

80 TERMS EVERY MOTORHOME OWNER SHOULD KNOW

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A tour of Monument Valley presents photo opportunities around every corner (see page 42).



Solid construction, a versatile two-slide floorplan, upgraded finishes and a host of useful options help set the Coachmen Leprechaun Premier 260DS apart from the competition. **Pg. 56**

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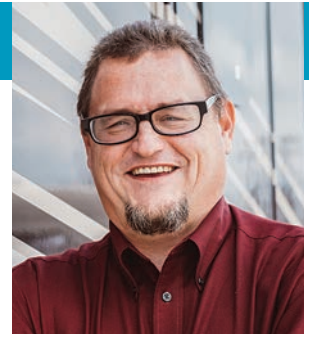
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Smartly appointed and with sleeping for five, Winnebago's new Vita 24F is a solid choice for families in search of a Sprinter-based Class C that won't bust the budget (see test page 70). Photo by Scott Hirko.





By Kristopher Bunker

## A Fresh Start

**T**he phrase “new year, new beginning” is generally reserved for early January, when visions of resolutions (and holiday buffets) still dance in our heads. But as any motorhome owner knows, March is when you can really start planning for your own new year — the new travel season, that is. What better time to retrieve your motorhome from storage, load it up with all the trimmings and get out there and enjoy?

In order to do that, you have a little work to do. Nothing too troubling; this is supposed to be fun, after all. But much like your residence needs some TLC as the seasons change, so, too, does your motorhome. A little time spent on chores now will help save time-consuming — and costly — adjustments and repairs in the heart of the season. And who wants to spend the prime sunny months with their motorhome in the shop?

To get back into the swing of things, it never hurts to brush up on some of the important terms you’ll hear while on the road and in camp. Several of these phrases should be second-nature to many motorhome owners but, as with CBers and ham radio operators, RVing often has a language of its own that may sound confusing the first time you hear it. Turn to page 80 for “Learn the Lingo,” and hone your RV-fluency skills.

Now that you’re talking like a pro once again, it’s time to prepare your motorhome for travel. “Awakening,”

beginning on page 62, is chock-full of user-friendly tips from the pros to get your motorhome ready to roll. From the tires to the roof, and everything in between, we explain the ins and outs of the critical inspection process, and how to address any potential issues. Once the prep work is finished and your ride is all clean and shiny, you’ll be ready to begin your adventures on the road — and stay there as long as you’d like.

Another way to ensure your rig is shipshape is to keep it as watertight as possible. “Leak Detection,” beginning on page 78, discusses the unique Sealtech system that helps find potential water-intrusion spots on the vehicle’s exterior. Identifying those spots, and fixing them immediately, is vital to help keep your motorhome on the road — and off the lifts at the local repair shop. After all, April showers are just around the corner, and even a small leak can lead to an expensive repair bill.

So, what to do while you’re

exploring, apart from the usual pleasantries such as campfire camaraderie, sightseeing and sampling the tastes of the surrounding area, that is? How about wood carving, travel journaling and fly tying, among other things? “10 More Hobbies for the Road” (page 51) is our sixth annual installment of the popular spotlight on healthy activities for motorhome owners — provided by fellow RVers and seasoned travelers.

We also offer a pair of family-friendly motorhomes, should you be in the market (or are merely window-shopping). Our close-up of the Coachmen Leprechaun Premier 260DS (page 56) illustrates the value of upgrading your motorhome choice to a different trim package, while Winnebago’s new Vita 24F (page 70) is a compact Sprinter-based Class C featuring smart appointments to help keep the bottom line agreeable. Either way, you and the rest of your crew should be in good hands for this season, and for many more to come.

Whether your latest adventure is only in the planning stages or already is in full swing, the old saying still rings true: An ounce of prevention really is worth a pound of cure, especially when that prevention allows you to enjoy the miles of smiles the coveted motorhome travel season offers to us all. **M**

### Contributors | March






**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.



**Kevin Livingston** grew up in RVs. He worked alongside his father, Bob Livingston, since he was old enough to hold tools. He lives in Reno, Nevada, and enjoys the technical side of the RV lifestyle.



**Steve Munnell** is a Florida native who is currently retired and lives in DeLand with his wife, Darlene. They enjoy traveling in their 2014 Fleetwood Excursion diesel-pusher motorhome.

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

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

### North of the Border

To escape the increasingly hot, muggy summers where I live in Florida, I make my way to the comfy climes of Atlantic Canada. The Acadian Coast of New Brunswick, where there always seems to be a cooling breeze off the Atlantic (and plenty of fresh lobster!), is my favorite getaway. Always good, too, is Nova Scotia's Cape Breton Island, where you can hike or bike for hours without drowning in sweat.

**Dave G. Houser | via email**

### O Canada

If you live west of the Mississippi, plant the front of your motorhome on U.S. Highway 101 headed north, starting just north of San Francisco, California, then follow it all the way until you reach Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Take a month. Temps are mild, scenery is beautiful and the variety of places to explore fits all tastes. The Pacific

Northwest is hard to beat when it comes to running from the hot summer months. If you live on the east side of the Great Miss, take a month to explore the coastal towns and beaches along Interstate 95 between Providence, Rhode Island, and Bangor, Maine.

**Bruce Smith | via email**

### Rocky Mountain High

During the hot summer months there is no place like home. We live in Glenwood Springs, Colorado, and love to travel around the mountains throughout Colorado during the summer. Aspen, Steamboat, Ridgway, Crested Butte, Telluride, Glenwood Springs, to name a few, all have music, food, flowers, tons of recreation, art and so much more. The days are warm and sunny, and evenings are clear and cool. There's never a need for air conditioning. If you feel hot, all you have to do is step into the shade! Many times, there's an afternoon shower

that freshens everything up and passes through quickly. With few insects to "bug" you, Colorado is delightful in the summer.

**Michele Diamond  
Glenwood Springs, Colorado**

### Our Home and Native Land

As Canadian RVers, we don't have to travel far, since our summer temperatures are pleasantly moderate for outdoor activities. If you live in the Western states, we recommend visiting British Columbia. From the Eastern states, the Maritime provinces, especially Prince Edward Island (PEI), are delightful. Additionally, the U.S. dollar is worth 30 percent more in Canadian dollars, so pack up the motorhome and head north during those hot summer months.

**Sandy and Larry MacDonald | via email**

### Maggie May

We live in central Florida, so we know

## Featured Letter

### Book Early

In the early months of summer, as the temperatures are rising in the Southern states, I head north to Yellowstone National Park. One of the best times in the park is early June. The temperatures are still very mild — the possibility of a light snowfall even exists — and the wildlife is still active before the hotter summer months drive the animals into the shade of high-elevation forests. Bison calves are only a few weeks old and still in their orange newborn coats. The crowds do not typically arrive until July and August, so getting an RV site in the only RV park inside the park can be a little bit easier than the peak summer months.

**Dawn Wilson | via email**





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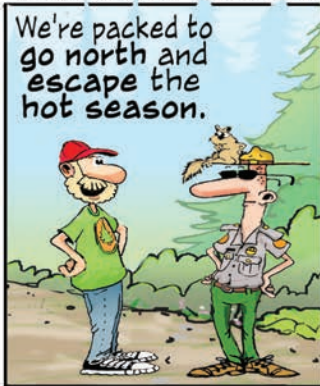
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Visual Letter to the Editor

by Joe Schmidt



How do the animals here survive it?



Like you, they can find ways to escape the heat.



what "hot" is during the summer. We love western North Carolina, especially Maggie Valley. There are plenty of nice RV parks in the area and the mountain scenery is gorgeous. Even in July and August the temperature in the evening can dip into the high 50s and during the day it usually does not exceed the mid-80s. It is a short trip east to Asheville, which has all kinds of interesting places to visit.

Steve Munnell | via email

**Mountain Life**

When temperatures rise, we head to the mountains. The Great Smoky Mountains straddle the Tennessee and North Carolina border and have 13 peaks above 5,000 feet. Temperatures at those high elevations are about 20 degrees cooler. Add the bonus of a thick canopy of trees, and an abundance of cool streams and waterfalls, and the oppressive heat of summer melts away. On extra sweltering days we seek the ultimate cool by kayaking on the Little Pigeon River or tubing in nearby Townsend, Tennessee.

A.M. Murphy | via email

**Beach Bums**

We live in the Central Valley of Northern California where the temperature often exceeds 100 degrees Fahrenheit, and sometimes is more than 110. When it gets that warm, even a trip to the many lakes in our area doesn't suit our need for more suitable weather. We generally load up the motorhome and head to the California coast near Monterey or Pismo Beach.

Ken and Gayle Reid | via email

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**Beat the Heat**

When we are escaping the summer heat of the South, we tend to head north. That's usually in the Midwestern states like Wisconsin (Door County) or the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. It's not always a lot cooler, but the humidity is lower, and that can make all the difference in the world.

**James and Dorothy Richardson** | via email

**Offline Wandering**

In the December 2018 issue, the article "Motorhome GPS Face-off" did a great job of discussing the features of the tested units, but one thing was not addressed: how well the units perform with preplanned trip routing. Although I have a degree in electrical engineering, my experience with offline GPS navigation units is that they never recover if you decide to take an

alternate route for a segment of the preplanned one. Since my primary use of the device is to avoid missed turns in unfamiliar territory, this is a key issue. I don't like the idea of procuring [an expensive unit], and then trying it out only to discover it loses the planned route — meaning I have to return the unit. I might be the only one with this problem, but I doubt it.

**Tom Brophy** | Azle, Texas

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**Out and About**

I love travel articles, but not with an emphasis on assuming everyone is 20 years old, and can hike and such. Some of us are older and in wheelchairs, or have arthritis or other chronic conditions, and have a hard time getting around, but we do like getting away. There is still this type of audience out there; it's not just the Millennials.

**Jane Parks-McKay and Tim McKay**  
Santa Cruz, California

**Like New**

As the owner of an older motorhome, I've read with interest the articles about folks restoring older motorhomes for use when traveling. We travel in our 2002 Holiday Rambler Vacationer and when looking for places, we tend to bypass the campgrounds that advertise an age restriction. As our coach does not look 16 years old, we have not had any problems staying in a campground when we travel. Does anyone else with an older coach have any problems being able to stay in a campground that advertises an age restriction?

**Bill and Less Kesner**  
Dammeron Valley, Utah

**Question of the Month**

Have you ever been refused entry to an RV park because you drive an early-model motorhome? Do you think it's a fair practice for RV park owners to turn away such motorhomes, even if they are well-maintained and look new?

Send your comments to:  
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## Galleta Meadows Metal Sculptures

Surrounding the town of Borrego Springs in Southern California is a vast sculpture park of more than 130 works of art covering acres of desert landscape. Some of these huge steel-plate re-creations are of creatures that roamed the area millions of years ago, such as prehistoric elephants, camels, saber-toothed cats and more. Others include bighorn sheep and wild stallions. It all began in 2008, when Dennis Avery, owner of Galleta Meadows Estate, commissioned artist/welder Ricardo Breceda to craft these unique sculptures. We biked along the quiet roads to check out the sculptures, which are scattered along miles of sandy landscape, but you can also see them while driving in your motorhome. Set up camp in one of the area's many private RV parks or reserve a spot at Anza-Borrego Desert State Park's Borrego Palm Canyon campground (some sites have full hookups). All the RV campsites offer awesome views of the surrounding mountains. — *Morey Edelman*

For more information: [www.visitcalifornia.com/attraction/ricardo-breceda-sculptures](http://www.visitcalifornia.com/attraction/ricardo-breceda-sculptures)



By Chuck Graham

# Wildlife Encounters: The California Condor Soars Again

One of my first encounters with a critically endangered California condor was also one of my most memorable. I was lying flat on my back on a broad, gritty sandstone slab in the upper reaches of remote Lion Canyon — located in the Sierra Madre Mountains, deep in the Los Padres National Forest — when a condor soared so close to me it blocked out the entire sun.

Hands behind my head, eyes closed, I was relaxed in the cool, late-afternoon glow with the scent of sage wafting in the air. Initially, I thought it was puffy clouds swirling above, occasionally shading the sun. Finally, I opened my eyes to see the silhouette of a condor's impressive, 9½-foot-wide wingspan soaring over me.

Condors are curious raptors with incredible eyesight. There's nothing quite like a condor soaring in afternoon thermals covering on average 150 miles per day as they forage for carrion in their historic habitat.

Ever since the last of these Pleistocene Epoch scavengers were captured in the Santa Barbara backcountry in 1987, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has made aggressive efforts through captive breeding to bring North America's largest flying land bird back from the brink of extinction.

Lead poisoning continues to be a sore spot for their expansion back into their preferred habitat, which would allow for natural foraging behavior in sweeping grasslands, scrubby chaparral, high deserts and mountains. However, successful, intensive captive breeding of these iconic birds has invoked hope of survival with more than 250 California condors now flying free in pockets of their historic ranges.

The species' current range includes California's coastal ranges (from Ventana Wilderness in Big Sur, the San Raphael and Dick Smith wildernesses in Santa Barbara County and the Sespe Wilderness in Ventura County), east through the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge in the Transverse Range and the southern Sierra Nevada. Other condor populations are expanding in remote regions of Utah, northern Baja California, Mexico and in Arizona's Grand Canyon.

Two of the more accessible locations to view condors are the 6.3-mile High Peaks Trail in Pinnacles National Park in Central California, and the expansive overlook on Mount Pinos, the tallest peak in Los Padres National Forest at 8,847 feet.

I was beginning to feel like that condor soaring above me was eyeing me as a potential carcass to feed on. I jumped up, grabbed my backpack to hike back to my tent overlooking the breathtaking Montgomery Potrero, when I counted 11 condors soaring upward in a tight circular formation in the same thermal. I pulled my camera out and began to run toward the more exposed ledges of Lion Canyon hopefully to witness another unforgettable moment steeped in prehistory.

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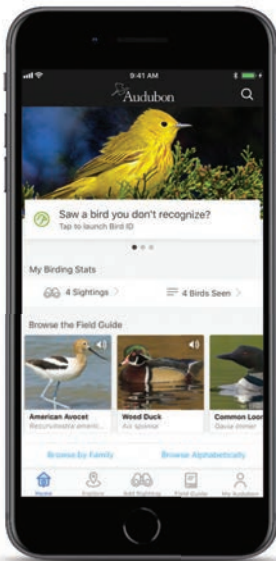
Ⓢ Removable sole systems on **Hodgman H5 H-Lock Wading Boots** allow users to swap soles for improved traction control on any terrain. Boots are constructed with abrasion-resistant synthetic material in the uppers and durable sheet rubber in the toe and heel areas, as well as double- and triple-stitched panel construction for long-term durability. Integrated drainage ports remove excess water weight quickly. D-ring on the tongue provides a secure location for gravel guard hooks. MSRP: \$149.95. **Gander Outdoors**, 888-542-6337, [www.ganderoutdoors.com](http://www.ganderoutdoors.com)



Ⓢ **Leatherman Charge TTI** multitool in Realtree Hardwoods camo pattern features 18 tools, including a customizable bit driver, outside-accessible tools and premium 2.9-inch S30V knife blade. TTI is equipped with rugged titanium handles and weighs less than 9 ounces; closed length is 4 inches. Included leather sheath allows storage of additional bits for added versatility. MSRP: \$179.95. **Leatherman Tool Group Inc.**, 800-847-8665, [www.leatherman.com](http://www.leatherman.com)



Ⓢ **Passport Series Helionox Tension Lock 115** is a three-segment fixed-length hiking pole with a long handle for adjustments on the trail. Helionox poles are engineered with aluminum alloy to provide superior strength while remaining lightweight. Simple locking and collapsing construction makes for easy use and storage, while foam-lined grip and cinch strap enhance user-friendliness. MSRP: \$82.95. **Camping World**, 888-626-7576, [www.campingworld.com](http://www.campingworld.com)



Ⓢ **Audubon Bird Guide** is a complete field guide to more than 800 species of North American birds. App is designed to help users identify birds, keep track of the birds they've seen and advise how to find new birds nearby. Field guide offers more than 3,000 photos, audio clips of songs and calls, multi-seasonal range maps and in-depth text. Users can also post and share photos to the Photo Feed. Available for free on App Store and Google Play. **Audubon**, [www.audubon.org](http://www.audubon.org)



## CLOSE UP

Ⓢ **Barska 15-40x50 Colorado Spotting Scope** offers superior performance in a lightweight and compact design. Ideal for nature enthusiasts and hunters, the Colorado is constructed with a tough, rubber-armored exterior and complete waterproof integrity. Fully multi-coated optics and BK-7 Porro prisms provide superior light transmission for bright images throughout the entire zoom range. Includes a carrying case and foldable, tabletop tripod. MSRP: \$34.99. **Overton's**, 800-334-6541, [www.overtons.com](http://www.overtons.com)



## A Nice, Shady Spot

Magne Shade's new Nano Shade is an easy, cost-effective way to shade the windows in your motorhome, potentially reducing A/C usage and prolonging the life of the upholstery. The Nano Shade is made of the same fabric as all Magne Shade products and utilizes the company's proprietary Nano Tape micro-suction technology (millions of tiny suction cups) to hold the shade to the glass. This type of installation allows users to easily remove and reposition the Nano Shade as many times as necessary to ensure the perfect fit — without leaving behind residue on the window. Available in a 20-by-20-inch square (MSRP: \$20) or 28-by-40-inch rectangle (MSRP: \$33).

**Magne Shade | 336-753-0905, [www.magneshade.com](http://www.magneshade.com)**



## Origami On the Water

Looking to ply the waters but don't have the space to store a traditional kayak? Oru has launched its first tandem folding kayak, the Haven. The Haven is a 16-foot long, 30-inch-wide kayak that folds into the size of a compact 40-pound suitcase using the principles of origami, so it can be stored inside your motorhome without taking up too much space. The Haven is made of 5mm double-layered custom-extruded polypropylene and is equipped with a rail platform along the top of the cockpit side walls, which makes the kayak compatible with fishing rod holders or cup holders. Two seat covers are also included. MSRP: \$1,999.

**Oru Kayak | 415-630-3717, [www.orukayak.com](http://www.orukayak.com)**



## Stout Selfie Stick

A waterproof action camera is a great way to record your most cherished memories, but it can be difficult to get the whole picture (or video) from an arm's length or with a flimsy selfie stick. Shurhold Industries introduces its new Camera Adapter that enables products like a GoPro or Garmin VIRB to quickly and securely attach to any of the company's 11 handles, which can extend up to 9 feet in length. The rustproof Camera Adapter is made from a high-performance polymer; as part of Shurhold's One Handle Does It All System, it locks onto any Shurhold fixed or telescoping triple-anodized aluminum handle and can be adjusted for the optimal shooting angle. It can also be used to check on motorhome roof seals and antennas. MSRP for the Camera Adapter is \$12.95; handle MSRPs start at \$6.68.

**Shurhold | 800-962-6241, [www.shurhold.com/rv](http://www.shurhold.com/rv)**



## Freedom Hauler

For those who want the convenience of a toy hauler without sharing their living space with outdoor toys, the Freedom Hauler may be just the ticket. The all-steel flatbed carrier bolts to a special mounting bracket installed on the motorhome's frame and features a patented self-steering axle that automatically moves itself going forward and in reverse. The company says this unique system does not put additional weight or stress on the motorhome's frame or suspension and can hold a 2,400-pound payload depending on how it's outfitted (keeping the motorhome's tow rating and gross combined weight rating in mind, of course). Plus, when you return home, the Freedom Hauler can be towed by any vehicle with a 2-inch hitch ball and used as a standard utility trailer. MSRP starts at \$7,990.

**Freedom Hauler | 208-901-1183, [www.freedomhauler.com](http://www.freedomhauler.com)**



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## WHY WE BOUGHT IT!

# HOW ONE FAMILY FOUND THEIR PERFECT RV.

**Meet Nic and Jess Farish**, fulltime RVers who travel and live with their young sons Bailey and Brady in their Winnebago Intent. Prolific writers, photographers and filmmakers, they are active in social media and host their own YouTube channel, among other activities. We spoke to them about why and how they RV.

### ► Why RV?

**W**e'd always wanted to travel, but Jess has a fear of flying, so road trips became our thing. RVing was something we thought would happen in retirement.

As our boys got older, we found ourselves telling them they could be and do anything they wanted when they grew up. And one day,

we realized that despite what we were telling them, we were not doing what *we* wanted to do anymore.

We got tired of saying "I wish, I wish, I wish," and realized we're as young as we are ever going to be — right now. Our attitude shifted to "Why not?"

So we changed our lifestyle from going to work every day to becoming more mobile. We both have performing backgrounds; Jess is also a writer and substitute teacher, while Nic shoots and edits video. We both also create website content.

And then we started looking for an RV.

### Choosing their RV

Our main concerns were floorplan, style, and space. We went to a few dealerships in our area and toured fifth wheels as well as Class A, B and C options.

We wanted something safe, dependable and sturdy. The vehicle couldn't be too long, for campground and driving purposes. And we had to check the ceiling height because Nic is 6'5" — a modern-day giant.

So we decided a Class A was best for our family.



From the automatic leveling system to the hookup-and-live or unhook-and-drive aspect of a Class A, it's the perfect set-up for us. We also decided on a gas model over a diesel, because a diesel just wasn't in the budget.

We centered on Winnebago because we know and trust the brand name: you can't be around for 60 years without knowing what you're doing. We decided to buy new, with financing, the warranty, a fresh engine, new tanks, and the reassurance that we would be safe and secure driving our little family.

### Their RV of Choice

We found the Winnebago Intent 31P and instantly fell in love! The comfort, the size, the ease of the one slide, the safety of the RV, plus the newbie-friendly interface with the technology, tank, and water systems are exactly what our family needed.

It checked all of the boxes: bunkhouse for the kids, tall enough for Nic (with room to spare!); at 32 feet long the length was right; and it had a Ford engine, increasing our peace of mind. Plus, it had a beautiful exterior!

### Favorite destination (so far)

Hands down, our favorite place was Coronado Island, California. The black and gold sand, the sunsets, the picturesque everything, the cafes, the bay! We beached, we had campfires and s'mores, told stories, built sandcastles, walked up and down the streets of the island, sipped mimosas, gazed at the beautiful sunsets with Hotel del Coronado at our backs...We saw an



entire lifetime there and we fell in love! They even had natural grocers that carried all my allergy friendly foods! We were only supposed to venture over for a day, but we ended up returning to Coronado four more days. Thankfully, RV living makes changing or expanding your plans a little easier!

### Best tips for choosing an RV

Define what you'll be using it for before you start looking. And buy what you can afford now, knowing your lifestyle and needs may change.

### One thing they wish they had known

We wish someone would have told us to start making reservations l-o-n-g before we wanted to be somewhere. Had we known there was such demand for our planned destinations, we would have shaped our travels and expenses a little differently. Also, weather. We would have spent more time tracking seasons and locations to avoid at certain times of the year. We have been lucky, but it wasn't because of planning!

### Parting thought

GO SLOWER! Spend more time at each place, take a little more time to travel between places, and enjoy your time in the place you are visiting. When you go too fast, it becomes about hook ups and take downs and how long you have to get somewhere, instead of your adventures and the memories you're creating.



### Follow the Farishes

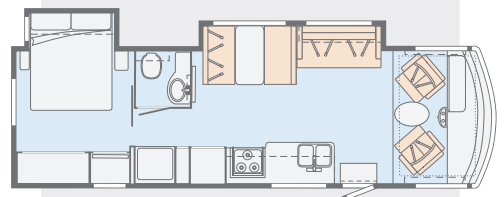
You can follow the adventures of the Farish family at [Winnebagolife.com](http://Winnebagolife.com) and here: [@ItsNicandJess](https://www.instagram.com/ItsNicandJess)



## THE WINNEBAGO INTENT

Introduced last year, the Winnebago Intent is a mid-size Class A gas model built on the Ford F53 chassis. Four floorplans, ranging from 27 to 32 feet, feature either double slideouts or a full-wall slideout. Attractive, spacious interior layouts, innovations like refillable/exchangeable LP tanks, abundant storage and a long list of standard features, including a tailgate package, make the Intent an extremely popular coach at its very attractive price point.

EXTERIOR LENGTH:	26'10"-31'10"
WIDTH:	8'5"
EXTERIOR HEIGHT:	12'
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MSRP STARTING AT:	\$116,673



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The Royal Gorge Bridge, America's highest suspension bridge, spans the gorge 955 feet above the Arkansas River.

## Old Bones and New Adventures

Colorado's Royal Gorge Region: Come for the suspension bridge, stay for the dinosaurs, whitewater rafting and fine wine

By Mary Zalmanek

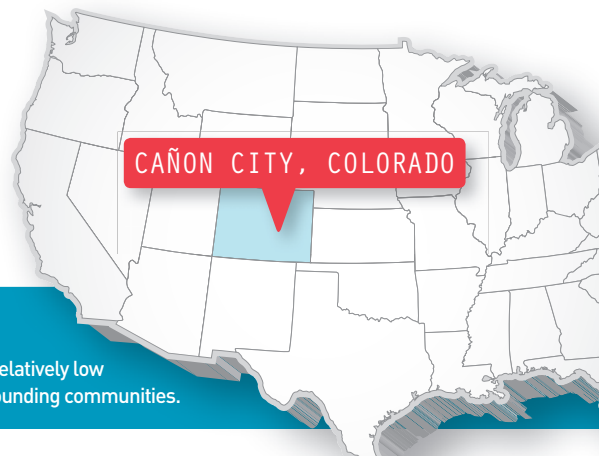
If you like beautiful scenery, outdoor adventure, fine wine and ferocious dinosaurs, Cañon City, Colorado, has all that and more. Nicknamed the "Climate Capital of Colorado," the city is protected from harsh weather conditions by its geography and 5,300-foot elevation. With a population of around 16,000, the city is large enough to ensure plenty of creature comforts and interesting attractions, but small enough to grant easy access to open space in the nearby Rocky Mountains and plains. The Arkansas River flows through southern Colorado's high desert, exiting the Royal Gorge just west of Cañon City.

Mountain View RV Resort is conveniently located on U.S. Highway 50 between Cañon City and the turnoff to the Royal Gorge. My husband, Jim, and I found it to be the ideal location for our stay in the Royal Gorge region. Our spacious site had an unobstructed view of

the mountains.

After settling in at the RV park, we checked out some local history in our dinghy vehicle. The Holy Cross Abbey, a former monastery of the Order of St. Benedict, was built in 1924 in the Gothic Revival style. A boarding school was opened on the property, which prospered during the 1950s and 1960s. After a steady decline, it closed in 1985. In the early 2000s, the remaining 20 monks hired a professional viticulturist to plant a vineyard in an effort to support themselves. The monastery closed in 2005, and new owners took over.

The Winery at Holy Cross Abbey is now producing award-winning wines. All of the wines are made on property with grapes from Colorado, California and Washington. In the tasting room,



### Did You Know? ➔

The Fremont County seat in southern Colorado, Cañon City is located in a mountain bowl at a relatively low elevation, meaning the winter climate generally remains about 10 degrees warmer than surrounding communities.

## GETAWAY

CAÑON CITY, COLORADO

visitors can stand at the bar and taste most wines for free. We opted for the VIP tasting. Dexi, our knowledgeable server, brought a plate of cheese, fruit, nuts and bread to our table on the patio, followed by samples of their wines. With each new wine, she recommended which food on our plate would pair well with it. Yum! She was right every time. We bought some wine to take home with us, and took notes about what to serve with it.

The next morning we were eager to see the Royal Gorge Bridge and Park, the city's most famous attraction. The bridge, built in 1929, spans the gorge 955 feet above the Arkansas

River, making it America's highest suspension bridge. The total length of the bridge is 1,260 feet, with the main span stretching 880 feet between the two towers. Nearly 1,300 wooden planks cover the steel base structure. To commemorate the bridge's 90th anniversary, 5,000 visitors were invited to put their signature on the bridge. During our visit in the summer of 2018, we wrote on a plank. An artist wood-burned the signatures into the planks for installation in early 2019.

Walking across the bridge, we watched people below us rafting on the Arkansas, and others soaring above us on the second-highest zip-line in North

America. Visitors from all over the U.S. paused to snap photos in front of their state flags that line the bridge. A "No Fishing From the Bridge" sign made us laugh.

As we neared the other side of the bridge, we were welcomed by the lovely singing voice of Lissa Hanner. Her sense of humor was apparent in her song choices. I especially liked her rendition of Nancy Sinatra's "These Boots are Made for Walking." When she invited two young children in the audience to join her on stage for a dance, it was hard to tell who was having the most fun: the kids, the singer or the audience. Shortly

A diplodocus longus turned his head to watch the humans testing their skills, balance and bravery on the multi-story ropes course in the Dinosaur Wild Walk. This stegosaurus is one of 16 life-sized animatronic dinosaurs in the Dinosaur Wild Walk.



Skyline Drive is a narrow, one-way paved road along a razorback ridge that offers a panoramic view of the city.



after she finished singing Michael Murphy's "Wildfire," we heard the announcement that the show at the Plaza Theater was about to start.

Since we wanted to see the film about the wildfire that swept through the area in June 2013, we left to secure seats in the theater. The fire consumed 3,218 acres surrounding the attraction, and 48 out of 52 structures at the park were destroyed. The bridge itself received minimal damage, requiring only 32 of the wooden planks to be replaced. Work to rebuild the visitors center, aerial tram and other structures began the following January. In August 2014, the park reopened.

Dinosaurs lived in the Royal Gorge region more than 100 million years ago. Paleontologists have found fossils of brontosaurus, stegosaurus, allosaurus and camptosaurus less than 3 miles from the bridge.

The Royal Gorge Dinosaur Experience pays tribute to these pre-



Tunnel Drive is a 2-mile-long hiking and biking trail along an old railroad bed.

historic creatures. It is conveniently located on Highway 50, near the turnoff to the Royal Gorge Bridge. When we entered the museum, Susan, a tour guide, asked us if we wanted to hold a real dinosaur bone from the Jurassic era. It wasn't a big chunk of bone, but the fossil was much heavier

than I expected. Susan explained how their full-scale dinosaur fossil casts from the Jurassic and Cretaceous periods are made using molds, laser scanners and 3D printers. The stegosaurus in their collection was made by 3D scanning and printing a nearly complete fossil, which was found in

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## GETAWAY

CAÑON CITY, COLORADO

Cañon City by high school students on a fossil-hunting field trip in 1936.

Looking at old bones and fossil casts showed us the skeletal structures, but it was outside in the Dinosaur Wild Walk that we got to see what these creatures looked like in the flesh. Sixteen life-sized animatronic dinosaurs lined the walkway, some of them tracking our movements as we strolled by. A diplodocus longus noticed us when we approached, but quickly seemed to return his attention to the humans testing their skills, balance and bravery on the multi-story ropes course.

We tested our own bravery on Skyline Drive, a narrow, one-way paved road (for passenger cars only) along a razorback ridge that offers a panoramic view of the city. We stopped at the pullouts to admire the view. Since the 2.6-mile road has no guard rails and sometimes steep slopes on both sides, all eyes were on the road while our dinghy was in motion. The

road has an interesting history, from dinosaurs to prisoners. Eons ago, dinosaurs left more than 50 footprints near the entrance, which weren't identified until 2000. In 1905, 60 inmates at the nearby Colorado State Penitentiary built the road in exchange for reduced sentences.

After watching the rafters from the bridge, we were excited that we had booked a rafting trip with Echo Canyon River Expeditions for the following day. We arrived about an hour before our trip was to depart so that we could get checked in and be fitted with life vests. The efficient staff accomplished that task in about five minutes, giving us plenty of time to look around. Echo Canyon is housed in the former 8 Mile General Store, which was built using timbers from the original Royal Gorge Bridge. Echo Canyon has been at this location since its founding in 1978. When Andy Neinas, the current owner, bought the business in 2001, he added the 8 Mile Bar and Grill. The retail



Top: At The Winery at Holy Cross Abbey, the VIP tasting on the patio includes a plate of cheese, fruit, nuts and bread to pair with wines. Above: Our site at the Mountain View RV Resort had a clear view of the mountains.

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**GETAWAY**  
CAÑON CITY, COLORADO



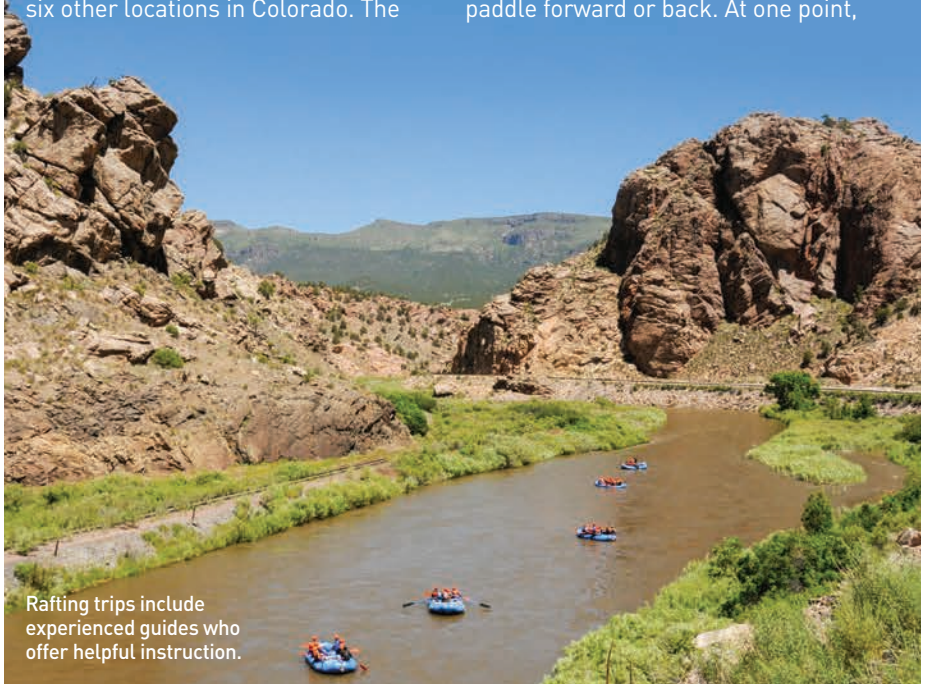
Photo: Echo Canyon River Expeditions

Echo Canyon River Expeditions offers half-day, full-day and multi-day rafting trips through the Royal Gorge and Bighorn Sheep Canyon.

store and restaurant are decorated with antiques reflecting Colorado's history, including a stove from the 1800s, historical highway markers salvaged from junk yards and a collection of Colorado license plates from consecutive years (1967 to 1975) when actual metal plates were issued annually to renew plates.

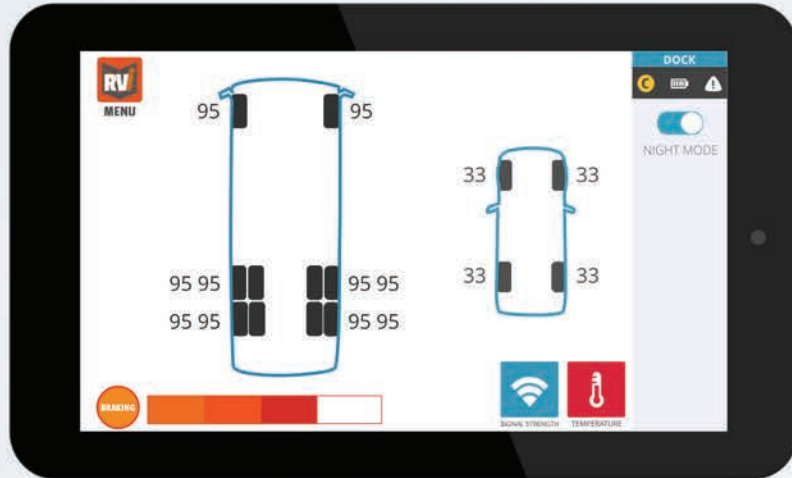
Echo Canyon offers half-, full- and multi-day rafting trips through Royal Gorge and Bighorn Sheep Canyon near Cañon City, as well as six other locations in Colorado. The

Royal Gorge has wet-and-wild Class III to V rapids. We chose the half-day Bighorn Sheep Canyon trip with family-friendly Class I to III rapids. A bus took our group of 30-plus people and our guides to the spot where we started our adventure. After listening carefully to the safety talk, we all loaded into our assigned rafts. Our guide, Alex, was competent, knowledgeable, friendly and had a great sense of humor. The six passengers in his boat followed his commands to paddle forward or back. At one point,



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## GETAWAY CAÑON CITY, COLORADO



This spot near the Bullen Bridge on the Riverwalk Trail attracts people wanting to cool off on a hot summer day.

we paddled upstream to a Class II rapid Alex called the magic wave. We performed the “typewriter” maneuver, letting the wave move us from left to right. When Alex called for a “high five,” usually after making it through a section of rapids, we would tap the ends of our paddles together above our heads in celebration.

After our perfect morning on the river ended, we satisfied our appetites at the 8 Mile Bar and Grill. I ordered the ahi tuna salad and Jim had the black and blue burger, with bacon, grilled onions and blue cheese. Both of our meals were delicious.

Before we left Echo Canyon, we got a quick peek at their cabins and glamping tents. If your non-RVing friends are jealous of your adventures, you can invite them to come rafting with you and stay at the nearby Royal Gorge cabins. Spoiler alert: this time you might be jealous of them!

During our stay, we asked locals for recommendations on bike rides and restaurants. Several sources suggested two trails for biking and hiking: Tunnel Drive and the Arkansas Riverwalk Trail. From the trailhead, we were able to ride the two connected trails in a couple of hours. Tunnel Drive is a 2-mile trail along an old railroad bed. It has three short tunnels and a great view of the Arkansas River. The Riverwalk Trail winds along the river through the city for about 7 miles. We saw lots of people playing in the river near the Bullen Bridge, a pedestrian bridge that crosses the river.

Quincy’s Tavern, a steakhouse in the nearby town of Florence, was also recommended. Even though we were warned that all they offer is steaks, it didn’t quite sink in until we got there. They have a one-item menu: Sunday through Thursday, they serve filet mignon; Fridays and Saturdays, they serve prime rib. The limited menu doesn’t hamper its popularity. When we arrived around 6 p.m. on a Sunday night, there was a 30-minute wait for one of the 14 tables. Jim and I took seats at the bar, where we were able to have a chat with Tina, the owner. She said 75 percent of her customers are locals, 25 percent visitors. The restaurant will soon be expanding into an adjacent space.

The Royal Gorge Region has plenty to offer its visitors. We came for the bridge, and in just a few days, we also enjoyed rafting, dinosaurs, fine wines, tasty meals, spectacular scenery and bike rides. Just think what we could have done in a week. **M**

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Echo Canyon River Expeditions**  
800-755-3246, [www.raftecho.com](http://www.raftecho.com)

**Mountain View RV Resort**  
719-275-0900, [www.mountainviewrvresort.net](http://www.mountainviewrvresort.net)

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**Royal Gorge Bridge and Park**  
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# OREGON ORIGINALS

Ten small museums that reveal the state's fascinating history

**N**ationwide, a visit to a large, renowned museum is on nearly everyone's radar. But, in the search for fun and educational stops, don't dismiss the small town, local historical society and nonprofit museums, for they hold collections of heart. Many have great upstairs-attic appeal, and some reveal surprising finds.

In the 1990s, in Milford, Pennsylvania, while viewing the unique and day-to-day items of Pike County at The Columns Museum, we came upon a stained American flag. Its story, now authenticated, was that it cradled Lincoln's head after the Ford Theatre shooting. Handed down through family, the flag passed from the Ford stage to Pike County Historical Society.

In Coulee Dam, Washington, the Colville Tribal Museum rewarded us with the expected beadwork, stone-fashioned tools and baskets, but it was an original Jefferson Peace Medal carried and given by Lewis and Clark that surprised. Tribal museums often give pause, providing

looks at common points of history through another's perspective.


Although finds rarely hit such pinnacles, the hunt is always fun. Pieces and collections may be comical, ingenious or commonplace. You never know until you walk through the door.

We generally stumble inside when the midday sun burns too hot, the road stretches too long or the raindrops simply insist, or when curiosity, whim or dare come into play. Museums may include indoor and outdoor exhibits. Historic photos, artifacts and memorabilia are standard. Pioneer homes and graveyards of agricultural, mining and logging equipment can set the stage. Voices of

old-timers may recount local events.

Small museums easily fit into motorhome travels. They sit along prime travel routes and near camping. While some feature only street parking, small-town life usually leaves space for motorhome stops. The main drawbacks are limited hours and/or seasonal restrictions. These are small-purse operations, dependent on a core of passionate, dedicated volunteers. Modest entrance fees and donations help keep doors open.

Oregon is ideal for traveling in search of the ultimate small museum. When compared to other regions, Oregon's history is young, but it is hard-earned. West to east, the following 10 museums, some little-heralded, act as portals to the character of the state.



This rustic church is part of the Fort Rock Homestead Village Museum. There are 11 structures in the village, with more on the way.



## Tillamook County Pioneer Museum, Tillamook

Tillamook County Historical Society combines a dairy-town pioneer museum with a satellite coastal property, Kilchis Point Reserve, west off U.S. Highway 101 between Tillamook and Bay City (to its north). The reserve offers a family-friendly 2-mile interpretive trail through coastal woodland to bay shore and a birding platform. You've not walked an interpretive trail until you've walked a museum trail. Panels come rapid-fire, explaining natural, Native American and pioneer history. Note, the reserve's small parking lot is best suited for dinghy vehicles.

In the former County Courthouse, the history museum rolls out exhibits, replica rooms and artifacts, windows in time, introducing the Tillamook Bay



## Getting There

The first stop of the author's tour is Tillamook County Pioneer Museum. From Portland, take U.S. Highway 26 West for about 20 miles. Keep left onto Oregon State Route 6 West for 51 miles. Turn left onto Laurel Avenue, then make a quick right onto 2nd Street to arrive at the museum.

Indians, early explorers, pioneer life, logging and dairying. The taxidermic exhibits and lifelike dioramas in the natural history room draw attention. When meeting Joe Champion, Tillamook County's first white settler, look for the small-scale stump, a replica of his first home here.



At the Great American Steam-Up (July 27-28 and August 3-4, 2019), visitors can view old-time vehicles like steam traction engine tractors (above, left), and a 1895 Watrous steam engine located in the Hilands Building (above, right) at Antique Powerland in Brooks. Below: The Benton County Historical Society Museum located at Philomath College features a rotating exhibit that changes once a year.

“PHILOMATH WAS A SEAT OF LEARNING, SO IT WAS FITTING THAT PHILOMATH COLLEGE, BUILT IN 1867, SHOULD HOUSE THE HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND MUSEUM.”

**Where to stay:** Motorhome sites can be found at Cape Lookout State Park (on Three Capes Loop, 10 miles southwest of Tillamook) or at Barview Jetty County Park (12.5 miles northwest of Tillamook, passing through Garibaldi).

**Port Orford Lifeboat Station, Port Orford**

In the old crew barracks at Port Orford Heads State Park, a museum features the heroics of the Coast Guard surfmen who risked their lives to rescue others caught in danger’s clutch on a 40-mile stretch of Pacific high seas. The unit operated from 1934-1960s; structures are on the National Register of Historic Places. An outdoor exhibit shelters the crew’s 36-foot self-righting motor lifeboat — the David that met Goliath.

After a lookout spotted distress signals, rescues began with a risky scramble down the headland’s 280-foot cliff on 532 storm- and sea-battered, slippery wooden and concrete steps. Park trails venture to the headland’s edge. Although even a hint of the stairs is all but gone, look for whale spouts.

This museum is one of three operated by Cape Blanco Heritage Society. Cape Blanco Light Station and the Hughes House (both at Cape Blanco State Park) are the other two.

**Where to stay:** State Parks, Cape Blanco (about 9 miles north) and Humbug Mountain (about 7 miles south) offer sites with hookups.

**Antique Powerland, Brooks**

Off Interstate 5 just north of Salem, Antique Powerland is a complex of



Rustic RV sites are available near Collier Memorial State Park.



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small heritage museums with indoor and outdoor exhibits, and different viewing schedules and coffers. Together they salute the conveyances of early Oregon and valley pioneer history. The select weekends of the Great Oregon Steam-Up in late July and early August (July 27-28 and August 3-4, 2019) find the park overflowing with old-time tractors, threshers, engines, trucks and more, all polished to rival the sun, and many puffing steam and tooting in celebration. Through the loving care of volunteers, the relics still work. A model train ride and steam-operated ice cream-maker convert next-generation historians.

**Where to stay:** Champoeg State Park (about 20 miles north and west off I-5) and Silver Falls State Park (about 30 miles southeast through Silverton) offer sites with hookups.

**Benton County Historical Society Museum, Philomath**  
On Benton County Scenic Byway,

southwest of Corvallis, Philomath was a seat of learning. So it was fitting that Philomath College, built in 1867, should house the historical society and museum. With much of its collection in storage, this small museum offers a rotating exhibit, organized by theme, that changes once a year. Find current themes online. In the future, Corvallis will base a new museum offering greater display. A model is on exhibit. This stately old-timer will continue to mark history and serve research.

**Where to stay:** Coastal camping is available when journeying to Newport (U.S. Highway 20) or Waldport (SR 34); private campgrounds serve the valley.

**Philip Foster Farm, Eagle Creek**  
Tucked in a modern crossroads between greater Portland and Mount Hood, this historical site at the end of the Barlow Road captures a sometimes forgotten chapter in Oregon Trail history. Here stands the farm that welcomed and supplied

arriving pioneers. After hundreds of days of hardship, dust and shortage, this oasis suggested the fulfillment of the Oregon Trail.

Philip Foster partnered in the Barlow toll road (Mount Hood bypass), but his generosity of spirit often usurped profit. View the farmhouse, barn, gardens, blacksmith shop and re-created pioneer store. The home is adorned by an enormous lilac, the first in Oregon. Living history events are popular.

**Where to stay:** Milo McIver State Park (about 12 miles southwest through Estacada) has water and electric sites. Forest Service sites sit along the Clackamas River (southeast) and at the base of Mount Hood (northeast).

**Collier Memorial State Park, Logging Museum, Chiloquin**  
North of Klamath Falls, along Spring Creek and beneath the ponderosa pines and firs, this outdoor exhibit honors logging. Oregon's untouched

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From top, right: Chandler Cabin, built in 1861, is a few blocks away from the Eastern Oregon Museum. The cabin is said to be the oldest wooden structure in Baker County, and is furnished in the style of the late 1880s. Northwest Vintage Car & Motorcycle Museum, located on the grounds at Antique Powerland, includes an outdoor exhibit of a 1938-era Texaco gas station.



forest of 4-foot-diameter trees sponsored a flood of emigrant loggers from the Northwoods of Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan, bringing skills and equipment. Joining them, deserting sailors brought a knowledge of riggings. When walking among the antique equipment, water wagons, horse-powered drag saw, steam donkey, railcars, cats, cranes and diesel trucks, signify the various chapters in logging. A general store, barn, smokehouse and cabins shape Pioneer Village.

**Where to stay:** Across U.S. 97 is park camping.

### Bowman Museum, Prineville

In an old bank, this museum provides another look at frontier life. Visitors can learn about cattle and sheep

conflicts and logging ponderosa pines, as well as Central Oregon's favorite son, Les Schwab, who made his mark in tires, treating customers like his own grandma. The voices of tribal members tell about digging for roots or gathering dogbane for basketry. Tears well at the tribute to the lost promise of the Prineville Hotshot Crew claimed by the Storm King Mountain Fire. Mouse traps, the wooden hands from the first clock in the courthouse tower and the homesteader's secret for keeping milk sweet in hot weather (limewater) are other discoveries.

**Where to stay:** Find BLM and Crook County Fairgrounds camping south of town along Crooked River Back Country Byway. Ochoco and Prineville Reservoirs, also offer scenic campsites.

### Fort Rock Homestead Village Museum, Fort Rock

Southeast of Bend, along Oregon Outback Scenic Byway (SR 31), this tiny community shows what a handful of motivated volunteers can do. They relocated and assembled a pictur-

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From far left: The Gilliam County Historical Museum in Condon features exhibits based on pioneer life. The Bowman Museum in Prineville is housed in an old bank and depicts life as it was on the Oregon frontier.

esque village of rustic cabins, a well-to-do's two-story house, doctor's office, general store, church and school (11 structures to date), saving each from certain demise of time, neglect and weathering or the intentional demolition to protect rangeland. The wind-washed sage-and-rabbitbrush plain of the village all too clearly captures the hardship of homesteading in the high desert. The seasonal visitor center and guided tours fill in details. Off-season viewing is from the parking lot only. At the state park to its north, the tuff ring of Fort Rock draws visitors.

**Where to stay:** About an hour's drive from Fort Rock, off U.S.

All structures at Fort Rock Homestead Village Museum, including the General Store, were relocated to the site and assembled strictly by volunteers.



97-North, La Pine State Park (west) offers a full-service campground; Newberry National Volcanic Monument (east) has U.S. Forest Service campgrounds.

### Gilliam County Historical Museum, Condon

In an old railroad depot in the grain-belt, this museum and its outbuildings explain pioneer life on the Columbia Plateau. Exhibits feature the essentials and homespun charm. View carpenter's tools, household wares and post office stations from towns that have slipped from the map. Learn how S.M. Cooney traded two gunny sacks of mane hair, one of tail hair and an old cow hide to secure a handsome pair of beaded leather gloves sewn by Flora, wife of Celilo Indian Chief Tommy Thompson. The agricultural building holds saddles and tack, and all manner of wagons and trucks. Rice Cabin includes the original 1902 Teddy Roosevelt-signed land grant.

**Where to stay:** Adjacent the museum, at the fairgrounds, Burns Park offers hookup sites. Cottonwood Canyon State Park (26 miles northwest on SR 206) has primitive camping on the John Day River.

### Eastern Oregon Museum, Haines

Bells, dolls and branding irons. North of Baker City, en route to Anthony Lakes on Elkhorn Scenic Byway, this museum on the Oregon Trail examines Western life and welcomes hands-on involvement. Housed in the old school gymnasium, outlying buildings and pioneer park, the extensive collection

tells the story of logging, mining and ranching and early day life in eastern Oregon. Belly up at the Bourne Bar (historically speaking), and see what else you'll find.

**Where to stay:** Anthony Lake Campground (U.S. Forest Service) is about 15 miles northwest via Anthony Lakes Highway/FR 73. **M**

### For More Information

**Antique Powerland, Brooks**

503-393-2424, <http://antiquepowerland.com>

**Benton County Historical Society Museum**

541-929-6230, [www.bentoncountymuseum.org](http://www.bentoncountymuseum.org)

**Bowman Museum, Prineville**

541-447-3715, <http://crookcountyhistorycenter.org>

**Collier Memorial State Park, Logging Museum**

541-783-2471, <https://oregonstateparks.org>

**Eastern Oregon Museum**

541-856-3233, [www.easternoregonmuseum.com](http://www.easternoregonmuseum.com)

**Fort Rock Valley Historical Museum**

541-576-2251, [www.fortrockoregon.com/frvhs.html](http://www.fortrockoregon.com/frvhs.html)

**Gilliam County Historical Museum**

541-384-4233, [www.co.gilliam.or.us/museums.html](http://www.co.gilliam.or.us/museums.html)

**Oregon State Parks**

information: 800-551-6949, camping reservations: 800-452-5687, <http://oregonstateparks.org>

**Philip Foster Farm**

503-637-6324, [www.philipfosterfarm.com](http://www.philipfosterfarm.com)

**Port Orford Lifeboat Station Museum**

541-332-0521, [www.capeblancoheritagesociety.com](http://www.capeblancoheritagesociety.com)

**Tillamook County Pioneer Museum**

503-842-4553, [www.tcpm.org](http://www.tcpm.org)

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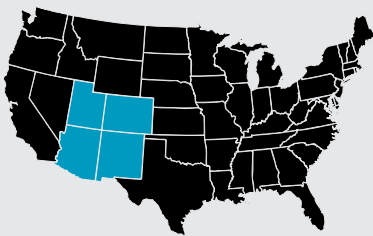
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# MONUMENT

Dubbed Tsé Bii' Ndzisgaii by Plateau is a study in the histo

**A**ccording to the oral tradition of the Navajo people, or Dineh as they prefer, many centuries ago the Earth's surface was formed after flooding waters welled up from the earth below. Deities, animals and their ancestors emerged through a giant reed. With stone cutting tools they cut trenches to drain away the floodwaters and expose the land. When the flood waters were gone, the mud dried to leave the siltstone on the floor of the valley. And then the Beings who had come from below placed the mountains and other landmarks and called it Tsé Bii' Ndzisgaii. We know it as Monument Valley, and it is spectacular!

We were south of Mexican Hat on U.S. Highway 163 in southeast Utah, came over a rise, and got our first view of the massive sandstone buttes



## Navajo Nation

The Navajo Nation Reservation covers more than 25,000 miles in Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico and Utah. For more information, visit <https://navajonationparks.org>.

# MONUMENT VALLEY MARVEL

the Navajo people, this stunning stretch of the Colorado  
 story of Native American relations and Hollywood Westerns

and mesas that make this a truly remarkable destination. Monument Valley straddles Utah and northern Arizona in the northern portion of the sprawling 29,817-square-mile Navajo Reservation, better known as the Navajo Nation. They are a sovereign nation, but their lands are held in trust by the U. S. government. The Navajo National Tribal Council oversees all operations including their own police force, schools, colleges, housing, museums and natural resources.

We entered the Valley among the towering rock formations and arrived at the new Monument Valley KOA campground located at milepost 2 on the Utah-Arizona border. This park has 54 full-hookup, gravel sites, most of them pull through. The campground is open from mid-March until the end of

October. The Wi-Fi is pretty good, but unless you have a satellite you probably won't be watching much TV. But who cares when you are surrounded by breathtaking scenery during the day and awash in brilliant stars at night? On our first night in the park, a full moon came up right next to one of the huge mesas. It was beautiful!

The next day we traveled 5 miles in our motorhome to the Monument Valley Tribal Park and Visitors Center at the east end of Monument Valley Road. It is important to note that this is a free-range area, so drive carefully and watch for horses and cattle on the roads. Admission at the gate is \$20 per vehicle. This is not a National Park but part of the Navajo Nation, so National Park Passes are not accepted. There is plenty of parking

for buses and RVs in front of the visitors center. The View Campground is located next to the tribal park. It has 30 primitive RV sites with no hookups. The registration office does offer some camping supplies, food, drinks and ice. Daniel, the young Navajo guide who would take us on a memorable 17-mile tour down into the valley, was waiting for us in front of the visitors center. You can use your own dinghy vehicle for the trip through the valley, but you would be better off going with a guide in an open-air, four-wheel-drive Jeep or truck they call "Chitties." Prices for



The Rain God Mesa area of Monument Valley is accessible via an unpaved road.



“MONUMENT VALLEY LIES WITHIN THE SOUTHERN THIRD OF THE MILE-HIGH COLORADO PLATEAU, A 130,000-SQUARE-MILE GEOLOGICAL PROVINCE CREATED 570 MILLION YEARS AGO.”

a two-hour tour start at \$40 per person and are readily available. The valley road is unpaved and as rough as they come. ATVs and other off-road-terrain vehicles are not allowed. In addition, there are some places you cannot go unless you are with a Navajo guide. For us, the best reasons were that Daniel explained in detail all the marvelous things we were seeing, and his stories about his people and the valley were captivating. Be sure to bring water and snacks because you will not find any for sale in the valley.

The Navajo reservation, including Monument Valley, lies within the southern third of the mile-high Colorado Plateau, a 130,000-square-mile geological province created some 570 million years ago. Mud from the ocean floor became sandstone held together by the Organ Rock formations

and limestone sediment. The Organ Rocks act as the pedestals for all the monuments in the valley. Our first stop was an overlook where we viewed the West and East Mitten buttes and the Merrick Butte. Both Mittens are more than 6,000 feet in total elevation and are so named because they resemble two gigantic mittens with their thumbs facing inward. According to Daniel, the Navajo believe they are the hands left behind by Holy People to signal that one day they will rule again. Merrick Butte also exceeds 6,000 feet in elevation. This stop, and several others on our tour, had sheltered gift stands where the Navajo sell their handmade jewelry and other crafts. We passed the huge Elephant Butte on our way to the Three Sisters Monument and the John Ford’s Point overlook.

Daniel explained to us that the

The stunning Ford’s Point overlook was named for famous movie director John Ford, who filmed seven Westerns in Monument Valley.

Navajo have lived in the Southwest for more than 500 years. The mountains and sandstone formations are both alive and sacred to his people, providing them with security and a harmony with nature. Countless stories about the valley have been passed down from one Navajo generation to the next.

He then told us the story about a time of great suffering of his people known to them as “The Long Walk.”

In 1848, the United States claimed the New Mexico territories that included the ancestral homelands of the Navajo and Mescalero Apaches. When these tribes resisted the



Goulding’s Lodge, Trading Post and Campground has 66 full-hookup RV sites, all of which offer spectacular views of Monument Valley. The Hogan is the traditional Navajo dwelling. The interior structure is wooden timbers that are completely packed with mud. The door always faces east to welcome the rising sun and should be entered in a clockwise direction.

Photos: Steve Mummell



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Lakeland, FL 33809  
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resulting westward expansion, the government decided to relocate them. It was an ugly chapter in U.S. history. In early 1864, Col. Christopher "Kit" Carson directed the operation with these orders, "All Indian men of the Mescalero (and Navajo) tribe are to be killed whenever and wherever you can find them. The women and children will not be harmed, but you will take them prisoner..." Over several months, their homes and other property were destroyed, and they were herded to Fort Defiance in eastern Arizona. In March of that year, 11,000 Navajo began a 350-mile forced-march through New Mexico to Fort Sumner and a 40-square-mile desolate, wind-swept reservation called the Bosque Redondo. They called it H'weeldi, the place of suffering. There, for four years, they endured, "the time of fear and suffering." Many died from starvation and disease. They lived in crude dug-out holes and the barren land yielded almost no crops. An estimated 20 percent of the Navajo tribe was lost during this period. In early 1868, the U.S. government finally realized that the relocation effort was a failure. In June of that year The Treaty of 1868 was signed at the Bosque Redondo. It returned their native lands to them and established a sovereign Navajo Nation. On June 18, 1868, some 7,000 Navajo men, women and children began the long journey back to their sacred lands. And when their sacred turquoise mountain "Tsoodzit" finally came into sight they were reminded that because of their beliefs, prayers,

The views in every direction from the KOA Campground are wonderful.



strength and hope they had endured.

We stopped at the gift shop next to The Three Sisters monument and John Ford's Point overlook. The Three Sisters is a trio of beautiful spires located at the end of the southeast corner of massive Mitchell Mesa. Ford's Point is named for the legendary Hollywood director who filmed a number of memorable movies in Monument Valley. More about that later ...

Unless we were with a guide like Daniel, we would have never made it to our next stop — Moccasin Arch. All the power of his four-wheel-drive truck was needed to get us through the deep sand of the trail leading to it. It was well worth it. Moccasin Arch is a huge pothole natural sandstone arch, one of several in the valley.

Our next stop between Raingod and Thunderbird Mesas

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was the homestead of one of the most famous Navajos of the 300,000-plus-member tribe, Susie Yazzie. She was a superb weaver, creating beautiful tapestries and rugs in the traditional way on the dirt floor of her traditional Navajo dwelling called a Hogan. Yazzie passed away in 2006 at the age of 90, but her granddaughter carries on her work inside the Hogan. Hogan doors always face east and should be entered in a clockwise direction. Yazzie's granddaughter provided us with an interesting demonstration of how wool is spun into long stands using an old-fashioned spindle. This was followed by a weaving demonstration on her upright loom.

During the final part of the tour we saw in the distance the Yeibicheie sandstone formation and the neighboring Totem Pole butte. Navajo tradition says that these formations are a line of prayer sticks held up by lightning. The 381-foot-high Totem Pole was used in actor/director Clint Eastwood's 1975

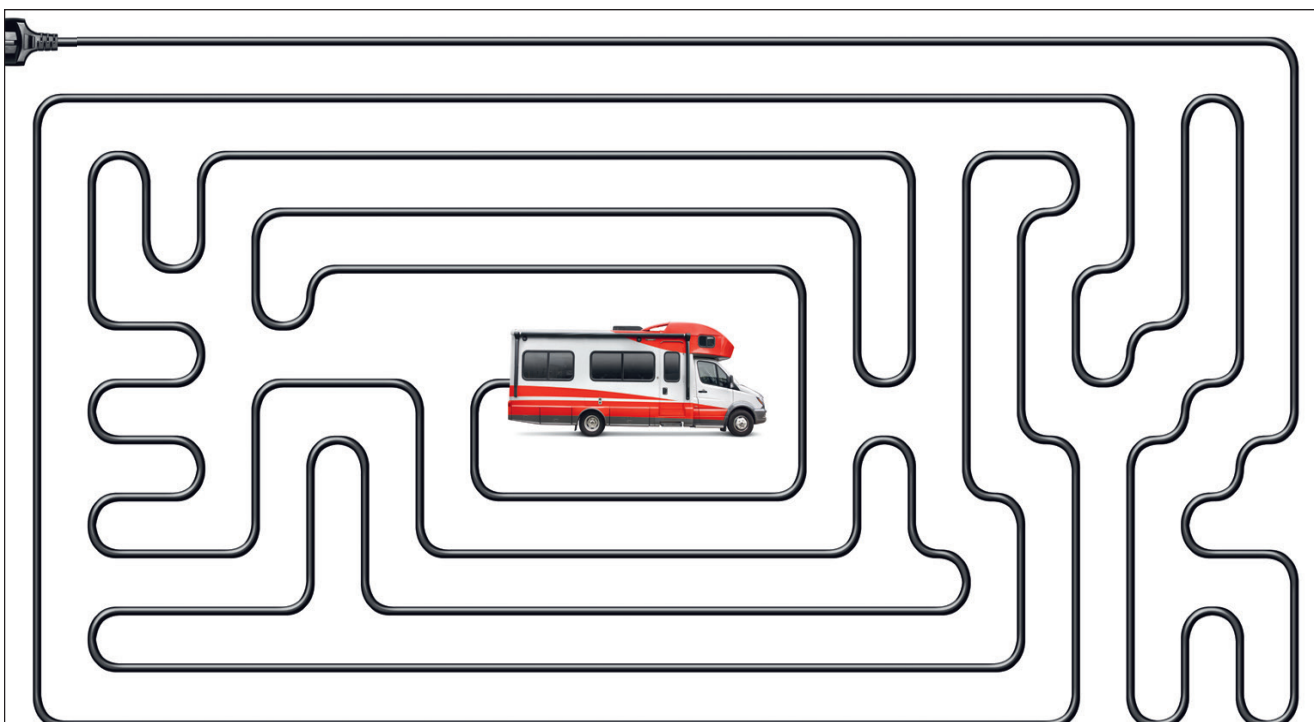
film, "The Eiger Sanction." Eastwood actually scaled it — the last time this was ever allowed by the Navajo.

With our trip through the valley completed, we thanked Daniel for a truly memorable tour and walked to the Tribal Park Visitors Center. In addition to a hotel and premium cabins, the center has a nice full-service restaurant and a trading post that is loaded with handcrafted Navajo jewelry, pottery, wool rugs and blankets. The veranda next to the gift shop is a great place for photos and an awe-inspiring view of the valley. The floor below the gift shop has several rooms containing artifacts and displays that do a nice job explaining the history of the Navajo Nation, from its beginning to its current system of government. And, there is a separate room with wonderful displays that tell the story of the heroic Navajo Code Talkers. During World War II, more than 400 Navajo served in Marine Corps divisions engaged in battle

with Japan. They were involved in a top-secret mission in which they developed a system to send coded messages using their native language. Their code completely baffled the Japanese, and by the end of the war it consisted of nearly 800 terms. It is the only code in military history to never be broken by the enemy. We returned to our campground in the late afternoon after what had been a truly amazing day.

### The Man Who Brought Hollywood to Monument Valley

The next morning, we drove our motorhome south again on Highway 163 and turned west on Monument Valley Road for a short ride to Goulding's Lodge and Trading Post. The RV park here is open year-round and has 66 full-hookup sites on hard-packed red dirt pads. The park's access roads are asphalt. Electrical service is 50-amp on some sites, 30-amp on others. They have cable TV and limited Wi-Fi. Just like our first



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The museum in the original Goulding's Trading Post has a room full of movie memorabilia including this promotional photo of Henry Fonda, Shirley Temple and John Wayne, the three stars of the 1948 John Ford Western, "Fort Apache." More than 400 heroic Navajo Code Talkers served in the Marine Corps during World War II. Using their native language, they developed a system to send coded messages. It completely baffled the Japanese and was never broken.



campground, the views here are spectacular. We parked below the original trading post that dates to the 1920s. It is here that we learned about the person most responsible for bringing the movie industry to the valley — Harry Goulding. Long-time Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater once said, "There are very few men in this world like Harry." Goulding, a cowboy from Colorado, came to Monument Valley in the early 1920s. He and his wife, Leone, lived in a 10-by-12-foot tent for a time before building a small, two-story stone trading post. They carved out a living raising sheep and bartering goods with the Navajo, who had lived in the valley for centuries. Then came the Great Depression of the late 1920s-1930s. It was a terrible time for the Gouldings, but even worse for the Native Americans living here. In 1938, Goulding put a plan in motion that began with an uncertain trip to Hollywood. He had heard that United Artists was looking for a location to film a Western. Armed with an album of 8-by-10 photos of Monument Valley, "bedrolls, a coffeepot and some grub," the Gouldings drove to Hollywood. The

receptionist at United Artists told him there was absolutely no way for him to see anyone about any movie production without an appointment. Goulding went to get his bedroll with the intent to camp out in front of the office. The receptionist decided to call someone. That someone was the location manager for the Western movie "Stagecoach," which was about to begin production. The story goes that he was about to call the police to have Goulding removed. But then he caught a glimpse of some of Goulding's stunning photographs. The rest is Hollywood history! He and legendary director John Ford pored through the photos and asked where in the world they had come from. A short time later, Ford began production of "Stagecoach" on location — in Monument Valley. It was the first of seven films he would direct there, all of them box office hits featuring the unsurpassed beauty of the valley and actors that included John Wayne, Henry Fonda and Shirley Temple. Many other feature films would be produced there as well. For the Navajo, the movie productions were a godsend for their economy.

They were used on the production crews and as extras. They also provided livestock and other goods and services. Ford and Goulding had a long friendship and the Goulding family was able to build their trading post and lodge.

The original trading post is today a museum with photos and memorabilia that provide a great history of the Gouldings' early years. A separate room is filled with original movie posters, promotional photos and original costumes worn by actors in many of the John Ford Westerns. Behind the trading post sits Goulding's original potato cellar with its thick walls and dirt roof. It looks just as it did when it was used as the living quarters of the cavalry officer John Wayne played in the 1949 box-office hit, "She Wore a Yellow Ribbon."

There is nothing else on earth like Monument Valley. The scenery is breathtaking, and the history is remarkable. The wonderful relationship the valley shares with the Native Americans who have lived here for centuries is inspiring. The mesas, the buttes, the stories and the absolute beauty of this place are the kind of stuff they make movies about. **M**

### For More Information

**Goulding's Monument Valley Lodge, Trading Post and Campground**  
435-727-3231, [www.gouldings.com](http://www.gouldings.com)

**Monument Valley KOA**  
800-562-3424, [www.koa/campgrounds/monument-valley](http://www.koa/campgrounds/monument-valley)

**Monument Valley Tribal Park**  
435-727-5870, <https://navajonationparks.org/tribal-parks/monument-valley/>

Moccasin Arch is a huge pothole natural sandstone arch, one of several in Monument Valley.



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# 10 MORE HOBBIES FOR THE ROAD



OUR SIXTH INSTALLMENT OF FUN AND ENTERTAINING PASTIMES FROM RVERS FEATURES ARTS, CRAFTS, MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS AND A HULA HOOP

**W**hile people enjoy the RV lifestyle for a variety of reasons, some common motivators are to travel, enjoy the great outdoors, meet like-minded people and learn new things. RVer's visit state and national parks, tour famous landmarks and cultural attractions, and explore big cities and small towns. The list of recreational activities our mobile community participates in seems endless: hiking, biking, fishing, kayaking, playing golf and pickle ball, ATVing, skiing, hang gliding, parachuting and rock climbing, just to name a few.

This group also enjoys creating and learning. Six years ago, I started asking fellow RVer's about their hobbies. I was surprised to discover the wide variety of artistic and educational pursuits possible in a motorhome: stained glass, woodworking, painting, genealogy, playing musical instruments and studying foreign languages. The people featured in this year's article are as enthusiastic about their fun and entertaining pastimes as ever.



## *Illustrated Travel Journals*

Michele Diamond has taken journaling to a whole new level. Inspired by a garden sketching and journaling class, she created her first illustrated travel journal in 2013. Since then, she's done one each year to capture memories of her RVing adventures, and one of a trip to New Zealand. Her journals include a written account of events and drawings of wildflowers, prickly pear cacti, landscapes, historic landmarks and anything else

that captured her attention. She even drew a map of her four-day trek around Milford Sound, situated on New Zealand's South Island. Michele and her husband, Sumner Schachter, have attended a June music festival in Aspen, Colorado, for the last 10 years. She keeps track of favorite musicians, like Jackson Browne and the Tedeschi Trucks Band.

While Michele creates most entries by hand, at least one noteworthy item was cut from a newspaper: an article with a photo of a bear standing on its hind legs and breaking into a nearby SUV at their campground. They had heard the commotion in the early-morning hours. Later they saw the damage a hungry bear can do when going after food left on the seat of a vehicle.



## Reading

Sumner Schachter is an active guy. When he's camping, most of his time is spent in physical pursuits like biking, hiking or kayaking. When he does sit still, he usually has a book in his hand. Many of the books he reads are selections for his book club, The Epicureans, "A Men's Support Group for Thinking and Drinking." The group has nine members from various professions. They meet eight times a year to discuss books and have lively conversations about family, national and international politics, religion, war, peace, and local events and issues, all with respect and humor as needed. The host prepares the meal, and Sumner reports there are some great chefs in the group. Once a year, they invite their spouses to read the book selection and participate in their discussion and meal. These discussions often continue around a campfire. About half of The Epicureans and their spouses get together for an annual camping trip. Books are frequently a topic in casual conversations, both ones they've read and those considered for future book club selections.

## Hula Hooping

Two weeks before Vanessa Todd left on a six-week RV trip to Alaska, she started hula hooping as a way to stay in shape while on the road. She ordered a collapsible hula hoop from <https://hoopnotica.com>. It comes apart in six segments for compact, easy storage. Vanessa found free introductory classes online at <https://hooplovers.tv>. The skills she learned in a month's time included waist hooping, hip hooping, knee and chest hooping, and hand tricks. This form of exercise helps trim the waist, and improves balance and posture.

Todd prefers to hoop on grass, but she can use a throw rug over gravel surfaces. With her hula hoop, a Bluetooth speaker, an iPod or smart phone and a dance playlist, she's set to go. She hoops for 30 minutes a day to music like "Uptown Funk" by Bruno Mars, "Golden Years" by David Bowie and "Brick House" by the Commodores.



## Fly Tying

Bill Todd's goal for his six-week Alaska trip was to fish "every possible day." An avid fisherman since he was 6 years old, he's been tying flies for about 25 years. He made a portable bench for tying flies out of a cutting board that he takes with him on RV trips. When tying flies, Bill chooses a pattern (most of which have specific "recipes" in terms of materials and the order of applying them) for the fish species he intends to catch and what they are currently eating. He also chooses an appropriate hook for the fly. For example, when fishing for sockeye salmon, he uses a large, heavy hook because of their hard-fighting character.

Bill has reeled in sockeye in the Kenai and Russian rivers, arctic char in Cooper Lake and northern pike in the Yukon. He paid \$300 to freeze and ship home the first 35 pounds of fish he caught. After that, they ate what he caught or released the fish. For catch and release, he uses a barbless hook. Bill said, "A fish is too valuable a resource to catch just once."

## Hand-painted Silk Scarves

My sister-in-law, Roxanna Zalmanek, makes hand-painted scarves and bandanas. Her husband, Charlie, made PVC frames that allow her to attach long scarves or square bandanas. While she has painted on silk and cotton, she prefers silk. Once the silk is on the frame, she uses a resist to create the pattern, so dyes don't run together, allowing for more detail. The resist is like a glue that will wash out after the dyes are applied. Sometimes she tints the resist to create a more colorful line. In three years, she's made about 150 scarves, bandanas and pillow covers. Most of them have floral or wildlife designs. The actual painting of the fabric is an outdoor activity since the silk dyes would permanently stain any surface they touch.

Another process Roxanna uses to make scarves is *arashi shibori*,



an ancient Japanese technique of tie dying. She attaches the fabric to a circular tube, wraps it with string, scrunches it up, then hand paints it. The result of *arashi* (Japanese word for "storm") *shibori* is a diagonal stripe pattern reminiscent of storm-driven rain.

## Caricature Wood Carver

When Jim Miller was 14 years old, he learned wood carving in Boy Scouts. In more recent years, he further developed his skills by taking caricature carving lessons from several of the top woodcarvers in the nation. Jim enjoys making sculptures that look like his friends. Initially he measures his subject's mouth, eyes and nose to get the proportions correct. He takes a photo and works

from that. He paints the finished product, then presents the likeness as a gift to his friend. He's given away nearly 70 carvings over the last 20 years. These lucky people are the recipients of fine pieces of work. Jim, a master wood carver,



has won close to 100 blue ribbons in various competitions, including a Best of Show at the Indio Date Festival.

The tools he needs for woodcarving — chisels, gouges and knives — are easily stored in his motorhome. For his sculptures, he uses basswood from Minnesota, which has no knots and a smooth, even grain.

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## 10 MORE HOBBIES FOR THE ROAD

### Porcelain Mosaics

Sixteen years ago, Nancy Gibbs' sisters learned to make mixed-media, three-dimensional mosaics at a workshop on the California coast with a leading mosaic artist. Her younger sister, Donna, then taught Nancy how to make these lovely works of art. Nancy searches antique shops and garage sales for interesting ceramic and porcelain figurines and dishes. The figurines become the centerpieces of her mosaics. She breaks dishes to make tiles. When friends accidentally break a dish, they save the pieces for Nancy, knowing she will turn their misfortune into something beautiful.

Nancy sold several mosaics at a juried art show in Colorado, but then decided the fun is in the making, not the selling. Now she either hangs them in her own home or gives them away.



### Polymer Clay Jewelry

Jennifer Patterson has had a lifelong interest in art, exploring several mediums before discovering polymer clay 20 years ago. She eventually started making jewelry in quilt block designs. Now she travels the country in an RV selling her products at various shows. Her quilt designs are popular, especially at quilt shows, and at Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she sells colorful balloon-shaped jewelry.

She creates custom colors by running FIMO polymer clay through a food processor and a pasta machine to blend colors. To get color gradation, she runs two or more solid colors through the pasta machine up to 20 times. Strands of clay are stacked together to create intricate patterns. This process can take up to three weeks. The final product is baked in a toaster oven for one hour at 265 degrees Fahrenheit.



Photo: Bob Oliver



## Kite Flyers

In 2001, Jim Foster was intrigued by four-line controllable stunt kite flying. Since then, he and his wife, Lynn, have built 20 kites. Flying as the pairs team "The Kite Kids," they have participated in kite festivals around the world. Teams of two, four, six, eight or more — the world record is a group of 81 people — fly kites together. Jim is often the lead, calling out commands. It's a lot like a square-dance caller, but in kite flying, the caller gets to play along.

The best winds for flying a kite are at the beach. With steady winds, the complex routines, often choreographed to music, can be very precise. Even with the erratic winds at Balloon Fiesta in Albuquerque, Jim and Lynn put on an impressive impromptu show for some of the people who were attending an RV rally. They demonstrated a "kiss," which looks like a butterfly when the kites touch.




Photo: Chuck Robinson



## Flutist

Beginning her second year RVing and anticipating life as a snowbird, Debbie Robinson realized she would have some free time on her hands. Her musical experience included playing the piano and clarinet. Debbie's piano keyboard was too big for their 25-foot motorhome. Unbeknownst to her husband, she had an overwhelming desire to play the flute. When she was 58, she purchased a flute and taught herself how to play. Now that she has time to practice regularly, she enjoys playing Beatles tunes, and other classic rock and pop music, plus songs like Beethoven's "Für Elise" and Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer."

Debbie is also an avid reader of nonfiction books. In a recent read, "The Social Conquest of Earth," the author, Edward O. Wilson, writes, "To perform music is human nature ... Learning to play a musical instrument even alters the structure of the brain ... Music is closely linked to language in mental development." Her new hobby is not only challenging, fun and entertaining, it's healthy, too. Debbie's encouragement to others is, "It's never too late to pick up an instrument." 

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# Fightin' Irish

COACHMEN'S LEPRECHAUN PREMIER 260DS IS FOR FAMILY CAMPING IN STYLE

By Chris Dougherty

**M**ost lines of motorhomes have at least a couple of trim levels, giving potential buyers an opportunity to upgrade if the budget allows for the extra-cost luxury features. Given the choice, buyers must make a decision if the upgrades are cost effective and meet the family's requirements for a motorhome. In the October 2018 issue, we published a test of the 2019 Coachmen Freelander 26RS, which is a similar floorplan to the Leprechaun Premier 260DS model evaluated here. Does an upgrade make sense and fit your lifestyle? Read on and you be the judge.

The Leprechaun Premiere and Freelander are structurally identical; the latter equipped with only one slide rather than two. Both have the same chassis offerings: Ford E-450 or Chevrolet 4500. So, if you belong to Team Oval or Team Bowtie, you can have a choice of chassis. Both chassis are modified in-house for a motorhome body and are fitted with Firestone's Ride-Rite air suspension. One Freelander floorplan, the 20CB,

is also available on the Ford Transit underpinnings.

To the credit of the company's management, Coachmen switched all of its side wall production to Azdel, which is a waterproof backer for the fiberglass that virtually eliminates dry rot and delamination from leaks. Class C motorhomes and truck campers have a long-standing issue with cabover leaking and failure because of complex seams and a lack of roof maintenance.

While water damage can still occur if the RV owner doesn't do the proper maintenance, the major structural issues from water intrusion are reduced.

Basically, the differences between the two motorhomes are what you can see and feel. It's like comparing a Buick and Chevrolet; both are similar in structure, but the former has better paint and trim, nicer interior furnishings and some extra niceties.

## The Inside Scoop

Stepping into the Leprechaun, it's immediately evident that the interior finishes are more appealing than the Freelander. The Leprechaun line has two interior décor options, chocolate and vanilla, which were later renamed mocha and cream. The furniture is clad in soft vinyl, and the extensive



Photos: Chris Dougherty



Storage is ample in the 260DS, especially in the galley. The double-door refrigerator and pantry (right) are located in a slideout and accessible when the slide is extended. The kitchen drawers (far right) are nicely hidden at the base of the galley's peninsula-counter configuration and are quite deep.



cappuccino cherry wood grain cabinets have a high-gloss finish that gives the interior a high-end look. The cabinets over the sofa (or optional recliners, \$761) have glass door inserts with an LED backlight. We're not sure how this will work out for buyers with a lot of stuff in the cabinet, as the items (at least in shadow) appear through the glass — but pre-sale, it looks pretty good. If nothing else, the light will help find things in the inevitable black hole formed in many RV cabinets.

The galley is compact but usable. Cooking chores will have to be efficient, and the L-shaped dinette table can serve as additional prep space. Coachmen added a flip-up counter to the side of the cabinet near the sink to add workspace, and the deep, single-bowl round plastic sink and range top can be covered if more space is needed.

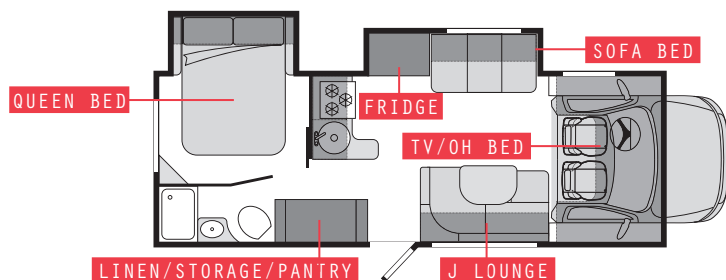
At first glance, we were concerned with what appeared to be a complete lack of drawers in the galley. But, simply open the vertical base cabinet door at the end of the peninsula, and four drawers are exposed. While not huge, they are deep and long enough to hold a variety of items. The rest of the base cabinet has lots of open room, and

enterprising RVers can create solutions to utilize available space.

The cabover on the test model had a 57-by-95-inch mattress with a 32-inch LED HDTV on a swing-away bracket. A DVD player is mounted under an adjacent cabinet. The bed is relatively comfortable and easy to climb onto with the standard steel ladder. The



Featuring a 57-by-95-inch mattress and 32-inch LED TV on a swing-away bracket, the cabover bed area (above) is fun for kids and adults alike. The windshield and opening driver's-side window offer great views. The standard quick-release net (above, right) helps to prevent occupants from rolling out of bed.





Far left: We understand that windows add weight and cost, but the fact there are no opening windows in the bedroom (far left) is a bit of a disappointment. An additional MaxxFan will pull cooler air from the front of the coach, however. The bathroom (left) is functional but tight, and passed all of our sit-on-the-toilet, stand-in-the-shower and brush-your-teeth tests.

front windshield, which is part of the optional molded fiberglass front cap (\$630.75) offers not only more light, but a great, fort-like vantage point for the kids to spy on the campground. A driver's-side window opens for ventilation, and a MaxxFan with cover (part of the Comfort and Convenience Package, \$3,190), directly overhead creates a soothing breeze.

Techies will like the Leprechaun, which not only has USB power points throughout the interior, but every unit has a WiFiRanger as a "mandatory" option for 2019 (\$245). While the router was completely hidden (read: we searched and couldn't find it) there's a power switch under the kitchen cabinet.

The master bedroom has a queen bed in a slideout that folds in half for the slide to retract. While perhaps not the most convenient arrangement, it works well, and the foam mattress is pretty comfortable. Kudos to the designers for including bedside tables and device connections. Another MaxxFan is included with the package.

As was the case with the Frelander, the side-bath design is pretty compact. We noted that the vanity was small in the Frelander, and in the Leprechaun, the company has added a slide-out countertop

from the wall, over top of the toilet to the vanity. It works, but sitting on the toilet is tight for those people who are larger and taller. A sit-down test before buying is certainly in order.

The cab area is standard Chevrolet, but with some added faux-carbon fiber applique (which was coming off the dash) and re-upholstered two-tone stock seats. The Jensen JRV9000 entertainment system (with navigation, Apple CarPlay, and side- and rear-view cameras) has plenty of features, but the function isn't entirely on par with some of the mainstream stereo manufacturers (in fact, we couldn't make it work right). It's possible the stereo needed a firmware update. Additionally, instead of using mirror-mounted side cameras, Coachmen installed fender-mounted cameras, which are blocked by the main body and mostly unusable. That said, the Jensen stereo can be easily upgraded via the aftermarket for audiophiles. There are some great cab features, including an integrated dashboard inverter, and optional rotating driver and passenger seats (\$390.05 each), which complement the living space seating.

### Behind the Wheel

The Chevrolet Class C cutaway chassis is built for Chevrolet by Navistar, and this chassis handles

the unloaded motorhome body adequately. The aforementioned Ride-Rite user-adjustable, air-bag suspension is an excellent addition, helping stabilize the motorhome from sway and rear-end sag. Most controls are well within reach and view, but the feel of the materials is a bit underwhelming.

One feature many motorhome owners in the gas world don't utilize nearly enough is the transmission tow/haul mode. While it's common to think that it's only for towing, it should also be activated when the motorhome is loaded for a trip. The tow/haul mode changes the shift pattern for better load handling, as well as automatically downshifting for slowing and stopping. When activated during the test drives, the hold-back was impressive and reduced the load on the brakes. Engine noise is tolerable, and the motorhome accelerated and held highway speeds well.

Under the hood, daily-check items like fluids are easily accessible. Power heated mirrors are added to allow good visibility around the body, and below the doors are sturdy fiberglass running boards, which are painted to match. Both are also included in the Comfort and Convenience Package.

### The Outside Story

The Leprechaun Premier starts out with color-infused high-gloss side walls, and a painted-to-match cab, in a choice of standard Carmel, or full-paint Crimson Sunrise or Ebony Star (\$8,925). The Frelander has a



### WiFi Ranger

Standard on the 260DS, the WiFiRanger is well-hidden, and is activated by this switch in the kitchen. Our tests clearly demonstrated the benefit of this device.

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The galley and living areas (above) are roomy with the slideout extended. The dinette is a comfortable place for passengers to sit and work on crafts while on the road. The rear exterior storage (right) is big enough for all your gear (while heeding weight ratings).

tan body and OEM factory white cab. Does a less snazzy exterior work? Sure, but for some of us, looks matter. The optional molded fiberglass front cap with LED accents and automotive-type windshield (\$630.75) make for a nice addition as well. Exterior fit and finish appear tight and well-made.

Outside storage is plentiful and, as is customary with Coachmen, awning size is maximized. Under the awning is a cabinet that can be fitted with an HDTV; the connections are supplied, as is space for other small components and patio necessities. Of particular note is the size of the rear storage compartment, which makes taking along all the toys and necessities practical. As with the Frelander, an optional solidly mounted grilling station is available for the rear passenger-side compartment (\$587), a very useful feature.

The company touts an optional Camping Cozy Package (\$1,298) for its ability to extend the camping season. Included in the package (not part of the test motorhome equipment list) are dual-pane windows, heated tank pads and tank gate valves. To accommodate the bathroom on the passenger's side,



the holding tank pipes are routed across the underside. This maintains the correct pitch for dumping, but also potentially exposes the pipes; additional steps may need to be taken to prevent freezing in extreme weather.

Lastly, the test unit was equipped with optional Equalizer stabilizing jacks (\$1,885). Using a switch in a panel near the door, the stabilizer jacks can be deployed before the slides are extended. The stabilizer is good for minimizing vehicle movement, and can control side-to-side attitude if loading is imbalanced while in camp.

### The Final Word

We liked the Leprechaun for its solid construction, use of Azdel, feature set, overall comfort and usability for the price. The Frelander had an MSRP of \$88,201, and the Leprechaun 260DS, an as-tested MSRP of \$104,960, making a \$16,759 differential. Other options include a side-by-side refrigerator (\$2,892), recliner chairs (\$761) and

## Manufacturer's Specifications

### Chassis

Model	Chevrolet Express Cutaway
Engine	6.0L V-8
SAE Hp	341 hp @ 5,400 rpm
Torque	373 lb-ft @ 4,200 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	4.10:1
Tires	LT225/75R16E
Wheelbase	159"
Brakes Front/Rear	Disc with anti-lock
Suspension Front/Rear	Independent coil spring/ multi-leaf
Fuel Capacity	57 gal
Warranty	5 years/60,000 miles powertrain; 3 years/36,000 miles bumper to bumper

### Coach

Exterior Length	27' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 4"
Exterior Height with A/C	10' 11"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	6' 11"
Construction	Aluminum frame; laminated side walls with Azdel underlayment; laminated roof with TPO; laminated, aluminum framed dual-layer floor
Freshwater Capacity	50 gal
Black-water Capacity	31 gal
Gray-water Capacity	31 gal
Water-heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-gas Capacity	16 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	30,000 Btu
Refrigerator	6.0-cu-ft
Inverter	N/A
Charger	55 amp
Batteries (1) starting 12-volt; (1) auxiliary, 12-volt	
AC Generator	4.0kW gasoline
MSRP	\$92,502.75
MSRP As Tested	\$104,960
Warranty	12 months/12,000 miles

### Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,600 lbs/9,600 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	14,200 lbs/20,000 lbs
ROCCC	2,630 lbs
DRY WEIGHT	1,104 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)

a hydraulic leveling system (\$3,661). If you're looking for a family-friendly or couples Class C, the Coachmen Leprechaun Premiere 260DS will allow you to travel in style. **M**

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By Chris Hemer

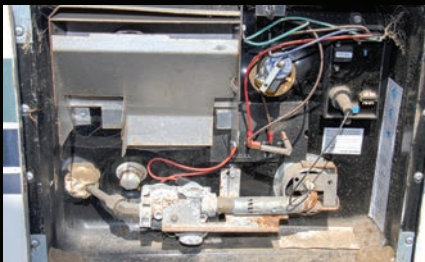
# Awakening

Keeping a motorhome clean, comfortable and safe is the best way to start the travel season — here's how the pros do it

**F**or an eternity, it seems, you've suffered. Gazing out at the leaden clouds. Wishing away the rain and snow. Impatiently waiting for that first glorious day of spring when you can finally bring your motorhome out of hibernation and kick another travel season into gear. Well, that time is rapidly approaching, but before you give in to the wanton travel bug nesting within, consider that your motorhome may

not have had the most peaceful winter's rest — especially if it was stored outdoors. Rain, snow, wind and icy conditions can cause a number of nagging maladies, not to mention vermin/bug infestation, mold/mildew and an overall exterior condition that belies your steadfast detailing regimen.

Not to worry. With a systematic plan of attack, your motorhome can work and look like new again. All it takes is a checklist, a few good products and some elbow grease and you'll be ready to hit the road again with confidence.



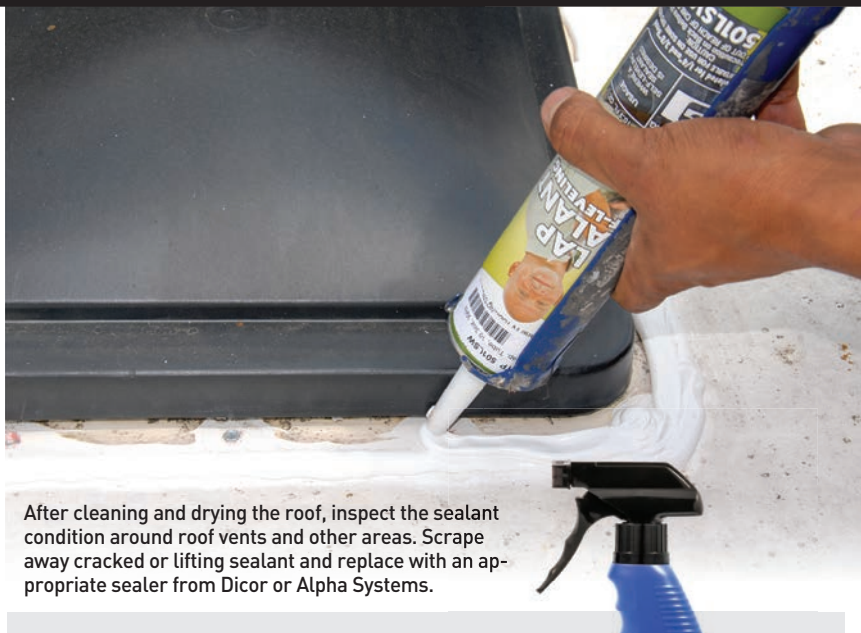
Spiders, wasps, mud daubers and other critters like to seek refuge inside refrigerator and water heater compartments — the burner tubes and flues in particular — so make sure to check these thoroughly before operating.

Photos: Chris Hemer and participating manufacturers

## Initial Inspection

The first step is to take a walk around the motorhome and see if anything looks damaged or out of place. Begin with the tires, checking the pressure in each and inspecting them for exterior cracks or signs of rot, particularly if they've been parked in standing water. If you've had the motorhome for a few years, you should also check the tire's date of manufacture, as tires can "time out" after six to 10 years (depending on storage conditions and exposure to the elements) and should be replaced even if they still look new. Open exterior compartments for the water heater, furnace (with exterior access) and refrigerator, and look for signs of fuzzy tenants like spiders, yellow jackets and mud daubers that may have taken up residence in the burner tubes and other areas (insects seem to enjoy the smell of LP-gas). Check the condition of sealants around exterior compartment doors, and reseal as necessary with a product like Geocel Pro Flex RV or a high-quality exterior silicone such as Lexel or GE Silicone II.

Next, check the condition of the batteries (or have them checked) and charge them if necessary, either by plugging in or with a battery charger if they have been stored off-site. An inspection is especially important if the motorhome has been plugged into AC power or if the batteries have been exposed to freezing winter; either condition can damage or



After cleaning and drying the roof, inspect the sealant condition around roof vents and other areas. Scrape away cracked or lifting sealant and replace with an appropriate sealer from Dicor or Alpha Systems.

ruin a battery. Verify that you have power inside the motorhome, both 12-volt DC (battery) and 120-volt AC (shorepower). Run a safety check to verify that the exterior running lights, turn signals, etc., are working properly and that no bulbs require replacement.

Open the engine compartment for a visual inspection. Rats, mice and even stray cats can make a temporary home on the engine, and you don't want to find that out after you start it up, if you get our meaning. Check thoroughly for, and remove, any nesting material. If everything looks clear, check coolant level and make sure the fluid is still within factory mileage and time limits and flush, if necessary. Start and run the engine, listening for any



Mildew stains can pop up just about anywhere in a motorhome that is stored in damp climates. Camco's Pro-Strength Mildew Stain Remover is formulated to restore the appearance of headliners, covers, awnings and other areas in and around the motorhome.

unusual sounds. After a few minutes, look for oil/coolant leaks, then check the transmission fluid level. This usually must be done with the engine hot idling in NEUTRAL or PARK — check the owner's manual if you're not sure. Turn off the engine and verify that the engine oil dipstick shows the proper level.



Camco offers extension poles, soft bristle brushes and microfiber cleaning heads for cleaning the motorhome effectively with minimal effort.

## Spring Checklist

### EXTERIOR

- Charge batteries
- Check tire pressure, condition
- Have brakes inspected
- Inspect suspension
- Operate leveling jacks and inspect for leaks
- De-winterize (if applicable)
- Fill/sanitize freshwater system
- Inspect exterior for insect/rodent infestation/damage
- Inspect roof for cracked sealant, other damage
- Check awning for proper operation
- Perform safety check (test brake-lights, running lights, turn signals)

### INTERIOR

- Test electrical system (both 120-volt AC and 12-volt DC)
- Check fire extinguisher
- Test smoke alarm/LP-gas/carbon monoxide alarms and replace batteries (if applicable). Check dates on detectors and replace if expired
- Test freshwater system, plumbing
- Have LP-gas system tested/inspected
- Run LP-gas appliances (furnace, water heater, stove, refrigerator)



Poli Glow can be used to restore faded fiberglass; complete kit includes 32-ounce bottles of Poli Prep and Poli Glow, mitt applicator and scrub pad with handle.

## Clean and Detail

If weather and temperature permit, now is a good time to give the motorhome a bath to wash off the months of grime. Since the roof is where most of the dirt collects, start there first. Common roof materials on newer coaches include aluminum, fiberglass and membranes made of rubber (EPDM), thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO) and polyvinyl chloride (PVC). Membrane roofs are different from solid-surface roofs because the membrane and sealants are more porous and susceptible to damage from foreign objects and neglect. In addition, ignoring a rubber roof will result in ugly side effects such as chalking and black streaks, which can run down the side walls. A variety of products are available specifically for cleaning and protecting RV rubber

roofs, including Camco's appropriately named Rubber Roof Cleaner and Conditioner and Dometic's RV Roof Cleaner/Sealer.

Fiberglass and aluminum roofs can be cleaned like the rest of the exterior surfaces; in other words, hosed off and gently agitated with a soft bristle brush (designed for vehicle detailing) and some RV wash. You can do this from the ground using an extension pole but, depending upon your balance and how comfortable you are with heights, you may choose to do this job on your hands and knees while on the roof. Here again, companies like Camco offer a wide range of helpful products, including microfiber wash heads, brush attachments, extension poles and more.

While on the roof, inspect all

seams, and ensure that the sealant around roof vents and other areas is in good condition; otherwise, scrape away old sealant with a plastic putty knife and reseal with an RV-specific product like Dacor's self-leveling Lap Sealant or Alpha Systems' Self-leveling RV Sealant, depending on the type of roof (Alpha Systems is formulated for TPO roofs). Alternately, seams, as well as damaged areas, can be repaired with EternaBond MicroSealant tape. Check roof vent hatches for



From far left: Thetford's Wash & Wax is a two-in-one product that effectively removes black streaks, bugs, dirt and road film leaving behind a protective coat. Dirt, grime and deteriorating rubber/sealants on the roof can result in dreaded black streaks down the front, back and sides. Thetford's Premium RV Black Streak & Bug Remover easily removes these stains from gelcoat, fiberglass and painted aluminum. As a side benefit, it also breaks down baked-on bugs. Founded in 1973, Star brite offers a wide range of RV-specific products, including Premium RV Wash, Premium RV Wash & Wax, Premium RV Polish and many others.



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Awnings can be subjected to dirt, tree sap and bird droppings while open, and mold/mildew while closed. Camco's Pro-Strength Awning Cleaner is a non-bleaching formula that is claimed to effectively remove these stains and also offers a UV-blocker for maximum protection.

cracks or other damage, and make sure vent covers are in good condition and not brittle or cracking.

When you're finished with the roof, spray the sides, front and back with a pressurized hose attachment to blast off most of the surface dirt and roof runoff. Use caution if using a power pressure washer, which can damage vinyl graphics. Then, use the aforementioned wash brush, designed for detailing, or a wash pad on an extension pole and some car wash soap/RV wash to clean the surface. Some good choices here include Camco's Carnuba Wash & Wax, Dometic's Wash N' Wax, Star brite's Premium RV Wash/Wash & Wax and Thetford's Premium RV Wash & Wax. Rinse the surface, then use a good quality silicone squeegee or Water Blade to dry it because this will dramatically reduce your efforts.

Now is also a good time to inspect the exterior fiberglass for signs of dullness or chalking; if the surface is in need of some TLC, Poli Glow offers a complete kit that includes 32-ounce containers of Poli Glow and Poli Prep (good for a 30-32-foot motorhome), a mitt applicator and scrub pad with handle. Poli Glow is easily applied without the need for rubbing or

# Cleaning House

A motorhome's interior may be a mix of carpet, fabric upholstery, leather/ultraleather, tile, stone, fiberglass and wood, each with its own cleaning regimen. It helps to know what products are available for cleaning these areas, and how they should be cleaned.

**Carpet:** Look for products that have been awarded the Carpet and Rug Institute ([www.carpet-rug.org](http://www.carpet-rug.org)) seal of approval, which identifies effective carpet cleaning solutions and equipment that clean carpet the right way and prevent damage. Spot Shot, a product of the WD-40 Co., is one such product.



**Countertops:** Countertops come in a wide range of materials today, ranging from tried-and-true laminates and solid surfaces like Corian to natural stone and man-made "engineered" stone products. Most all-purpose cleaning products like Roadmaster's Voom! RV Cleaner will do the job effectively — just remember to avoid abrasive products when cleaning solid surface counters in particular, as they can scratch. The only other thing to be aware of is that natural stone is porous, even if a coating has been applied. That means there are nooks and crannies in the surface that can allow bacteria to grow, so make sure you use an antibacterial cleaner on these surfaces to

buffing, and is formulated to last up to 12 months.

Deploy the slides to make sure that they are functioning properly. Inspect the seals for integrity and

be safe, and use non-scratching pads to remove tough stains. Engineered-stone products look and feel like natural stone but are non-porous. If in doubt, ask the dealer/manufacturer what product was used in your motorhome, and its recommendations for cleaning it.

**Fiberglass:** Above all, remember that, while fiberglass is strong, its surface is delicate and can be easily damaged by some abrasive pads and/or products. In sinks, use a store-bought, non-abrasive cleanser, a specialty product designed specifically for cleaning fiberglass, or even baking soda on a sponge dipped in white vinegar. In showers, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure; using a squeegee and a hand towel to remove water from the walls and glass will prevent hard-water spots from forming. Otherwise, the same methods mentioned above will get the job done here as well.

**Furniture and upholstery:** These soft goods seem to change constantly in motorhomes, as manufacturers attempt to keep their interior designs fresh and contemporary. Generally speaking, most of the techniques used to clean carpet will work on fabric furniture, but it's a good idea to find out how to clean specific furniture, and what product to use, before an accident happens. When in doubt, contact the furniture manufacturer for its recommendations. Happily, ultraleather, vinyl and even most leather products can be cleaned with a damp sponge or cloth, and there are a variety of leather/vinyl conditioning products on the market as well.

confirm that they are still supple and that there are no large gaps or cracks; Thetford and others market rubber-seal treatments designed for slides. If you have slide toppers,



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check the condition of these as well, making sure there are no tears or signs of mold/mildew. Same goes for the patio awning. If extra care in these areas is necessary, Camco offers both an Awning Cleaner and Mildew Stain remover to help you get the job done.

### Systems Check

Hopefully, the water tank was drained before putting the motorhome in storage. Before leaving on the first trip, the tank should be filled and sanitized. If you're the DIY type, you may elect to flush the freshwater system yourself, and sanitize it with a diluted chlorine bleach solution or with a kit like Thetford's Fresh Water Tank Sanitizer. Fill the freshwater tank with water, then make sure the air has been bled from all faucets and showerhead(s) and that the demand pump is providing adequate flow/pressure. Now is a good time to inspect/clean the water pump filter.

In a perfect world, the LP-gas

After flushing and sanitizing the freshwater system, make sure there's good flow from every faucet/showerhead in the motorhome, inside and out.

system should be pressure-drop tested every year — something a certified RV technician can do. Once the pressure is confirmed, and there are no leaks in the system, run the stove and fire up the water heater, then run the furnace for a few minutes to make sure that it is producing heat and the fan is working properly. Operate the refrigerator on LP-gas mode, if so equipped, and also verify that the refrigerator is working on 120-volt AC. If a problem is detected, schedule an appointment at the repair center right away; getting in the queue during the time everyone is looking for service can lead to travel delays.

Finally, go through the motorhome and make sure that the LP-gas, carbon monoxide and smoke detectors are functioning, up to date and have fresh



batteries if they're battery-operated, and that the fire extinguisher(s) is up to date and full. Now is also a good time to make sure that the emergency exit(s) unlatches and operates freely.

### Superior Interior

Hopefully you had time to clean the interior and took steps to make sure it stayed dry before you closed it down for the season. If not, you could be greeted by the not-so-pleasant scents of must and mildew. If that's the case, the first step is to open the windows and doors to let the interior air out, then use a desiccant product like DampRid.

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DampRid's desiccant crystals absorb excess moisture that can cause mold/mildew and warped cabinets. DampRid's products are offered in several versions to suit specific needs and are available in Fragrance Free, Fresh Scent, Lavender Vanilla and Citrus Fresh. Kanberra products are now offered by Poli Glow, and are available in gel, spray and other products. Kanberra contains Australian tea tree oil, which offers a fresh scent and natural, antibacterial properties.

### Sources

- Camco Manufacturing Inc.**  
800-334-2004, [www.camco.net](http://www.camco.net)
- DampRid**  
888-326-7743, <https://damprid.com>
- Dicor Corp.**  
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800-544-4881, [www.dometic.com](http://www.dometic.com)
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716-683-3000, <https://kanberragel.com>
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800-922-5013, <https://poliglow-int.com>
- Roadmaster Inc.**  
800-669-9690, <http://roadmasterinc.com>
- RV Air Inc.**  
844-782-4746, <https://rvair.com>
- Star brite Inc.**  
800-327-8583, [www.starbrite.com](http://www.starbrite.com)
- Theftord Corp.**  
800-543-1219, [www.thetford.com](http://www.thetford.com)

DampRid is an all-natural product that traps excess moisture and eliminates musty odors. The company offers a convenient, single-use moisture absorber for RVs that requires no electricity or power and is said to last for up to 45 days. Kanberra Gel, meanwhile, is a popular, all-natural product that allows the antibacterial properties of Australian tea tree oils to become airborne through evaporative release, resulting in cleaner, fresher air, according to the company.

Before hitting the road, remove and inspect the filter from each air conditioner. These filters can be cleaned easily with water and then allowed to air dry. If replacement is required, or if you're looking for a more effective

product, consider an air filter from RV Air. The company's patented filter is made of unwoven polyester and blocks particles as small as 3 microns, according to RV Air, including pollen, dust, mold spores, pet dander and other allergens.

Once you've given your motorhome the once over, a good pre-travel ritual is to spend the first night (or weekend) in your own driveway, or someplace else close by. This way, you can conduct a "real world" test in a practical situation, and make sure that everything works correctly. Now get out there and enjoy! **M**



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# Function Without Frills

Winnebago's newly created Sprinter-based Vita Class C has a solid foundation and an appealing price tag By Kevin Livingston

**P**artaking in the RV lifestyle has certain meanings and goals, and revolves around individual activities and special interests when traveling. Many of these lifetime goals and aspirations reside deep in the heart and soul of each person and fruition is easily attainable while traveling in a motorhome. How apropos is it that Winnebago named its latest Sprinter-based Class C, "Vita," which is Italian for "Life." The Forest City, Iowa, icon created a new model for those on a lesser budget, but without sacrificing the niceties that make motorhome travel so appealing. Through pinpoint targeting of componentry, the company managed to introduce a more-affordable, easy-to-handle motorhome for a larger segment of the buying public, while maintaining the Mercedes-Benz flamboyancy and offering a good selection of features that enhance livability.

The 2019 Vita 24F begins its life on the über-popular Sprinter chassis that offers time-proven performance and solid handling, and although the cockpit is purpose-built on the functional side, the Vita boasts everything you could possibly want in a small-stature, super-capable motorhome. While traveling at highway speeds, strong crosswinds presented little fear of losing confidence, and

**ABOVE:** The Vita's classic exterior profile is complemented by chrome wheel liners and a graphics package that's not overstated.



**BELOW:** Rear corner bed offers decent comfort for two adults. Separate lavatory adds bathroom versatility. Compact residential refrigerator offers generous interior space. Bottom: Dinette is roomy enough to seat four people. Expansive window provides a good view of the outside. Pull-down window shades, LED lighting and spacious cabinets are welcome features.



as a matter of fact, the motorhome climbed mountain passes without slowing to a snail's pace. Once we reached our destination, Joshua Tree National Park in Southern California, the svelte motorhome felt right at home on the narrow roadways and in tight campgrounds. Obviously, maneuvering in a natural environment with close quarters, common in public camping areas, was right up this motorhome's alley.

The six-cylinder turbodiesel engine may not be a barnburner, but the 188 ponies do a credible job keeping up with fast-moving traffic (a California trademark), and since the engine sips fuel, the smiles get even bigger during fill-ups. Supporting the drivetrain

is a smooth, yet sturdy suspension, providing a comfortable and sporty ride without creating undue roughness and the jitters associated with passing big rigs. This is an important factor for newbies who have heard stories about roadway stability issues in wind and around commercial trucks.

Exterior styling follows the lines of a more conventional Class C, whereas the cabover portion is larger to accommodate a bigger sleeping area above the cockpit. While not as aerodynamic as Sprinter-based motorhomes with

more radical sloping front caps, the Vita is by no means bulky looking, and the extra space will be welcome for families with youngsters who relish the up-high sleeping area. A single slideout enhances floor space enough to ward off claustrophobia and the motorhome is nicely equipped with self-containment features that make off-grid (think National and State parks) possible. These consist of industry-leading capacities for its class with a 37-gallon freshwater tank, a 41-gallon black tank, a 41-gallon

gray tank and 12.2 gallons of LP-gas capacity. Top it all off with a pair of Group 31 12-volt deep-cycle AGM batteries, a 55-amp power converter, a 1,000-watt inverter, a Cummins Onan LP-gas generator and a 200-watt solar system, and the Vita can easily forgo hookups for a reasonable length of time. To use the Vita 24F to its fullest, add a dinghy, like a two-door Jeep Wrangler, to the 5,000-pound-rated hitch receiver and families can make the most out of every RV outing.

Just because the rig is compact doesn't mean it's not built using Winnebago's well-known construction features. A specially crafted strong, lightweight body and SuperShell Sleeper Deck cabover structure, which adds strength and insulation, are ideally mated to the Sprinter chassis and offer a superb fit that exudes a higher build quality. Although you won't find an excessive supply of extravagant, or even unnecessary, tech goodies, you will find everything necessary to get the job done.

The exterior attractions are supported by a 15-foot powered patio awning with LED lights for mellow and effective night vision. A selection of lighted outside compartments, ranging from a significantly sized rear compartment to a smaller, but fairly deep bin (configured horizontally) keep camp supplies organized. There's easy access for winterizing the water system, and the controls for the stabilizing jacks can be found on the wall inside the bigger locker. The

Canyon deluxe graphics package adds handsome aesthetics to the exterior.

Hardware for the basic hookups is easy to reach, and there's a freshwater gravity fill for filling the water tank, which adds primitive-camping versatility. The power cord for the 30-amp system is nicely secured into its own little locking compartment; it has to be plugged into the side-mounted receptacle when using the generator. Even though the sewer access is open and easy to find, it sits too low and is rather difficult to reach without the need to crawl around on your hands and knees; it could benefit from a relocation exercise.

Inside, the décor is somewhat understated, relying on more natural tones in brown and tan, but the elements are traditional and work well, even with a family of four moving about. Attention is quickly drawn toward the cockpit, shaded in a light gray with darker colors used for the captain's chairs, dash and trim. Taking note from the driver's seat, you won't find anything luxurious. Instead, the elements — like the rubber floor mat instead of carpet or the mostly blank dash housing only driving essentials — help shave dollars from the sticker price. While the cockpit seats feel durable, after a short while, finding a comfortable spot takes some posterior fine-tuning and acclimation to the adjustability features. However, while directing the Vita down the highway, the driver has an excellent view of the open road and the controls, which are very ergonomic.

### WHAT'S HOT

Large cabover bed, rear storage locker, large holding tanks, AGM batteries with a solar system, inside storage, drivability

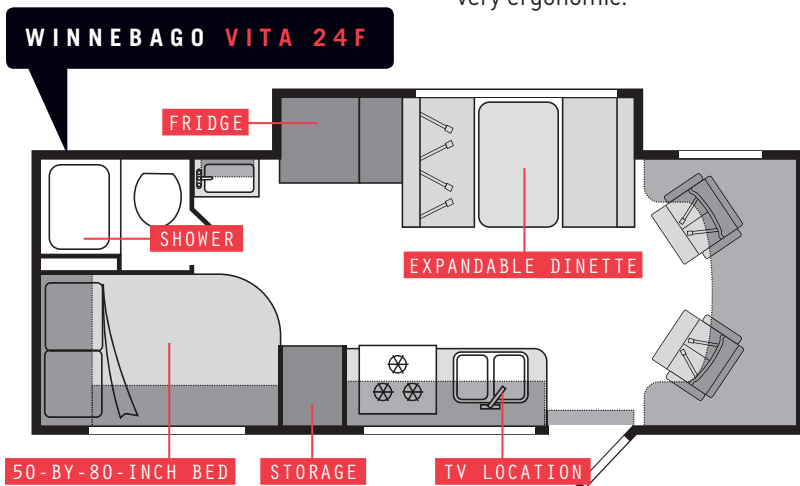
### WHAT'S NOT

Plastic hand-operated toilet, refrigerator-door latch, cabover mattress, TV mounting location



Directly above the cockpit controls is the largest overhead bed offered in a Sprinter-based Class C, measuring 49-by-87 inches. Two kids will find enough room to keep from tangling up and the area offers a playful respite for the little ones. Two adults can snuggle up there in a pinch; the out-of-the-way sleeping area can be a blessing in a compact motorhome. The mattress, though, doesn't contribute much to a restful sleep since its thickness is less than optimum. Using a memory foam pad can add comfort without cutting into the very-generous space between the ceiling and mattress. The bunk area could be dolled up with the addition of a front window to feel more open and provide a little outdoor gazing for those sleeping up there.

Seating in the living area is limited to the dinette cushions unless the cockpit seats are swiveled toward the rear. The dinette is large for a motorhome this size and can seat four in relative comfort. There's just enough elbowroom on the leatherette cushions, and the table works well within the floorplan. Large windows allow those seated on the dinette during travel (seat belts are provided) to see outdoors. Access to the back is fairly open, even with the single slideout retracted, which makes it easy to get to the bathroom while on the road. If additional sleeping quarters are required, the dinette





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can be converted into a 40-by-76-inch bed. Two youngsters can probably coexist here, but one would be more comfortable.

Situated immediately across from the dinette and within clear view of the seating is the galley counter and overhead cabinets that house the 32-inch HDTV. The medium-dark earth-tone cabinetry offers enough space for essentials, and the woodwork is more traditional than what's found in many of the plans using European-styled laminates. Although the TV is placed onto the cabinet door to make the best use of space, it would have been well worth the 2- or 3-inch loss of storage needed to recess it into the door and avoid the unwanted headaches from corner contact when using the sink.

The galley resides just below the TV. Complementing the two-segment sink are the usual implements for cooking, including a three-burner stove outfitted with a high-output burner up front, and a convection microwave to eliminate a redundancy of appliances and weight. Nicely nestled with the kitchen accouterments are a couple of drawers for silverware and spatulas, as well as an LED-illuminated spice rack and faux-tile backing to accent the wood cabinetry and black appliances. Luckily, the Vita comes with sink covers/cutting boards; otherwise, preparing meals on the virtually nonexistent counter would be somewhat of a struggle.

Positioned across from the galley, in the slideout, is a 7.3-cubic-foot residential refrigerator that holds more foodstuffs than the physical dimensions suggest. The aforementioned inverter can be called in for power when on the road and the refrigerator can be accessed with the slide retracted. As customarily done in the industry, some type of latching hardware is used to prevent the door from opening when on the road. Here, a clunky bolt with a large knob must be painstakingly screwed in to wedge the top and bottom doors closed. It's certainly not a deal breaker, but somewhat out of sync with Winnebago's



(Left) Galley is compact, but well-equipped. Sink covers provide additional counterspace for meal prep. Drawers and cabinets will handle more foodstuffs and supplies than expected. TV mounted on cabinet door above sink makes good use of space; recessing 2-3 inches inside the cabinet would prevent head knocking. (Right) Shower is right-sized, but the plastic toilet leaves something to be desired, as the hand-flushing mechanism feels out of place on a motorhome of this caliber.

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# When will your next adventure **pop-up**?

**PW Tofino**  
Starting at \$69,550 USD



The all new Tofino is built on the Ram ProMaster 1500 chassis with a 136" wheelbase and measures 17' 9" long. The massive 2000 pound O.C.C.C. and versatile 70 cubic feet of rear cargo storage space will adapt to any lifestyle or recreational activity.

Simplicity combined with technology provides dual 100Ah lithium coach batteries, 2000 watt inverter, touchscreen controls as well as available roof rack and solar packages. A manual lift roof completes the Tofino revealing a 49"x72" overhead bunk providing a second sleeping space while opening up the galley and living area. For those adventures with a lot going on, the Tofino has a lot to work with.

**Pleasure-Way**  
Industries Ltd.

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

usual engineering prowess.

Considering the overall space in a compact motorhome, the judicious use of cabinetry for keeping clutter off the floor and beds is well done. Among the cabinets is a Winnebago exclusive design that showcases its new multiuse storage “pantry” fitted with adjustable shelves that can double as a fairly tall closet for longer clothing. Opposing closets, across the multi-gray-color vinyl-clad aisle, provide additional storage.

The rest of the interior is devoted to the “master” bedroom and separated bathroom facilities. On the right is a corner bed that is almost queen size. Even though the 50-by-80-inch foam mattress with the radius corner is not abundantly thick, it still provides a comfortable night’s sleep with just enough room for two adults to keep from slugging it out. The downside, of course, is that the person on the outside wall has to climb over the other person to get out of bed. But this configuration has been around for a very long time, and it makes good use of available real estate. Surrounding the bed are ample overhead cabinets, along with a handy shelf at the far end that’s outfitted with two LED ceiling lights and a power outlet.

Just outside the door to the enclosed toilet/shower room is a lavatory with a small sink and mirrored medicine cabinet above. The scheme

is commonly used in the industry and is workable, offering versatility when multiple people need to use the facilities. Inside the enclosed area you’ll find a shower that supplies enough room to get the job done and an adjacent toilet. While the toilet position provides enough wiggle room to handle intended tasks, functionality leaves some room for improvement. The smaller all-plastic toilet is a hand-operated unit instead of a much-preferred foot-pedal model. It’s pretty low to the floor and seems like it’s flushing you along with the contents. Be prepared to dodge splashing water and for frequent, less-than-pleasant cleaning of the wall, door and bowl rim. An aftermarket upgrade to a porcelain-bowl model, while adding a little weight, will pay big dividends in comfort and usability.

With few exceptions, like the toilet choice, Winnebago did a good job orchestrating a Sprinter-based Class C without many of the frills that elevate costs, while maintaining a well-balanced amenity posture. The floorplan works fine for a family, and the HVAC systems do a good job moderating inside temperature. All things considered, the Vita is a solid value with a reasonable number of pleasantries thrown in to instill pride of ownership. **M**

#### Winnebago Industries

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

## Specifications

### Chassis

Model	Mercedes-Benz Sprinter
Engine	3.0-liter turbodiesel
SAE hp	188 @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	325 lb-ft @ 1,400-2,400 rpm
Transmission	Five-speed auto
Axle Ratio	3.92:1
Front Tires	215/85R16
Rear Tires	215/85R16
Wheelbase	170"
Brakes	Disc/ABS
Suspension (F/R)	Struts/leaf springs
Fuel Capacity	26.4 gal
Fuel Economy	17.9 mpg
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles chassis; 5 years/100,000 miles engine

### Coach

Exterior Length	24' 7"
Exterior Width	7' 6"
Exterior Height with A/C	11' 6"
Interior Width	7' 3"
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Aluminum frame with steel supports, laminated walls with block foam insulation, EPDM roof
Freshwater Capacity	37 gal
Black-water Capacity	41 gal
Gray-water Capacity	41 gal
Water-heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-gas Capacity	12.2 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	20,000 Btu
Refrigerator	7.3 cubic-foot residential
Inverter	1,000 watt
Converter	55 amp
Battery	(1) 12-volt chassis, (2) 12-volt AGM house
AC generator	3.6 kW LP-gas
MSRP (approximate)	\$120,000
Warranty	12 months/15,000 miles basic; 36 months/36,000 miles structure

### Wet Weight

(water & heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

Front axle	3,740 lbs
Rear axle	5,820 lbs
Total	9,560 lbs

### Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,410/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
ROCCC	1,470 lbs (deduct weight of passengers for net cargo capacity)
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (full water, no passengers)



By Chris Dougherty

# LEAK DETECTION

Performing a Sealtech test will pinpoint water intrusion that otherwise is not detectable with the naked eye

**M**otorhome leaks rank right up there with the most destructive maintenance-related problems, and for good reason. Motorhomes are quite complex, combining the amenities of a home with the versatility of a vehicle, and are exposed to conditions that are equivalent to an earthquake and a hurricane every time they travel down the road. Motorhomes also have to maintain gross vehicle weight ratings (GVWR) to be driven legally, and are built to flex as they respond to road conditions. The sealants used on motorhomes are designed to handle that flexing without failing, but over time those sealants can lose their ability to control moisture intrusion. When water gets into the structure of the motorhome, delamination, rot, mold, mildew and mushrooms can lead to structural failure and expensive repairs.

For years, Sealtech Manufacturing has been building and selling a system to dealers to detect leaks in RVs, and the company has expanded its offerings with a new, lighter-weight machine (and business system) that is ideal for mobile technicians.

The concept is remarkably simple, even though the execution is a bit more intricate. The machine is placed in the interior of the motorhome, with a tube that seals to an open roof vent. The system pressurizes the inside of the closed-up RV, and the technician

walks around the outside spraying the motorhome with a soapy solution. Locations where air penetrates the roof and sides of the motorhome will appear as bubbles, and are then marked or photographed, indicating a spot to be resealed or repaired.

While it can be surprising to see all the leaks this system will reveal, it's not foolproof, especially on motorhomes with front and rear fiberglass caps that frequently leak from underneath. Sometimes the leaks in those areas are so significant that it



becomes difficult to pressurize the motorhome. Often, however, these leaks can be heard, as can those in other pipe and wire

**1** The Sealtech system includes the main unit, upper vent mating mechanism, tubular duct, vent bridge, turnbuckles and a 1-gallon pressure sprayer for soap solution.

chases located in the basement of the motorhome. Slideouts, especially in the bottom corner, can be problematic; duct tape can be used to close off these spots, as can damp towels (at least temporarily). Furnaces, refrigerators and even some exterior lighting can be gateways for pressurized air to pass, although these areas typically pose no danger of a leak. Experience and knowledge in RV construction are essential to be highly successful with the Sealtech system and to establish accurate results.

Many RV manufacturers and dealers across the country employ the Sealtech system to leak-test RVs. The ones that don't use Sealtech have to depend on flood-testing the RV with water sprayers which, during the discovery, can lead to water damage. The Sealtech system will not damage the RV and, while it takes a little more effort than strapping a hose to a ladder and spraying the motorhome, the results are far better.

Sealtech locations can be found at [www.sealtechleaktesting.com](http://www.sealtechleaktesting.com). Additional information on the system and process can be obtained by calling 810-310-3070 or by visiting <https://rvleaks.com>. Testing should be done annually, and usually costs less than \$200. Sealtech machines are also available for purchase, with MSRP starting at \$3,795.



1



2

**[1-2]** The inner garnish, crank and screen are removed; the inner garnish is replaced to help make a better seal. The turnbuckles are hung on the side of the vent (or the vent bridge, if necessary), and the upper-vent mating mechanism is connected to the turnbuckles and tightened.



3



4



5



6



7



8

[3-4] Main unit is positioned directly below the vent. The tubular duct and pressure line are attached to both. The motorhome is then inspected to ensure that all vents, windows and doors are tightly closed. Sealtech unit is then turned on and pressure adjusted to .3-.5 inches of water column. [5] The discovery process starts on the roof by checking all seams with the soapy solution. The open vent is the one connected to the Sealtech machine. [6] The inspection continues down every seam in the body. The operator will take a picture of, or mark with a grease pencil, every location where a leak is detected. This motorhome had some substantial leaking around the whole front cap and the windshield. [7-8] The test takes knowledge of RV construction to make proper judgments. These appear to be leaks, but they're normal. Slideouts usually have areas on the bottom where water can drain away. Windows will frequently show a leak, especially jalousie and sliding windows, which feature vents to allow condensate water to drain away. That said, a leak like the one shown in photo #8 could indicate a loose window or a bad gasket. Bubbles coming from the edge or top of the window where it meets the siding indicate a leak that must be repaired. **M**

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# LEARN THE LINGO

RVERS HAVE A LANGUAGE ALL THEIR OWN; THESE TERMS WILL COME IN HANDY ON YOUR TRAVELS

**N**ew-ish to RVing? If so, you're likely confused by all the terms that go along with it. Not to worry. Whether you're new to the motorhome lifestyle or a seasoned veteran, it never hurts to brush up on some of the most common phrases used while RVing. Read through this glossary of RV lingo, and you'll be spouting off like an RV veteran in no time. It doesn't include everything you may hear (including foul expletives) but it's a good start.

**12-volt DC** The basic, battery-supported wiring system. Most motorhomes have two 12-volt direct current (DC) systems; the chassis system and the coach (or house) system. Direct current is used to provide power for most, or all, of the lighting in the motorhome, as well as appliance circuit boards, radios, heater, etc.

**120-volt AC** The household electrical system. Alternating current (AC) is used to provide power to motors, heating elements, receptacles, etc. It also provides power to the charging system for topping off the batteries.

**30-amp/50-amp** The type of AC electrical service in an RV. 30-amp service is adequate for running one air conditioner, which is why it is normally found in smaller motorhomes. The 50-amp service is for the big boys, capable of cranking up two or more A/C units, plus the other amenities commonly found in luxury coaches. The 30-amp plug has three blades, and the 50-amp version has four.

**A/C** Abbreviation for air conditioner.

**Air bags/air springs** Air bag suspension systems improve ride and handling, and are adjustable, often on the go.

**Axle ratio** The axle or gear ratio refers to the size and design of the differential gears. It's the correlation of turns of the driveshaft with the turns of the axle. So, a 4.10:1 gear ratio means that the driveshaft turns 4.1 times for every 1 revolution of the axle.

**B-plus motorhome** Technically, B-plus motorhomes don't exist; they're built on a cutaway chassis, and are therefore Class

C's. The RV industry uses this term to suggest that a compact motorhome has more space than the average Class B.

**Ball mount** The part of the hitch that the ball attaches to and is inserted into a receiver mounted to the vehicle. Sometimes known as a drawbar.

**Basement** Basement-style motorhomes have a raised-rail chassis that allows the manufacturer to build large, pass-through storage compartments underneath.

**Baseplate** Bolts to the frame at the front of a dinghy vehicle, providing attachment points for the tow bar.

**Black tank/gray tank/fresh tank** The three main holding tanks in any RV. Black is for the stinky stuff, gray is for shower/sink water and fresh is for drinking/showing/washing dishes.

**Black streaks** The hard-to-remove streaks that tend to run down the side of any RV that's stored outdoors.

**Boondocking/dry camping** Camping remotely without hookups.

**Btu** British thermal unit is an international measure of energy that is used to describe the amount of heat needed to raise the temperature of 1 pound of water by 1 degree. Also used to measure the amount of heat that an A/C unit can remove from a room (based on square footage) per hour.

**Cabover** The section of a Class C that extends over the cab and is usually a sleeping area or entertainment center.

**Cap** The glossy fiberglass front or rear part of an RV's body structure.

**Chassis battery/house battery** The chassis battery is required to start the engine and perform other chassis-related functions, while the house battery (or batteries) runs everything in the living quarters.

**Class A** Generally the largest motorhomes; most often built on a stripped chassis.

**Class B** The most compact motorhome; it's built inside a commercial cargo van.

**Class C** Built on a cutaway chassis, maintaining the cab and doors of the van or truck. Bodies often have a front cabover that can be used for sleeping, entertainment components and/or storage.

**CCC** Cargo Carrying Capacity. The measure of how much stuff you can load in the motorhome. Calculated by subtracting the actual weight (fuel tank and LP-gas full, no supplies or passengers) from its gross vehicle weight rating (see GVWR). Whatever's left is the CCC. For motorhome tests, we use our own formula, Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (ROCCC), which is the weight of a motorhome with full water and no passengers.

**Converter/charger** This device converts 120-volt AC or household current to 12 volts DC for use in an RV. It also charges the house batteries.

**DEF** Diesel Exhaust Fluid. In modern diesels, the engine exhaust passes through a catalyst that uses urea to assist in re-burning exhaust particulate.

**Delamination** When laminated layers of fiberglass (used to build exterior walls) start to bubble or separate. Usually caused by water leaks or failure of the adhesive used to assemble components.

**Demand pump (or water pump)** RV water pumps are self-priming, and draw water from a freshwater tank and distribute it through the freshwater system.

**Diesel pusher** A rear-engine, diesel-powered motorhome.

**Dinghy** A vehicle that is towed behind a motorhome with all four wheels on the ground. Some folks call it a "toad."

**Dinghy brake** The separate braking system installed in the dinghy that applies its brakes whenever the motorhome's brakes are applied.

**Doghouse** The "hump" that covers the engine inside the cab or living area of a Class A or Class C, although many technicians refer to this access point in a Class C as an engine cover or engine access cover.

**Drop hitch** A draw bar that is used to drop the ball mount lower or higher several inches when inserted in the receiver to compensate for the difference in height between the tow vehicle and trailer.



**Drop receiver** Used to change the hitch receiver height (up or down) to allow the tow bar to ride level when connected to a dinghy.

**DSI** Not a popular crime show. It stands for "Direct Spark Ignition," meaning the water heater can be lit by a switch inside the RV.

**Dually** A truck with two rear wheels/tires per side, or four total. The extra tires help increase the load carrying capacity, and also improve stability when towing heavy loads. Plus, they look cool.

**Engine brake** Also known as a Jacobs Engine Brake or Jake Brake, this engine-mounted device controls the exhaust valves on a diesel engine, which forces the engine to slow the vehicle.

**EPDM** Ethylene Propylene Diene Monomer rubber. Commonly used for RV and commercial roofing membranes, and is largely being replaced by TPO and PVC.

**Exhaust brake** Like an engine brake except that it works by closing off the flow of exhaust, causing high backpressure in the manifold and the cylinders. Less effective than a Jake Brake, it still works to help slow the vehicle.

**Four down** A way of distinguishing how a vehicle is towed in dinghy towing parlance. "Can this car be towed four down?" It means no trailer or tow dolly is required to safely tow the vehicle behind a motorhome.

**Freshwater gravity fill** A fitting, usually on the side of a motorhome (if so equipped) connected to a 1¼-inch tube that feeds directly to the freshwater tank. This allows the tank to be filled by either a hose or a portable tank. A small breather tube is usually also connected, which allows air to escape while filling.

**Full-body paint** A multi-layer paint applied to the whole exterior, instead of colored or white fiberglass or gelcoat with vinyl appliques to add design to the exterior.

**GAWR** Gross Axle Weight Rating. The maximum allowable weight the axle is designed to carry, including the weight of the axle.

**GCWR** Gross Combined (or Combination) Weight Rating. The maximum allowable weight for the motorhome and a trailer or dinghy, including passengers and cargo.

**Gelcoat** The visible, smooth, hard exterior surface of a fiberglass panel.

**Genset** Short for generator.

**GVWR** Gross Vehicle Weight Rating. The maximum amount the motorhome chassis can weigh.

**Heated/enclosed underbelly** A motorhome with the holding tanks covered and insulated to provide RV extended-season functionality. Heat from the furnace is

routed into the holding-tank areas to help prevent tanks and plumbing from freezing.

**Hookups** Electrical, water, sewer, cable. An RV park or campground that has all of these is said to have "full hookups." Those with no sewer are a "partial hookup."

**Inverter** Takes the 12-volt DC power from batteries and turns it into 120-volt AC current to power household items like residential refrigerators. Much like a converter, inverters with charging provisions will keep the house batteries conditioned when plugged in to shorepower or while using the generator. There are Modified Sine Wave (MSW) and Pure Sine Wave (PSW) inverters. Running electronics? You need a PSW.

**kW** Kilowatt. It's a measure of power that those of us in the RV world use to size up generators. One kW equals 1,000 watts.

**Leveling jacks** These help level the motorhome on uneven ground. RV systems can be electric or hydraulic, and have from three to six jacks, depending on the RV. Not to be confused with stabilizing jacks, which are commonly used on small motorhomes and are designed to reduce body movement but can't be used for leveling.

**Load range** The amount of weight a tire is designed to carry at its specified inflation pressure.

**LP-gas/propane** Liquefied petroleum gas. Propane is the form of LP-gas used to run gas appliances in a motorhome.

**Payload** The amount of weight a motorhome chassis is designed to carry, including body, passengers and cargo. Payload is the GVWR minus its unloaded curb weight (see UVW/UCW).

**PB** Polybutylene piping is what you'll find in most older RVs and is gray in color.

**PEX** PEX piping, or crosslinked polyethylene, is used in every RV today. It is easy to install and repair and is also freeze-resistant. (Tip: PEX and PB fittings are not interchangeable.)

**Pull-through site** A campsite between two roads in a campground that allows an RVer to access the site without having to back up.

**PVC** Poly Vinyl Chloride. Used in a number of products, including drainpipe and roof membranes.

**Receiver** The hardware mounted to the frame at the back of a motorhome or vehicle that the hitch draw bar slides into. More commonly referred to as a "hitch receiver."

**Roof air conditioning** Most RV house air conditioning systems are roof-mounted, run on 120-volt AC, and discharge cooled air through a duct system or through a direct discharge plenum.

**SCWR** Sleeping Capacity Weight Rating. The RV manufacturer's designated number of sleeping positions multiplied by 154 pounds, which is the federal standard average occupant weight used when calculating payload or other weight ratings for motor vehicles. For example, if the rig is designed to sleep four, the SCWR would be? Come on ... you took math (it's 616 pounds).

**Shorepower** What you plug into at an RV park or campground. The expression "shorepower" comes from the boating industry, but since RVs are always on land and are not amphibious, we don't have a shore and ... OK. You get it.

**Slide topper** An awning that covers the roof of a slideout box to keep debris off it and shed excess rainwater. The awning extends and retracts with the slideout box.

**Slideout** Also called a "slide." These are room extensions that extend and retract from the main structure, providing more living space when parked.

**SRW/DRW** Single Rear Wheel/Dual Rear Wheel. Used to express the difference between a truck with single rear wheels and one with dual rear wheels (dually).

**Tag axle** That extra, or third, axle behind the rear axle of a motorhome. Used on large diesel-pushers, the tag axle is necessary to carry additional weight. Some tag axles are "steerable," in that they steer as you turn the coach; others must be retracted to prevent them from skidding in tight turns as the rear of the coach pivots.

**Tail swing** Many RVs have axles far forward of the rear-most point of the vehicle to improve the turning radius. This results in the rear of the motorhome swinging in a wide arc when making a sharp turn, which can result in a collision with another object.

**Torque** Measurement of twisting force. With RVs, it relates to the powertrain's ability to pull a load and is measured in pound-feet (lb-ft).

**Tow bar** Used to connect a dinghy vehicle for towing behind a motorhome.

**Tow rating** The manufacturer's stated maximum weight a vehicle is designed to tow.

**TPO** Thermoplastic Polyolefin is a single-ply roofing membrane that some manufacturers use as an alternative to EPDM rubber.

**UVW/UCW** Unloaded Vehicle (or Curb) Weight. The weight of a vehicle as built by the manufacturer, including all motor fuels and liquids, and all accessories attached by the manufacturer.

**Wheelbase** Distance between the steering and drive axles of a motor vehicle. **M**



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# FLUFFY, THE CUSTOM CLASS C

WHEN A CRAFTY COUPLE COULDN'T FIND THE MOTORHOME THEY WANTED, THEY BUILT IT THEMSELVES

A few decades ago, if you were in the market for a Class C motorhome, you might have found yourself singing that iconic Rolling Stones' chorus: "You can't always get what you want." The truth is that choices in smaller units were limited, and even RVs from different manufacturers looked and felt remarkably similar. You could accept that life is full of compromises, or you could take Chuck Speyerer's route and build your ideal motorhome yourself.

The recently retired telephone company employee had been camping most of his life, in everything from a pickup to a van to a Class C Fleetwood Tioga 23. He had a very definite idea of what he wanted, but when he and his wife, Susan, a retired teacher, started

their search for a new motorhome, they were disappointed with the production units on the market. They wanted something around 25 feet with a diesel engine, manual transmission, an aluminum exterior and an interior equipped for more than overnight trips.



Chuck and Susan Speyerer have traveled more than 114,000 miles in their DIY Class C.

"I was looking for a custom design, and no one would work with me," Chuck explains.

Undaunted, he told his wife that rather than settle for an RV that didn't fit their needs, he would build one himself.



Fluffy's custom-painted exterior garners plenty of smiles and attention while on the road and in camp.

"I said, 'How are you going to do that?' and he said, 'I'll figure it out,'" Susan remembers, laughing.

And he did.

Chuck, who calls himself a self-taught builder and mechanic, wanted something that could handle mountains and rough terrain. He began in 1999 with a 25-foot, 15,000-pound-rated Ford F-450 chassis with a 7.3-liter diesel engine, 4WD and a manual transmission — certainly not a typical configuration for an RV. Starting with a 200-inch wheelbase, Chuck added air springs to the rear suspension to stabilize the ride. He constructed an all-aluminum exterior with pre-formed rounded aluminum corners, aluminum tubing to support the roof, and then used aluminum Z-brackets for internal framing.

With the exterior complete, Chuck told Susan she could design the interior however she would like. She drew out lines on the unfinished plywood flooring for where the kitchen, bathroom and seating would be, and Chuck built to her specifications.

One of the things Susan had seen when they were RV shopping was a rear kitchen, and she knew she wanted to include that in their new motorhome's design. She did not like the way the sink and counters were the central focus of the living area in most smaller RVs, and she preferred cabover sleeping accommodations rather than taking up valuable floorspace with a bedroom. The couple added a 4-inch foam mattress and built an easy-to-use ladder for access to the bed. Chuck also installed a 26-inch-square vent in

the ceiling of the cabover to make the bunk feel more open, a feature Susan loves.

"We can see the stars from our pillows at night," she says.

The kitchen cabinetry, constructed of Formica-covered fiberboard, was completely customized for Susan's needs. She first purchased all the cookware and kitchen supplies she would use, and then Chuck built the individual compartments to accommodate them, even adding drawer dividers to separate utensils. He also built a pantry with pullout shelving, and the couple added a refrigerator and LP-gas stove with a 21-inch oven.

The Speyerers chose wood parquet flooring throughout, and Chuck custom-built a sofa with storage beneath for the living area. They picked up two office swivel chairs from a secondhand store and had them upholstered to match the sofa, then permanently mounted them to the floor on either side of the dining table. For the bath, Chuck built the vanity and installed the shower and toilet. He used residential faucets throughout, and while he started with a sliding RV shower door, he eventually upgraded to a custom glass door instead.

In terms of systems, the Speyerers' were mainly interested in boondocking, so their focus was on sustainable living without reliance on electricity. Fluffy has two solar panels and a Honda generator, but Chuck notes they have only about 10 hours on it since it was purchased. Their Class C has no inverter, and the only 120-volt AC appliance is the air conditioner, something they seldom

### DARE TO DIY

If you need inspiration to start your own DIY project, you might try John Wickersham's Haynes manual, "Build Your Own Motorcaravan, 2nd Edition," published in 2013. The book covers everything from refit to renovation to building a European motorcoach from scratch, and includes information on electrical systems and water supplies. Keep in mind that European components and codes differ from those in the United States, so plan accordingly.



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## The Classic Ride

use on their trips.

Construction, which took more than a year, was still in progress when the couple took their first camping trip. It was an educational experience.

"We went up to Shasta Lake, California, and it just rained and rained," Susan laughs. Since the motorhome had been garage-kept during the building process, Chuck had not yet sealed the roof. It was immediately apparent where he would need to concentrate his efforts. On the bright side, it was the last time "Fluffy" ever had a leak.

Yes, Fluffy is the name of the Speyerers' DIY Class C, a term neither of them can explain. "It just came up that way" in conversation as it was being built, and the moniker stuck. Not that Fluffy looks very soft and cuddly. In fact, the Class C follows a strong patriotic theme, from the interior red, white and blue décor to the unique exterior paint.

"Initially it was all white, and we decided to have it professionally painted," Chuck explains. They went to a sign painter and asked him to "do something patriotic." They had no idea what it would look like until they went back to pick up their motorhome, but they couldn't be happier. The design is unlike any production RV on the road, and it garners attention wherever the couple travels.

Susan notes, "People stop us all the time and say, 'I remember you, I saw you on the freeway' and they tell us how much they like our motorhome."

Now 19 years old, Fluffy has more than 114,000 miles on the odometer and still looks showroom new. The couple has traveled extensively west of the Rockies, including trips to Yosemite, Lake Tahoe, Yellowstone, Southern California and the Cascades. There have been a few updates: the addition of a 19-inch flat-screen TV, a backup camera and replacement of the original denim with more durable upholstery. Where they once towed a motorcycle, they



**Top:** The pull-out table and repurposed swivel office chairs make optimal use of living space. **Above:** The stars-and-stripes décor is repeated indoors with the pillows on the custom-built sofa and a red, white and blue throw rug set against the wood parquet floor.

now tow a Mazda. Otherwise, they have not changed a thing.

While theirs is a great story, there is no question that building your own motorhome is not an easy task, and it is certainly not for everyone. Chuck points out that online access to information was limited two decades ago, and finding parts was "quite a trick." He also warns that if you think you want to tackle a project this big, be prepared to spend a lot of cash.

"People think I saved money doing it myself, but that isn't really true," observes Chuck. "It cost me about \$110,000."

Of course, that same amount may not have bought a custom diesel 4WD Class C two decades ago, even if someone would have been willing to manufacture it. Fluffy is one of a kind, which is why the classic lyrics written by Paul Anka and immortalized by Frank Sinatra are the perfect theme song for Chuck and Susan Speyerer's classic ride: "I've traveled each and every highway, and more, much more than this, I did it my way." **M**

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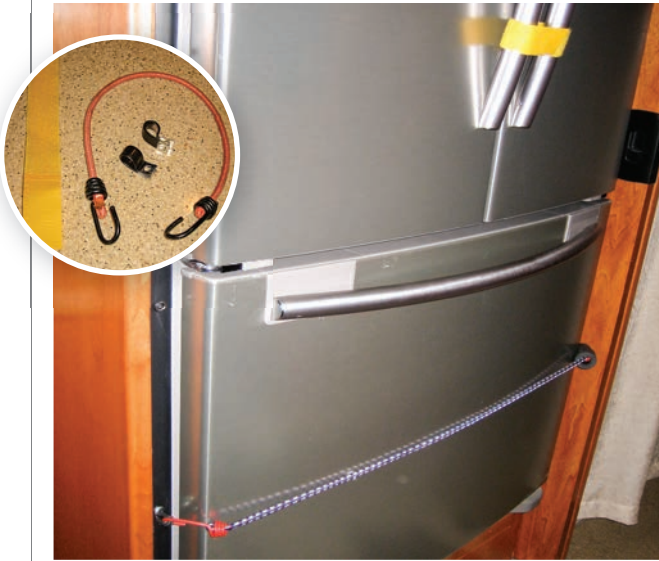
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## Keep Them Closed

After installing a residential refrigerator in my Class A motorhome, I immediately found I had a problem: the doors would not stay closed during sharp turns. My solution employs two cable clamps and a shock (bungee) cord to hold the bottom freezer compartment in place, and a hook-and-loop strap to keep the two refrigerator doors closed.

**Larry Black** | Seymour, Tennessee



## Tug a Lug

Tugging a full portable waste tank by the metal handle even a short distance is tough on the fingers and palm. To make the job a little easier, I use a 5-inch-long piece of 1¼-inch wooden dowel fitted with a ¼-inch eye bolt; a vise and pliers were used to open the eye bolt to form a hook. I counter-bored one end of the hole in the dowel to allow the nut to fit without protruding.

**Art Szustak** | Cleveland, Tennessee

## Loofah Time

I have tried a lot of ways to wash the bugs off of the motorhome, and eventually found the perfect solution. In my wash bucket I carry a used loofah sponge, and when I hit a spot with old dried up bugs, I rub the area with the wet loofah and the bugs are gone. The sponge will not scratch the surface. I have used this method for years with great results. I expect a new sponge would work just as well.

**Arthur Dumke** | via email

## Here, Boy!

Putting the cover on the motorhome for storage isn't my favorite chore. One problem we always had was passing the retaining straps under the motorhome to the opposite side. We tried attaching weights and having one person throw the strap under the motorhome to a

second person on the other side, and we tried using a long pole to push it across. This year we tried a new method, which was fun — and good exercise — for our dog. Our dog weighs between 35-40 pounds and has no trouble fitting under the motorhome. One person loops the free end of the strap through the dog's

collar and the second person, on the other side, coaxes the dog with a treat. The dog then runs under the RV with the strap, which can easily be pulled out of the collar and the process is repeated. The dog enjoyed it, and it was easy for us.

**Bob Bainbridge** | Elyria, Ohio 



### Have an Idea?

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

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## Where's my GPS?

At a loss after he was unable to secure a replacement unit — or even to consistently contact the GPS manufacturer — a reader dialed up Hot Line and asked us to intervene. He wrote:

“ I purchased a Magellan RoadMate 9612T-LM several months ago. Per the instructions, I connected the power cable for more than an hour to charge. I then connected the USB cable and registered the device, and also downloaded the required updates. Once that was finished, I reconnected the power cable and tried to enter a destination, only to find that the device was unable to complete the process. So, I contacted customer support via email and followed the instructions (once I finally received them) for obtaining a replacement unit. I tried this several times, with little success. Eventually I did receive confirmation [that the company would] replace the unit. It's now several months later, and I still have not received a replacement, nor have I received any consistent reply to my emails. It is very difficult to converse with Magellan support. When they do finally reply, it is almost always a different technician than before. Plus, they don't have any telephone support [that can be relied upon]. I finally found two phone numbers, but they both go to the same recording that directs callers to visit the website or send an email to customer support. Can Hot Line help me?

**Ronald Russell | Brookline, New Hampshire**

Follow-up customer support is vital to a company's reputation, so we attempted to contact Magellan on behalf of Russell. Though we never heard back from the company directly, we were happy to receive the following update from Russell.

“ I finally received my replacement GPS. When Magellan units work, they are great. However, the company needs better customer support, and [the replacement process] shouldn't take five months. — R.R.

As you know, Hot Line is a consumer-advocate department that is designed to mediate conflicts between customers and various RV-related companies. But there are cases where we receive letters about positive interactions between the two parties, where no intervention is needed. Read on to see how a company going the extra mile for

its customers can lead to a wonderful experience for all involved.

### Hey Porter's!

“ For months in advance, we planned a six-week journey through eight states to visit relatives, celebrate a birthday and just relax. Three hours from home, the power steering on our 15-year-old Monaco Diplomat failed. My husband struggled on for 30 to 40 miles until we could reach a metropolitan area, believing our chances of finding someone who could fix our problem would be better.

One night at a campground, a number of driving miles with hubby

using his muscles to the max and three mechanical shops later, we landed at the doorstep of Porter's Automotive in Tallahassee, Florida. You'll never meet a nicer, more-willing-to-help bunch of people, including Heath Porter and his amazing office manager, Sherri. The diagnosis was not good ... a very expensive gearbox needed replacing. Hubby and I packed up a few things and headed back to our home base in our dinghy car, leaving our problems and a copy of our service warranty with the good folks at Porter's.

Together, Heath and Sherri battled with our warranty company for two weeks to get the assistance our policy clearly covered. If more service people advocated for their customers the way Heath and Sherri did, there would be fewer people contacting Hot Line for help with their warranty problems. When the approval finally came, they ordered the necessary parts and successfully installed them. They stayed in touch with us throughout the ordeal. Sherri even rescued a forgotten houseplant from the motorhome and cared for it until we returned. And the day after our trip from Tallahassee to home, Sherri called to make sure we made it and to see how our coach handled during the short trek.

If you're ever in the Tallahassee area and need help with your vehicle, contact Porter's Automotive (850-224-2886). They're located on Capital Circle Southwest, convenient to both Interstate 10 and U.S. Highway 90. Tell them the Capos send their very best regards.

**Mary Capo | St. Augustine, Florida** 

### Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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By Ken Freund

## Diesel or Gas?

**Q** Why are most manufacturers of small motorhomes going to diesel, especially on the Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis? We would like to trade our 2016 van for a 24-foot Class C. The only choices are big Ford/Chevy gas chassis or diesel chassis. Our Pleasure-Way LEXOR is on a RAM ProMaster chassis, which runs on gas and gets about 17 mpg. This is what the Sprinter gets, and diesel costs more at the pump. Mercedes may be a good long-lasting engine, but at our age we can't justify the several thousands of extra dollars to purchase and maintain it. Any ideas why more small RV manufacturers are not using the ProMaster on vans and smaller 24-foot motorhomes?

**Mary Burnett | Kissimmee, Florida**

**A** Not all manufacturers are going that way. Our January issue addressed this topic very well, with the article "Chassis Connection," starting on page 34. You may be completely overlooking the Ford Transit chassis, which offers two different gasoline engines and



one diesel. The Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis is widely sold in Europe, where the cost of fuel is much higher than in the U.S., so fuel economy is an important design factor. Diesels typically get in the neighborhood of 30 percent better fuel mileage than a closely equivalent gas engine, and in Europe, diesel fuel is typically cheaper than gasoline. This is why the Sprinter came with a diesel. The RAM ProMaster chassis is designed mainly for the North American market and offers a 280-hp gas engine aimed more toward that audience. However, for 2019 Mercedes is offering a 2.0-liter four-cylinder turbo gasoline engine with 9-speed transmission.

### Swaying Class C

**Q** We have a 31-foot 2011 Jayco Greyhawk motorhome on a Ford E-450 chassis. I have added after-market front and rear suspension upgrades. These consist of front and rear stabilizers. I installed these to reduce sway and rocking, such as while being passed by an 18-wheeler, or when encountering wind gusts, but the motorhome still has more sway and rock than I would like. Wind is still really bad. I know I cannot get away from wind or passing big rigs. Without spending a ton of money, what would you suggest next?

**Gary Hanna | Spokane Valley, Washington**

**A** Your motorhome has a long rear overhang and a lot of side surface area, which is a recipe for swaying. The heavy rear acts as a sort of pendulum. You are basically fighting against physics and need to understand that you may never

completely eliminate swaying. I assume the stabilizers you installed are sway bars or, more correctly, "anti-roll bars." There are several manufacturers of these, including Hellwig and Roadmaster. You might consider a SuperSteer Rear Trac Bar, which is designed to eliminate unwanted and uncontrolled side shift of the rear axle. I would have gone with this first. The URL is <https://supersteer-parts.com/product/trucks-vans-suv/ford/e-350/e450-chassis-rear-trac-bar>. Roadmaster also makes the Reflex Steering Stabilizer, which uses springs to return to center ([www.roadmasterinc.com/products/rss/reflex.html](http://www.roadmasterinc.com/products/rss/reflex.html)).

The ultimate fix is a product called LiquidSpring, which is a Compressible Liquid Adaptive Suspension System (CLASS). Used in the emergency vehicle and RV markets, the LiquidSpring suspension is quite effective at dampening sway, at a premium price. You can see our review of the Liquid-

Spring suspension at [www.motorhome.com/motorhomes/motorhome-gear/suspension-transformation/](http://www.motorhome.com/motorhomes/motorhome-gear/suspension-transformation/)

### Rough Ridin' Rambler

**Q** We have a 2007 Holiday Rambler motorhome with a very hard ride, especially in the front. I replaced shocks and had the air bags adjusted, with no improvement. Should I consider sway bar bushings or something else? What else could be causing the sound and feel of bottoming out over bumps?

**Richard Corbin | Springdale, Arkansas**

**A** In 2007, Holiday Rambler made a wide variety of models on several chassis, including Ford, Workhorse and GM, plus the diesel pushers on heavy-duty chassis. Without knowing which one you have, it is difficult to give specific information. Worn-out sway bar bushings might result in a clunking

sound when negotiating turns when the motorhome tries to lean. However, they won't significantly affect ride while driving straight.

Tire pressure can greatly affect ride quality. To determine the correct pressure, weigh the motorhome when fully loaded for a trip, including fuel, water, LP-gas, cargo and passengers. Obtain the tire manufacturer's load-inflation table for the tires. This can be found at tire dealers and on the manufacturer's website. Adjust all tires to the pressure listed for the actual weight on the individual tires at each position. If you can't weigh by wheel position, a less accurate method is to take the axle weight from the scale report and divide that number by the number of wheels on that axle. Then adjust the pressure for that and add 10 percent. I suggest checking for sagging or broken springs, which could cause the suspension to bottom out. While you're at it, check the rubber jounce bumpers. If they look like they are

rubbed clean and appear to be getting used regularly, put some paint on one, and after a test ride, which should include bumps and dips that wouldn't bottom a suspension in good working order, recheck them for paint transfer. I suggest you have an experienced RV or suspension technician test drive it and give you a professional opinion on ride quality and needed changes.

## Overfilled Transmission

**Q** We have a 2014 Tiffin Open Road Allegro 31 SA with 17,000 miles on the odometer. Recently I had the transmission filter and fluid changed because we tow a dinghy and wanted to ensure that the transmission is meticulously maintained. We drove approximately 200 miles when, upon entering a freeway, a huge cloud of smoke billowed out from under the coach. I continued to drive slowly an additional 50 miles (with no further smoking) in order to get to a Ford dealership,

where they diagnosed the problem — the transmission had been overfilled by 1½ quarts and the fluid had been thrown out the overflow. My owner's manual states that overfilling a transmission can damage it. How can I tell if damage has occurred? Can damage occur in 250 miles? Did the blowing of fluid out the overflow valve damage anything? Once at home (additional 300 miles) the check engine light came on. It was for an oxygen sensor on the left bank. Could this be related?

**Ken Schiltz | Prescott, Arizona**

**A** I'm not sure how the dealership could diagnose how far the transmission was overfilled when much of it had been ejected, but in any case, it's unlikely that any damage occurred based on your explanation. Sometimes a high fluid level can cause seal leaks, but usually you would notice operating problems right away.

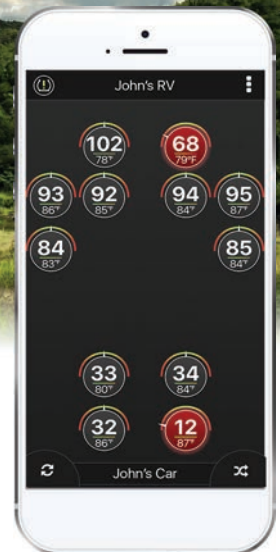
It's unlikely that any transmission fluid affected the sensor that is far

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forward of the overflow outlet. Besides that, aside from physical damage to the exterior, oxygen sensors typically only fail due to foreign substances in the exhaust stream. In other words, if your engine had ingested the transmission oil, burned it and sent it down the tailpipe, it would be possible that the oxygen sensor was damaged, but this was not the case. You did not mention if the oxygen sensor was replaced or not, but if it wasn't, I suggest recording the "Check Engine" error code and then deleting it. If it doesn't reappear in several hundred miles, it was probably just a quirk. Finally, keep in mind that most transmission failures are caused by excessive heat. Consider using a quality synthetic fluid (which is more resistant to heat breakdown) if you are towing, particularly if it is a heavy vehicle or trailer.

### Towing the 2019 Malibu

**Q** My Chevy dealer says I can flat tow the 2019 Malibu with a turbo-

charged 2.0-liter engine and nine-speed automatic transmission. The 2018 wasn't listed as being towable. I'll consider ordering a 2019 Malibu Premier with that engine/transmission combination if you confirm the dealer's info.

**James Brossard | Bellevue, Washington**

**A** You're in luck. I contacted Chevrolet directly on your behalf (800-222-1020) and it verified that this model with the 2.0-liter turbocharged engine is the only 2019 Chevrolet Malibu factory-approved for towing. Whenever considering a new vehicle for dinghy towing, it is always a good idea to consult the owner's manual, as we did. The applicable information about dinghy towing is on page 316. Among the restrictions, it calls for the negative battery cable to be disconnected. Therefore, you'll need a charge line from the motorhome to power most auxiliary braking systems. You'll also need to run the vehicle at the beginning of each day

and at each fuel stop for about five minutes, and must not exceed 65 mph while towing.

### Leveling Jack Use

We have a 28-foot Winnebago motorhome. I recently had a guy tell me that I should never use the leveling jacks for anything more than a few moments to get it set up. His theory is that if you use them for long-term leveling it would cause the seals to go bad.

**Mark Whitfield | via email**

First of all, Mark, if that were the case, everyone who uses them for extended periods, like full-timers and snowbirds, would be in trouble. The fact is, these systems are designed to hold up a coach for long periods. HWH is a manufacturer of RV leveling jacks. Here are some FAQs from the company's website:

**Q:** Can I store my coach with my



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jacks extended?

**A:** Yes, this will not hurt the system.

**Q:** How long can I leave my coach parked with the jacks extended?

**A:** As long as you want. We recommend operating the system occasionally if possible.

However, HWH strongly recommends against using the jacks for changing tires or working under the coach, where a failure could cause

the coach to fall on someone. In these cases, the coach should be solidly supported on heavy wooden blocks or jack stands for safety.

**Hot-running Neptune**

**Q** We have a 2007 Holiday Rambler Neptune with a 300-hp Cummins engine and rear radiator. There is good coolant in it, there isn't any dirt in the

radiator cooling fins and it runs cool for hours. Then on a hill climb, after 10-20 seconds, it starts to overheat and the warning light comes on. But as soon as rpm drops, so does the temperature. I don't have a temperature gauge with numbers. It runs at about three-quarters up the gauge, but of course when I go into higher rpm on a hill, it climbs up the other quarter and will often trigger a check engine light. What could it be?

**Richard Corbin | Dothan, Alabama**

**A** Diesel engines produce a varying amount of heat based on load. At idle, they barely produce any heat, but at full load, there's a lot of heat that needs to be dissipated from the radiator. It seems like the cooling system is working marginally, which is why it can handle the heat at lower loads. There are two likely culprits that need to be checked. Based on the year of your coach, I suspect that the inside of the radiator may have developed a coating of insulating deposits from interaction with the coolant. This happens slowly over the years and isn't usually noticed until overheating develops. I've found that it often happens after 10 years or so. The typical solution is to have the radiator removed and cleaned internally by a radiator shop; it's called "rodding out." I have fixed many overheating problems using this method.

It's also possible to detect cool tubes (on the side away from the fan) among the hot ones, which indicates that little or no coolant is flowing through those tubes. You can check it with an electronic spot thermometer (infrared thermometer), but never place your hands near the fan when the engine is running.

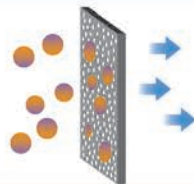
The other likely gremlin is an engine-cooling fan that is not engaging fully. Since it's way in the back, you may not hear it from the cab. It's best to pull over on a grade (where safe) when it gets hot and have an assistant rev the engine while you listen in back for the fan's roar. Alternatively, you might consider taking it to an official Cummins service center. Cummins



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generally has a good reputation for finding and solving such problems, although it may not be cheap.

### Towing a 2018 Chevrolet Equinox

This is in response to the December 2018 letter by Paul Dyresen regarding towing a 2018 Chevrolet Equinox. We have the same issue: Following the owner's manual for flat towing the 2018 Equinox, the alarm begins to ring when the vehicle is in the "accessory" mode. The owner's manual states the alarm will shut off after about 20-30 minutes. It does not! Chevrolet engineers recommended that a battery charger be installed to prevent battery drain. We had one installed (Chevy recommended a unit by IVR); it is relatively inexpensive and keeps the battery charged for about 4-5 hours of towing. I do recommend that a battery booster be purchased also because we have experienced a dead battery when we arrived

at our destination. I hope this helps.

**Paul Carrier | Tifton, Georgia**

Thanks for sharing your experiences with towing the Equinox. It's best to install a charge line from the motorhome. Kits are available from several aftermarket manufacturers.

### Can't Coil Cold Cables

**Q** I have a 2016 Thor Windsport 35C that uses a 50-amp shorepower cable. I don't use the RV in colder weather (temperatures below 40 degrees Fahrenheit) but have experienced problems coiling the cable for storage in the morning when the temperatures outside are in the low 40s. Short of using a heat gun to warm up the exterior of the cable, is there some other way to keep the cable flexible in these kinds of temps?

**Rick Kluber | San Diego, California**

**A** That's pretty much it, other than waiting for the sun to warm things up. This goes for hoses, too. Items made from plastic or rubber are affected by low temperatures. Product quality plays a role here; cheaper cables and hoses will likely stiffen up more easily. If you're going to use the RV frequently in colder temperatures, SmartPlug makes a 50-amp cordset that remains flexible in colder weather. Camco makes the Zero-G hose, which is similarly pliable. Fortunately, you don't get too much weather that cold in San Diego.

### Slideout ... Won't! — Comment

This is in regard to "Slideout ... Won't" in the December 2018 issue. With respect to the issue of the slideout not working in a Coachmen Sportscoach, one suggestion is to check the solenoid controlling the non-ignition components, such as slideout power. I have a 2012 Sportscoach and had an issue with a lack of power for items that should operate when the ignition is on. It was determined that it was the solenoid that engaged with the ignition switch. As a temporary solution, until a solenoid could be **(continued on page 105)**



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## COACH & POWERTRAIN

(continued from page 100)

located, a tech jumped the wires to the non-ignition solenoid. The person who wrote to you could be experiencing the opposite situation that I had.

**Michael Polsinelli | South Lyon, Michigan**

Thanks for writing, Michael. If you try to operate a slideout and there's no noise at all, suspect a power supply or safety lockout problem. You should begin the troubleshooting process by checking all the safety lockouts (like parking brake set, ignition on, front seats pulled forward, etc.). Then, if you don't have any luck, check for power at the motor terminals, wall switch or slideout controller using a voltmeter. Follow the troubleshooting instructions for the specific brand and model of slideout system you have.

### Adding Instrumentation — Tip

This is in response to Julie and Ted Thornton's issue with time, temperature and direction requirements

(November 2018 issue.) Go to Walmart or Amazon and you can get a "weather station" with an outside sensor that will give you a large display with time and temperature info for very little cost. They might now have a choice that will include directional info, but I can almost guarantee Amazon would have a large display compass for the dashboard.

**Lynn Gutterman | via email**

Thanks for writing. You can also find these units in RV or hardware stores, on eBay and in many other places. **M**

### Have a Tech Question?

**Contact our experts:**

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

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## Details, Details

On the 100th anniversary of Grand Canyon National Park, paying attention to the small stuff makes a big difference

By Alan Rider

**P**artly by nature, partly by training, I've become one of those people for whom details matter. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that simply noticing the finer points that most people overlook enriches any experience. Especially when you're traveling.

I've been thinking about this idea since I read that Grand Canyon National Park (928-638-7888, [www.nps.gov/grca](http://www.nps.gov/grca)) is celebrating its 100th birthday this year. You see, over the course of the many trips I've made to the park, I've become convinced that the real beauty of this place lies not in the broad sweeping vistas, but in the small things most visitors don't even notice.

Like the huge black birds you'll see gliding along the canyon rim, for example. They're endangered California condors, one of the rarest birds in the world, brought back from the brink of extinction and reintroduced to the wild in an area just northeast of the park. One encounter with them soaring by on their majestic wingspan and all the efforts to save the species seem oh-so worth it.

Another easily overlooked attraction is the show going on above the canyon. The sunsets here are world-famous, of course, but stay after the sun dips below the horizon and you'll enjoy some of the most star-filled skies anywhere in the nation (the Grand Canyon is expected to move from Provisional status to full International

Dark Sky Park later this year).

Speaking of things most visitors will never see, I'd encourage you to get an early start on your visit. Arrive at the park before sunrise and you'll not only avoid the crowds, but you can enjoy watching the deep indigos of the false dawn give way to yellows, oranges and greens under the robin's-egg-blue sky of another spectacular new day.

While I think of the Grand Canyon as a natural wonder, humans have a long history here as well. One blink-and-you'll-miss-it stop along the 25-mile Desert View Drive is the Tusayan ruins. There you'll find a modest museum containing a variety of artifacts, including small split-twig animal figurines that were created about the same time as Stonehenge.

Architecture aficionados with an eye for detail will find a lot of buildings with fascinating histories here.

Groundbreaking architect Mary Colter designed a half-dozen structures here and then obsessively supervised construction and decoration meant to make the new look old. Topping that list is the seven-story Desert View Watchtower near the park's east entrance, which was built to resemble the watchtowers built by Ancestral Puebloan people of the Four Corners region centuries ago. Another masterwork is her "geologic" fireplace at the Bright Angel Lodge, which uses stones from all the canyon's major rock layers arranged in the shape of the canyon's Zoroaster Temple formation and placed in the same order they appear in the canyon walls.

Our review of often-overlooked Grand Canyon attractions wouldn't be complete without a mention of the North Rim. Though it's only open from mid-May to mid-October and requires a scenic four-and-a-half-hour drive from the much more crowded South Rim, this higher-altitude side of the canyon is utterly distinct thanks to its cooler subalpine climate that produces vast stands of tall pines and white-barked quaking aspens.

Put all these small details together and it's easy to see why President Theodore Roosevelt called the Grand Canyon "the one great sight which every American should see." I couldn't agree more. Which is why it remains one of my most highly recommended stops along The Road Ahead. **M**

**“ I've become convinced that the real beauty lies not in the broad sweeping vistas, but in the small things most visitors don't even notice. ”**

### Isn't it Grand? ☞

The seven-story Desert View Watchtower is located near the national park's east entrance. Choose from one of 13 day hikes at the North Rim, ranging from 20 minutes to seven hours.





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