Every place we stop, people want to know about our Safari. They come inside and say 'Wow,'" Karen says proudly. "I guess we did it right."

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Quilt Storage

Like most RVers, we are short on space for storing bulky items, especially extra blankets for when the weather turns cold. We solved the dilemma of how to store an extra quilt by putting it into a king-size pillowcase. It keeps the quilt clean, neatly folded and out of the way, but still easily accessible. It also serves as an extra pillow.

Coleen Sykora | Soldotna, Alaska



Safety in Numbers

As a pilot and former flight instructor, I constantly emphasize the habitual use of a checklist. It goes far to eliminate missing an important step. I suggest using a checklist, written or otherwise, to cover the important steps for connecting a dinghy. It is quite possible to miss one or more of these steps if one feels hurried or if there is a distraction. Of course individual systems will vary, but using my setup as an example, there are eight steps to the process:

- 1, 2) Left and right connecting pins.
- 3, 4) Left and right safety cables.
- 5) Connection for brakelights on dinghy vehicle.
- 6) Air cable connection for brake pressure in dinghy vehicle (if so equipped).
- 7) Breakaway wire cable (applies brakes in dinghy vehicle in emergency).
- 8) Placing of brake activation device in dinghy vehicle.

A good habit is to do each of these steps in the same sequence each time. While connecting the dinghy, I count the steps, so I know that if my count is fewer than eight, I must have missed a step.

Robert Fornefeld | Scottsdale, Arizona

Tissue Issue

To contain the plethora of plastic bags for recycling uses that we usually have, we stuff them into empty tissue boxes. We usually have two boxes at any given time, and since our microwave is situated inside an overhead cabinet, we have one wedged in next to the microwave for travel stability. The second one is wedged inside the microwave on a couple of towels to keep the glass turntable from bouncing around. They are both removed before using the microwave. They are easily at hand and it solves three problems.

Larry Barrett | Deerfield, Illinois

Mind the P-Traps

All plumbing fixtures require a P-trap to prevent odors, gases and vermin (mice, insects, etc.) from escaping the holding tank into the living space of the RV. To properly seal, the trap requires a liquid (normally water)

to function. This can be an issue when the RV is stored or not used for extended periods, especially in warm climates; as the liquid evaporates, the seal becomes ineffective and undesirable odors/gases migrate into the RV.

My solution is to pour at least a

cup of water or deodorizing solution (compatible with RV holding tanks) into each sink and shower on a regular basis when the unit is not in service. When winterizing, be sure to use an approved RV antifreeze solution.

Pete Miller | via email



Have an Idea?

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

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| Map# | Event Name | Dates | Venue | City, State |
|------|-------------------------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 01 | Wisconsin RV Show | TBD | Wisconsin Center District | Milwaukee, WI |
| 02 | Knoxville RV Show | 1/4/19-1/6/19 | Sevierville Convention Center | Sevierville, TN |
| 03 | Columbus RV Show | TBD | Greater Columbus Convention Center | Columbus, OH |
| 04 | South Carolina RV & Camping Show - Greenville | 1/4/19-1/6/19 | Greenville Convention Center | Greenville, SC |
| 05 | Des Moines Boat & Sport Show | 1/4/19-1/6/19 | Iowa State Fairgrounds | Des Moines, IA |
| 06 | Colorado RV Adventure & Travel Show | 1/9/19-1/12/19 | Colorado Convention Center | Denver, CO |
| 07 | Washington Camping RV Expo | 1/11/19-1/13/19 | Dulles Expo Center | Chantilly, VA |
| 08 | Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile | 1/11/19-1/13/19 | Mobile Convention Center | Mobile, AL |
| 09 | Mid America RV Show | 1/17/19-1/20/19 | Kansas City Convention Center - Bartle Hall | Kansas City, MO |
| 10 | Greater Chicago RV Show | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | Renaissance Schaumburg Convention Center | Schaumburg, IL |
| 11 | New Jersey RV & Camping Show - Edison | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | New Jersey Convention & Exposition Center | Edison, NJ |
| 12 | Des Moines RV & Outdoor Show | 1/18/19-1/20/19 | Iowa Events Center | Des Moines, IA |
| 13 | Cincinnati-Dayton RV Show | 1/24/19-1/27/19 | Dayton Convention Center | Dayton, OH |
| 14 | Topeka Boat & Outdoor Show | 2/1/19-2/3/19 | Kansas Expocentre | Topeka, KS |
| 15 | Colorado Springs RV & Outdoor Show | 2/7/19-2/9/19 | Colorado Springs Event Center | Colorado Springs, CO |
| 16 | Minneapolis/St Paul RV, Vacation & Camping Show | 2/7/19-2/10/19 | Minneapolis Convention Center | Minneapolis, MN |
| 17 | Richmond Camping RV Expo | 2/8/19-2/10/19 | Richmond Raceway | Richmond, VA |
| 18 | Topeka RV & Sport Show | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Kansas Expocentre | Topeka, KS |
| 19 | Chattanooga RV Show | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Chattanooga Convention Center | Chattanooga, TN |
| 20 | Atlantic City RV & Camping Show | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Atlantic City Convention Center | Atlantic City, NJ |
| 21 | Richmond Boat Show | 2/15/19-2/17/19 | Richmond Raceway | Richmond, VA |
| 22 | Harrisburg RV & Camping Show-Pennsylvania | 2/21/19-2/24/19 | PA Farm Show Complex & Event Center | Harrisburg, PA |
| 23 | Overland Park RV & Outdoor Show | 2/22/19-2/24/19 | Overland Park Convention Center | Overland Park, KS |
| 24 | Central Illinois RV Show - Peoria | 3/1/19-3/3/19 | Peoria Civic Center | Peoria, IL |
| 25 | Rhode Island RV & Camping Show | 3/1/19-3/3/19 | Rhode Island Convention Center | Providence, RI |
| 26 | Colorado RV, Sports & Travel Show | 3/7/19-3/10/19 | National Western Complex | Denver, CO |
| 27 | National Capital Boat Show | 3/8/19 -3/10/19 | Dulles Expo Center | Chantilly, VA |
| 28 | Virginia RV Show - Hampton | 3/8/19-3/10/19 | Hampton Roads Convention Center | Hampton, VA |
| 29 | El Paso RV Show | 3/15/19-3/17/19 | El Paso Convention Center | El Paso, TX |
| 30 | Springfield RV & Camping Show | 3/22/19-3/24/19 | BOS Center | Springfield, IL |
| 31 | Colorado Springs RV & Travel Expo | 4/4/19-4/6/19 | Colorado Springs Event Center | Colorado Springs, CO |
| 32 | Greater Phoenix RV Show | TBD | TBD | Phoenix, AZ |

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By Ken Freund

CD Player Quits

Q We have a 2003 Gulf Stream Conquest Ultra and the CD player has never worked right. It starts out just fine, but after about 45 minutes it just quits. I assume it has something to do with the heat from the engine. Do you have any ideas on how we can fix this problem? We live in Alaska and radio reception is spotty.

Mary Smith | via email

A Since it takes that long to quit, there's a good possibility that heat buildup is the culprit. If the radio doesn't quit, but the CD does, it's likely that the electric motor stops. I suggest removing the unit from the dash, but leaving it connected and hanging out of the opening in the dash. If the CD player still quits, you can consider installing a small 12-volt DC "muffin" fan behind the radio chassis to cool it off. Otherwise, replacement is the next step.



Auto Brake Problems

Q We have a 2006 Itasca motorhome with a Workhorse chassis and an Allison transmission. This transmission does not have a park position with an internal parking-brake mechanism. It uses a brake on the driveshaft called an Auto Brake. When the transmission is put in park it actually engages the Auto Brake and that is what keeps the motorhome from moving. Lately, the Auto Brake has been engaging on its own for no apparent reason while driving down the road. The default position is brake-engaged. Hydraulic pressure is applied to release the brake. I have had two shops try to fix it. The switch on the steering column that engages the Auto Brake has been replaced. A switch on the dash that can be pulled to engage the brake has been replaced. Two relays in the control circuit have been replaced. Ground and power connections in numerous places have been inspected and all passed. The hydraulic pump, circuit board and the brake itself have not been replaced, as the mechanics don't think they are the culprits since the problem is intermittent. I

recently went on a 700-mile trip and the brake engaged three times while driving. Each time it happens, I need to pull the switch on the dash out and push it in to release the brake. Can you help?

Dennis Rother | Hastings, Minnesota

A These J-72 brakes have been a big source of problems over the years. I'm glad you didn't replace the pump assembly because it's usually not faulty, and it's expensive. Repeated brake applications will ruin the parking-brake assembly, so it's good that you've been trying to get it fixed as soon as possible. There's a solenoid that releases pressure and thereby applies the brake. It's likely that either the electric module below the pump is going bad, or the power to it, or the solenoid, is being interrupted. Brazel's RV (877-786-1576, www.brazelrv.com) offers technical advice to customers and sells a kit designed to solve the problem (part No. US2018, \$649). It contains a line-lock valve that connects to a switch on the dash and retains pressure so you won't continue to damage the brake if there are additional failures. It also includes a module that isn't otherwise available

separately. In addition, Brazel's recommends installing a small light on the dash that will monitor power to the solenoid. Otherwise, with the line lock, you won't know if there's been a failure.

Baffled by Batteries

Q On a recent trip, we were dry camping and noticed that our motorhome's house battery was running down, and we couldn't use the generator in the state forest due to noise restrictions. I wondered if I could add another 12-volt battery in parallel, or, if using two 6-volt batteries, could I add other 6-volt batteries, also in parallel? At a local dealer's seminar, a tech said that he would like to replace the 12-volt house battery with two 6-volt golf cart batteries in series. Is this a good choice? Is there a limit to how many batteries I could hook up in parallel?

Bob Dye | St. Louis, Missouri

A Six-volt golf cart batteries give a lot of bang for the buck and last a long time. They are very popular among RVers and are effective. You could add another 12-volt battery in parallel; however, it should be done

in pairs. An older, weak battery will drain power from the stronger one, impacting efficiency and longevity. You should design a system so the batteries are not regularly discharged beyond 50 percent of capacity, as deep discharges shorten their life. So, if a battery has a rating of 100 amp hours (AH), the target depth of discharge (DOD) should be 50 AH. For the typical 12-volt battery, that would correspond to a voltage of 12.2 volts DC. Some batteries, like AGM and LiFePO4, have different guidelines, so be sure to check with the battery manufacturer for more specific information. There is no absolute limit to how many batteries you can install in parallel, although there are practical limits, such as cost, weight and space. Also, if you have a massive bank of batteries, the engine alternator may not be able to fully recharge them all during normal driving. Typically, one pair of golf-cart batteries wired in series is popular; two pairs, wired in series/parallel is a solution for those who need additional capacity when in primitive environments. It's possible to use three pairs, but weight and space may become limiting factors.

Charging Challenge

Q I purchased my first motorhome, a 2011 Roadtrek 210 Simplicity, three years ago with 18,000 miles on the odometer. It now has more than 30,000 miles. It was parked for about three weeks between trips as we scheduled service to fix a few things. The technician went over the RV thoroughly and mentioned that the battery separator was not working; he demonstrated this by the green light on the monitor not lighting up while the engine was running. He also checked with a voltage tester at the battery separator and was able to show that the voltage on the house battery side was lower than the engine battery side while the engine was running. In addition, with the generator running, the charging light on the monitor panel lit up green. He did not have the

part on hand, so we deferred service. Realizing we had a trip coming up before we could replace the battery separator, I ordered the part and had planned to install it myself.

I decided to do one last check prior to installing the part and so turned on the engine and everything was normal, including the green light. We took our trip without any problems until the last day. This is when I noticed that, when the engine was at idle, the alternator was putting out about 10 volts with headlights and marker lights on along with the A/C running full force and back-up camera on. The charging indicator (the magical green light) was not on. Once we got on the road, the alternator was putting out its usual 13 to 14 volts and that green light was lit up again. So here is my question: Is it the battery separator or the alternator that is not putting out enough, or is it just normal because of the load on the alternator at idle?

Lisa Shick | Half Moon Bay, California

A Your 210 Simplicity came from the factory with an electronic separator and 6-volt AGM batteries. The fact that the light goes on when the engine output is higher tells me that the separator is working properly, as it will shed power from the higher source to the lower source above a set voltage. So, when the motorhome is plugged in, the Tripp Lite inverter/charger is providing multistage charging, in which the voltage is high enough for the separator to close and provide charge voltage to the chassis battery when needed. The same happens when the alternator is charging the starting batteries, and the house batteries reach a certain threshold. With the age of the motorhome, I would recommend having the batteries tested on, preferably, a computerized battery tester. I also suggest measuring voltage output at the alternator, and then measuring voltage at each battery. Do this at rest, then start the engine and repeat the measurements. Then do it again with all the loads **(continued on page 71)**



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

COACH & POWERTRAIN

(continued from page 67)

on. If any of the batteries are deeply discharged or sulfated (yes, AGM batteries can sulfate, but must never be given an equalization charge), it's quite possible that voltage will be lower during initial charging. But if the voltage measured at each battery goes up when the engine is started, it indicates the separator is doing its job. Alternators provide a variable charge rate based on engine rpm. Dashboard gauges are notoriously inaccurate, but voltage should be well above 10 volts DC at idle and increase to around 13.5 to 14.5 volts at higher engine speeds. Defective batteries may require higher current. If the alternator voltage is low, it should be tested professionally at a repair facility.

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Q We have a 2016 Winnebago Vista LX motorhome on a Ford F-53 chassis with a V-10 engine and TorqShift five-speed auto transmission. Checking transmission fluid, I noticed it has a burned smell. It shifts with no problem. We have been out West with 10,000-foot elevations. I have 24,000 miles on the coach. What should I do about the smell, and what can I do in the future to prevent damage to the transmission?

Danny Martin | Lumberton, North Carolina

A It's good to be concerned now, instead of waiting for a breakdown before reacting. Typically, a burned smell in the fluid occurs after hard usage and/or if the clutch packs are slipping a lot. This causes excessive heat and starts to overheat the fluid, and may lead to the fluid becoming dark brown. I suggest that you have a good automatic transmission specialist flush the fluid, including the torque converter, and the filter replaced. Also, have the mechanic test drive the motorhome to determine if it is shifting properly and diagnose any problems with the transmission. Soft, slow upshifts can cause excessive slippage. Cut the filter open and inspect the insides to determine if there is a significant accumulation



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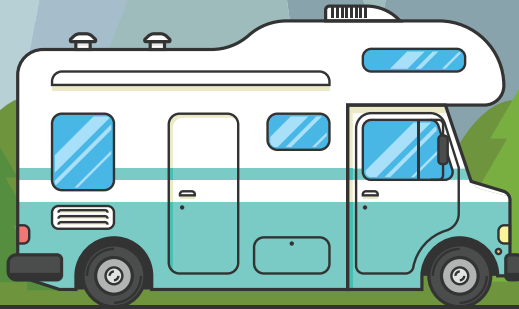
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of clutch material or other particles. For better protection, use high-quality synthetic transmission fluid; it's more resistant to high temperatures and will last longer. Towing a dinghy and full-throttle upshifts put more stress on the transmission. You could also install a transmission-fluid temperature gauge and ease off the throttle if the fluid temperature gets higher than 250 degrees. If the temperature climbs to near 275 degrees, pull over and allow the engine to idle (out of gear) to circulate and cool the fluid.

Thermostat Troubles — Tip

We have a Gulf Stream B Touring Cruiser 5316. The gentleman who has the thermostat problem ("Thermostat Troubles," October 2018) needs to have his motorhome's power converter inspected. I had a KZ 190BH travel trailer that had a factory installed Pioneer radio/CD. The CD worked fine, the speakers worked fine, I just couldn't get any radio stations. After multiple inspections and a replacement antenna, I got out my old portable AM radio and went looking for the strongest "hash" noise. It pointed me to the WFCO power converter. The power converter was inspected and replaced (under extended warranty), and the radio started working properly. We also noticed that the lights were brighter.

Gary Gardner | Crystal River, Florida

Thanks for sharing your tip, Gary. Using a portable AM radio to hunt for electrical "noise" is an excellent old-school idea that I had frankly forgotten about. Readers can use this method to find the sources of radio frequency interference (RFI). **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

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

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40621882

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COBRA SUPER COUPON

4 CHANNEL WIRELESS SURVEILLANCE SYSTEM WITH 2 CAMERAS



Customer Rating **★★★★**

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COMPARE TO ALC \$349.99
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Customer Rating **★★★★**

- 350 lb. capacity

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SOLAR ROPE LIGHT

- Great outdoor accent lighting
- Super bright light

Customer Rating **★★★★**

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ITEM 62533/63941/64625/68353 shown

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PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE SUPER COUPON

1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE



Customer Rating **★★★★**

- Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4"
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COMPARE TO IRONTON \$199.99
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ITEM 69512/61858/69445 shown

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WARRIOR SUPER COUPON

18 VOLT LITHIUM CORDLESS 3/8" DRILL/DRIVER



Customer Rating **★★★★**

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MODEL:P1810

ITEM 64118

43314215

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US GENERAL SUPER COUPON

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Customer Rating **★★★★**

- 12,600 cu. in. of storage
- 580 lb. capacity
- Heavy duty gas struts hold lid open at 90 degrees

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COMPARE TO SNAP-ON \$799.95
MODEL:NRBCT0TPCC

ITEM 64818/64096 shown

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LIMIT 5 - Coupon valid through 4/11/19*

COVER PRO SUPER COUPON

10 FT. x 20 FT. PORTABLE CAR CANOPY



Customer Rating **★★★★**

NOW \$99.99

COMPARE TO SHELTER LOGIC \$205.99
MODEL:25522

ITEM 63054/62858 shown

40682583

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AUTOMATIC BATTERY FLOAT CHARGER



Customer Rating **★★★★**

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COMPARE TO \$99.99

ITEM 64284/69955, 69594/42292 shown

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CENTRAL MACHINERY SUPER COUPON

8" 5 SPEED BENCHTOP DRILL PRESS



Customer Rating **★★★★**

NOW \$54.99

COMPARE TO BUFFALO BLACK \$110.95
MODEL:DP5UL

ITEM 62520/60238 shown

40696721

LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 4/11/19*

drillmaster SUPER COUPON

80 PIECE ROTARY TOOL KIT



Customer Rating **★★★★**

NOW \$6.99

COMPARE TO PROFESSIONAL WOODWORKER \$26.95
MODEL:51832

ITEM 63292/63235/68986/87626 shown

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A Grand Tour

On visiting two imposing estates and the wisdom of having your castle to-go

By Alan Rider

They say one's home is their castle. Well, by extension, wouldn't that same logic apply to our motorhomes? Of course, everyone's response to that question is going to be subjective. If you're fortunate enough to drive one of those 45-foot Class A beauties with the polished marble floors and ornate ceilings, the answer is probably easy. That said, even my more modest set of wheels gives me the feeling of being the master of all I survey while I'm rolling down the road.

Still, it's probably a stretch to compare any of our mobile abodes with actual castles. Which got me to thinking about the real thing.

Now, you may be of the opinion that castles are a quaintly anachronistic European thing. Truth is, though, we have dozens of castles — and the less-fortified versions I'd call palaces — right here in the United States.

Based on my personal experience, I can tell you that Central California's appropriately named Hearst Castle (800-444-4445, <http://hearstcastle.org>) would likely be at the top of that list. While it's really more of a grand mansion than an actual fortress, this 80,000-plus-square-foot hilltop abode is a tribute to one man's extravagant approach to homebuilding — and his binge-buying of architectural elements, like coffered antique ceilings and facade elements of an ancient Roman temple.

The result is a 115-room Mediterranean Revival-style hilltop/seaside palace that can take an entire day, or

even multiple days, to fully appreciate. Over the years I've taken several of the dozen tours offered by the folks at what was once known as La Cuesta Encantada (aka The Enchanted Hill) and found them all thoroughly captivating.

One of the highlights of those visits includes the Grand Rooms Tour, which is recommended as a starting point for everyone. While that tour gives you a feel for the main building's public spaces, like the cavernous Assembly Room and over-the-top outdoor Neptune Pool, I can also highly recommend the Upstairs Suites Tour that offers a glimpse into the private world of William Randolph Hearst and his many famous guests.

If you think Hearst Castle is impressive, you'll want to be sure to

make a swing through the Blue Ridge Mountains of western North Carolina for a stop at the Biltmore Estate (800-411-3812, <http://biltmore.com>). Located in the town of Asheville, this 175,000-square-foot palace makes William Randolph Hearst's place in San Simeon look like a modest bungalow.

With more than 4 acres of floor space, George Washington Vanderbilt III's 250-room Gilded Age mansion features grand public spaces, and amenities that include an indoor swimming pool and one of the first bowling alleys in a private home. To say nothing of the 75 acres of formal gardens that make up just part of the 8,000-acre estate.

When I was there last, I remember having the distinct feeling that the basic 90-minute audio guide tour probably didn't do much more than scratch the surface of what is the largest privately owned residence in America. In other words, like Hearst Castle, plan on spending the day partaking of additional tours like the Rooftop Tour, where you can imagine you're the lord of the manor surveying your kingdom. To say nothing of the events at the estate's on-site winery, like the Celebration of Sparkling Wine (as a champagne lover, sign me up).

Ultimately your rolling castle may not be nearly as big as these popular palaces. It does offer something they don't, however — the ability to get it to-go along The Road Ahead. **M**

“Truth is, though, we have dozens of castles — and the less-fortified versions I'd call palaces — right here in the United States.”

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For an inside look at over-the-top opulence, visitors can tour the sprawling grounds of Hearst Castle in California and the Biltmore Estate in North Carolina.



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