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November 2014

7 ADVENTURES AND SPORTS FOR RVers



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Courthouse Butte, just south of Sedona, Arizona, in Red Rock Country.



The Roku 3 is one of the top-rated media streaming devices. Pg. 41

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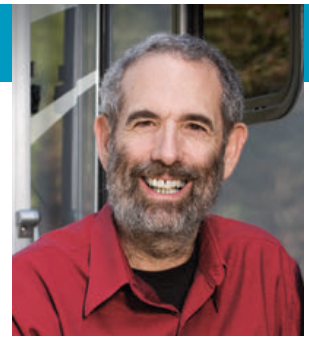
Lugging around a vacuum cleaner is a drag; InterVac's central system makes short — and lightweight — work out of cleanup

ON THE COVER

Eby's Pines RV Park & Campground in Northern Indiana Amish Country is the backdrop for Entegra Coach's Anthem diesel-pusher — an all-electric tag-axle plan with four slides (see test on page 52). Photo by Shawn Spence.



By Bob Livingston



Is There Really an Off-Season?

It's hard to believe that Thanksgiving is right around the corner. Seems like time just vaporizes these days. My take on fall and winter travel is probably different from that of the majority of motorhome owners. I'm certainly a big fan of hanging out in posh resorts in snowbird regions, but I don't shy away from the adventure of travel in places where the leaves have turned and dropped from their branches and the chill in the air forces us to don jackets and huddle around campfires.

The solitude of late fall/winter travel can be visually breathtaking, but visiting crowd-free destinations is also a big selling point for my family and RV friends. We enjoy the thrill of self-containment, especially when the weather presents challenging conditions.

Obviously, batteries play a critical role in how well we fare when unhooked from the grid. Smart charging has upped the ante from conventional power converters, which tend to discourage batteries from being in top condition. But even some

smart chargers can fall short when conditioning certain types of batteries, so having the right real-time information and historical backup can play critical roles in battery performance and longevity.

That's where monitors come in handy. Having a digital readout of voltage helps, but the information is woefully inadequate. Detailed charging and loading data provided by a high-tech monitor like the TriMetric meter tested on page 61, gives the coach owner the advantage when it comes to 12-volt DC power management.

Hanging out in areas where the weather can be marginal has its risks for those of us who like to spend time outdoors. We've spent many a Thanksgiving in California's Sierra Nevada foothills buried in snow. But that never stopped us

from smoking a turkey in a Weber cooker. You just have to plan on being inside for longer periods of time.

Indoor activities have come a long way from the days when we snuggled under a blanket on the couch and listened to music or read a book. Electronic wizardry gives us more choices, whether that means answering email on a computer or tablet or watching a movie on a big flat-screen TV with surround sound. Wireless technology has made it possible to enjoy current programming and movies almost anywhere we travel. Sure, we're conditioned to watch satellite TV, but Don Smith shows us how we can also take advantage of program streaming in his article "Give Your TV a Ph.D." on page 41.

A number of low-cost gadgets allow connection to any TV with an HDMI port, and our smartphones, for example, do the rest. Of course, a good Wi-Fi source is also necessary. It's hard to believe that DVDs are becoming almost obsolete.

In my mind, there are no substitutions for the outdoors, even during the colder seasons. But you have to admit that spending time inside our motorhomes has become a lot more pleasant. I'll swap that blanket for the fireplace, any day. **M**



“Wireless technology has made it possible to enjoy current programming and movies almost anywhere we travel.”

Contributors | November



Dennis C. Brewer and his wife, Penny, have spent four years full-timing and three years snowbirding across the 45th parallel in their motorhome. Dennis is a technology author and consultant.



Bill and Jenn Gehr, along with their two Boston bulldogs, are full-time RV adventurers who enjoy sharing their technical knowledge with fellow RV enthusiasts wherever they travel.



Bruce Hampson has been writing about cars, boats and RVs for more than 30 years. A former senior managing editor at *MotorHome*, he lives in the RV-building capital of the world, Elkhart, Indiana.



Bobbie Hasselbring is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of www.realfoodtraveler.com, which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS Class C.



E. Don Smith is a Tennessee-based freelance writer and photographer who has been a frequent contributor to *MotorHome* magazine since 2006. He is the proud owner of a Tiffin Phaeton coach.



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

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What is Your Definition of a Full-Time RVer?

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

A Full-Timer's Primary Residence is an RV

I have to take issue with Ron Jones' inaccurate and elitist definition of a "full-time" RVer. Simply put, a full-timer is someone whose primary (or only) living accommodation is his or her RV. Why on earth would it matter if they stay in the same place for an extended period of time? With the price of fuel, and considering that many full-timers are retired, they sometimes can't afford to go galivanting all over the country! If Jones' definition were accepted, then who would decide how long an RVer stayed at a particular location before they stopped being a full-timer and became ... what?

When I retire next year, we will become full-timers, and we plan on working as camp hosts for three-month stints, so I guess we wouldn't qualify under Jones' standards.

Mike Williams | Fruit Heights, Utah

The Simple Definition of a Full-Timer 24/7/365. One location, two locations or 365 locations — makes no difference.

Mike Kangas | Menominee, Michigan

What Address to Use When Going Full Time?

I enjoyed the discussion about what defines a full-time RVer. I am 70 years old and work part-time as an over-the-road truck driver. When I retire, I plan on living full time in an RV and traveling the U.S. One question I have is what to do about an address for my driver's license. Maybe other readers can offer some suggestions.

Richard Smith | Las Vegas, Nevada

Please Keep Our Pets and Wildlife Safe

While the July Quick Tip "A Better Mousetrap" is a clever way to keep mice away, it is dead wrong when it states, "This not only means that pets can't get



to the poison" Please let your readers know the dangers of bait boxes to both cats and dogs and other predatory animals. Once a mouse eats the bait (typically an anticoagulant poison) in one of these boxes, it exits the container and might live for several hours or days. EPA studies indicate that these second-generation anticoagulants are then likely to poison the predatory wildlife that eats the dead (or still living) rodent. This includes our pet cats, dogs and other predatory wildlife. Thanks for your concern in helping to keep all of our pets and wildlife safe.

Diana Rubin | Quincy, Massachusetts

Don't Let the Engine Idle

I read the article "ReDISCOVERY" in the July issue written by Chris Hemer on his review of the 2015 Discovery motorhome. He states that Fleetwood's instructions indicate that the engine must be running

Featured Letter

Our Motel on Wheels

We have had this license plate since we bought our Winnebago View in 2006. We have traveled through all the continental U.S., Alaska, Canada and Nova Scotia, and everywhere we travel, people comment on our tag. We started camping in 1992 in my husband's parents' 1972 Winnebago Brave. Our son and his wife and their four kids have it now, but it needs repair. They use it for campouts in their backyard. Before we got a motorhome, we traveled in

an SUV and then in a van, and slept in them when needed. We are both retired now. The day after I retired, in 2008, we left in our View and traveled to Alaska. The reason we bought a small motorhome is because we don't like to pull a dinghy when we are on long trips and the View is easy to maneuver. Needless to say we love to travel and see our beautiful country!

Bobby and Carla Wood | Gastonia, North Carolina





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to operate the slides, jacks and stairwell cover to prevent excessive voltage drain on the batteries. In my opinion, running a diesel engine is annoying to neighbors and unnecessary. I agree that it takes considerable energy [battery voltage] to move the slides and operate the leveling jacks. Rather than letting the engine run when I arrive at a site, I connect the electric cord to the campground before deploying the jacks and extending the slides. When I get ready to leave a site, I don't disconnect from shorepower until I have closed the slides and retracted the jacks. Using shorepower to keep the batteries charged up is less annoying and saves fuel.

Leo Aragon | Via email

Sewer Air

Thanks for another great issue (July). In particular, the two articles back to back: "Keep it Clean" and "Tanks a Lot." In the beginning of Emily Fagan's article, under the "wastewater tanks" section, she states after discussing the decision

of whether or not to leave the gray-water tank valve open in RV parks with sewer hookups: "This debate will probably go on forever." For my part, this is true, but here's something worth keeping in mind if you like to keep your gray dump valve open in RV parks. The park's sewer system will be partially vented through your RV's gray-water tank and subsequently up the vent stack and out into the air. In addition, some of this gas can obviously enter the RV's interior through P-traps and malfunctioning sink vents. If you've ever walked through a big RV park and caught a whiff of "sewer air," you may have likely experienced what I'm talking about.

Drew Mueller | Martinez, California

Just Plain Practical

I am so happy that Wal-Mart and Cracker Barrel allow RV parking overnight. I'm not a cheapskate, as one of your readers thought we must be. When we are on the road and just passing through, I find it abundantly wasteful to spend \$50 or \$60

a night just to park and sleep from 9 p.m. to 7 a.m. When RVers are just passing through a town and are trying to get to another location, Wal-Mart and Cracker Barrel are very safe places to just park for the night and sleep. That's not being cheap, that's just plain practical.

Nancy Westmoreland | Carefree, Arizona

Question of the Month

When you travel in your motorhome, how many nights, on average, do you stay in parking lots such as Wal-Mart or Cracker Barrel?

Send your comments to:

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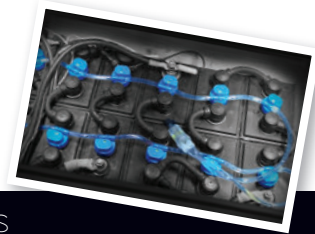
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Utah's Goblin Valley State Park

Take a walk on the wild side in this remote and rugged high-desert playground

By Regina L. Hollis

Welcome to weird, wonderful Goblin Valley State Park, home of squat, rubicund, long-nosed, comical gnomes carved over millennia by wind erosion from mud, silt and sandstone remnants of a 170-million-year-old inland sea. This hiker's paradise is situated south of Interstate 70, north of Utah's scenic Highway 24/95, between Capitol Reef, Canyonlands and Arches national parks on San Rafael Reef's high desert. My husband and I never tired of the

labyrinth of gnome trails, but during hot afternoons hiking in nearby Little Wild Horse and Bell slot canyons offered a respite from the heat. The state park offers spacious electric RV sites, each with its own fire ring and covered picnic table. Nearby free Bureau of Land Management dry campsites are plentiful, too. However, bring your own water either way!

For more information, call 435-275-4584, or go to www.stateparks.utah.gov/park/goblin-valley-state-park.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Steak It Out

I love a good beef steak, and when I travel in my motorhome, I often seek out great steakhouses. Steaks also are an easy choice for cooking over the grill at a campsite.

The term “steak” comes from the Old Norse word *steik* or “roastbeef.” It’s a slice of beef cut perpendicular to the muscle fibers that’s grilled, broiled or pan-fried. But what are the best cuts for a tasty steak? Beef from lesser-used muscles are the most tender; these include the loin and rib, which cook quickly.

Rib steaks, my favorite, come from the “rib primal” with the rib bone attached. This is a “cowboy rib-eye” or “bone-in rib-eye.” (You can also buy rib steaks without the bone, but bone-in tends to be more flavorful.) It has plenty of fat marbling and a rim of fat, which makes the steak particularly juicy and flavorful. The center portion or “eye” is the most tender.

Sirloin steaks are also a good choice and are often served in steakhouses. This cut is near the cow’s rump, and, generally speaking, the closer the cut is to the rump (like rump steak), the more tender it is. The upper sirloin is more tender (and more expensive) than lower sirloin. These cuts are great for grilling or frying.

Other steak-lover favorites include T-bones and Porterhouse steaks. Porterhouse are cut from the rear portion of the loin and have a larger tenderloin portion; T-bones are cut closer to the front of the short loin and have a smaller tenderloin.

Some people want a small portion and opt for just the tenderloin filet. This meat is so tender that dishes like steak tartare (raw chopped or



From top: At Urban Farmer in Portland, Oregon, you can get a “flight” of steaks that let you compare the flavors of grass-, grain- and corn-fed beef. Baked potato is a classic pairing with steak.

minced beef mixed with onions, capers, seasonings and sometimes raw egg) are made from tenderloin.

Cook ‘em Right

Steaks can be cooked rare (red inside and 130-140 degrees internal temperature), medium rare (red-pink, 145 degrees), medium (pink, 160 degrees) and well done (brown, 170 degrees). A great tool to help you cook steak to your liking is a quick-response meat thermometer (insert through the side of the steak to its center). Take steaks off when they reach 5-10 degrees below the final temperature. For instance, for a medium-rare steak, remove from the grill at 135-140 degrees. Then allow your steak to rest for 5-10 minutes before cutting. This allows the muscle fibers to relax (and be more tender) and lets the meat absorb all the juices, which ensures it won’t end up all over your plate or serving platter.

Have a favorite steakhouse?

Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com (with Road Foodie in the subject line).



Dig In! Prime rib, which is often served with au jus (the meat’s own juice), comes from the primal rib section of the cow, just like a rib-eye does.



ROAD FOODIE
FAVORITES
Great Steakhouses

The Signal Grill, Hamilton, Montana. This small steakhouse offers juicy 8-, 12- and 16-ounce rib-eyes with perfect grill marks and juicy interiors; www.thesignalgrill.com

Urban Farmer, Portland, Oregon. In addition to its “flight” of steaks, it also offers super-tender Kobe beef from a special strain of Wagyu cattle; www.urbanfarmerportland.com

Vernon’s Hidden Valley Steakhouse, Los Ranchos, New Mexico. This replica 1920s “speakeasy” serves delectable rib-eyes (12 and 20 ounce), filets, New York strip and prime rib; www.thehiddensteakhouse.com



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Getting a Good Wrap

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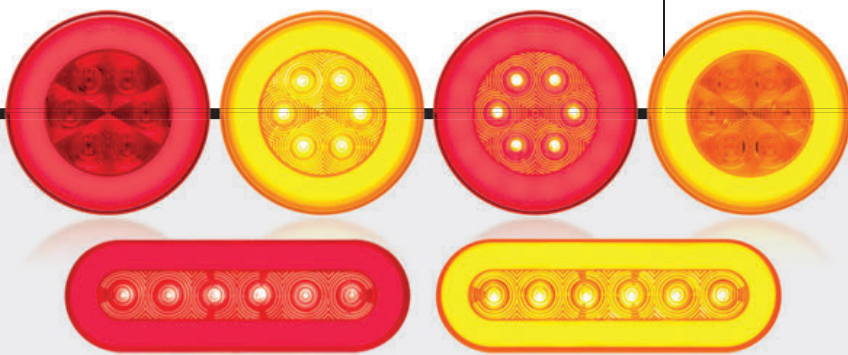
TRACWRAP, 210-678-3700, www.tracwrap.com



Go With the Flow

Truck System Technologies, an established provider of tire-pressure monitoring systems, has introduced its state-of-the-art TST507 Flow Through System, which features a fill port that allows users to add or remove air without having to remove the sensors. This system monitors air pressure and temperature in real time for each tire, and can also signal a low tire, an overheating tire or an overinflated tire. The TST507 Flow Through System utilizes CR1632 user-replaceable batteries and can monitor up to 22 tire positions with customizable high/low alert parameters.

Truck System Technologies Inc., 770-889-9102, www.tsttruck.com



Turn on Your GloLight

Optronics International announced the introduction of its newest generation of GloLight LED stop-, tail- and turnlamps. By re-engineering the lights to incorporate LEDs on both its front and back surfaces, engineers were able to reduce the size of the lamp's printed circuit board by 50 percent. LEDs on one side form the central array, while LEDs on the opposite side use reflective optics to create the glowing outer band. The lamp's electronics use solid-state, surface-mount-device construction that protects them against moisture, shock and vibration. All GloLight Gen II lamps use highly durable polycarbonate lenses and housings that are sonically sealed.

Optronics International, 800-364-5483, www.optronicsinc.com



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Ford Increases Chassis Output to Meet Demand

Ford Motor Co. has boosted production of its Class A motorhome chassis in response to growing consumer confidence and demand for motorhomes. According to data from Statistical Surveys Inc., a market analysis company specializing in the RV industry, total motorhome sales are up 13 percent year to date through May. Sales of Class A's are up 12 percent through May, and sales of Class C's are up 14 percent for the same period.

"Motorhome sales are cyclical, and correlate with improving economic performance," said Erich Merkle, Ford sales analyst. "Like boats, homes and luxury cars, motorhomes — especially Class A — are big-ticket items, so when we see a continued upward trend in sales, it means people have far greater confidence to make a large, discretionary purchase."

Ford leads the Class A and Class C motorhome chassis markets, with a 63 percent share of the Class A market and 72 percent share in Class C chassis year to

date through May, according to Statistical Surveys.

Ford increased production of its F-53 chassis used for Class A motorhomes by 33 percent through the first half of 2014 to meet growing demand. "We believe we will see further growth as the industry continues to recover," said Merkle.



Hit the Links

The "Good Sam RV Travel Guide and Campground Directory" has announced its list of Top Parks for Golfers for 2014. These RV parks, which were chosen by the directory's editors and consultants, provide challenging, fun-filled golf courses for RVers who seek out great links on their travels. Listed by state, they include:

Alabama	Auburn RV Park at Leisure Time Campground, Auburn
Arizona	Eagle View RV Resort at Fort McDowell, Fort McDowell Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort, Casa Grande Pueblo El Mirage Golf & RV Resort, El Mirage
California	Emerald Desert RV Resort-Sunland, Palm Desert Pomo RV Park & Campground, Fort Bragg
Florida	The Glades RV Resort, Moore Haven Grand Lake RV & Golf Resort, Citra
Michigan	Petoskey RV Resort, Bay Harbor
Missouri	Mark Twain Landing, Monroe City
Montana	Fairmont RV Park & Campground, Anaconda
Oregon	Mallard Creek Golf & RV Resort, Lebanon
Texas	Parkview Riverside RV Park, Concan
Washington	Lake Pleasant RV Park, Bothell



NEWS BRIEFS

Engaging the Next Generation

▶ As part of the Department of the Interior's youth initiative to engage and employ the next generation in the great outdoors, the National Park Service (NPS) and the Boys & Girls Clubs of America have announced a joint effort to develop field trips and programs that encourage outdoor recreation, stewardship and healthy lifestyles.

"It will introduce thousands of children to their national parks ... where they can play, learn, serve and work outdoors," said NPS Director Jonathan B. Jarvis.

One of the initiative's goals is to engage 1 million volunteers annually on public lands, effectively tripling the current volunteer numbers.

New Camping World Store

▶ Camping World Inc. opened its newest SuperCenter in Rossford, Ohio, in the Toledo market on Aug. 22. The location, named Camping World of Rossford, offers RV sales, service, parts and accessories, and is located off Interstate 75. The 30,000-square-foot facility has a Camping World retail store and Camping World RV Sales dealership.

Airstream's Grand Tour

▶ Airstream has added a new floorplan to its Interstate Class B lineup. The Grand Tour, with an overall length of 24.5 feet, is built on the Mercedes-Benz chassis and has six air bags, lane-keeping and collision-prevention systems, and parking sensors. Standard features include a power awning, Ultraleather seating, Corian countertops, a drawer microwave, twin HD LED TVs and a dedicated workspace. An msrp has not yet been established.

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Abiquiu, New Mexico



At Ghost Ranch, visitors see actual locations that inspired O'Keeffe's paintings.

A Day in Georgia O'Keeffe Country

Drive an hour north of Santa Fe, New Mexico, to immerse yourself in desert terrain that inspired artist Georgia O'Keeffe (1887-1986). Start your day in the tiny village of Abiquiu with an escorted tour of O'Keeffe's 5,000-square-foot residence and studio (www.okeeffemuseum.org). Just below, Bode's General Store pumps fuel, sells groceries and serves up green chile cheeseburgers beside Highway 84 (www.bodes.com).

After lunch, drive 15 miles north to Ghost Ranch, a retreat center now owned by the Presbyterian Church, for an O'Keeffe Landscape Tour (www.ghost ranch.org). Your guide will point out the artist's summer home and specific locations she painted. Early reservations are recommended for both tours.


Overnight at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Riana Campground on Abiquiu Lake. Ideal for large motorhomes, some sites have electricity and all face Cerro Pedernal mesa where O'Keeffe's ashes were scattered. — *Christine Goodier*

Platte River Valley, Nebraska

The Amazing Sandhill Crane Migration



One of nature's most amazing migrations happens each fall and spring when sandhill cranes fly along the Central Flyway in Nebraska and gather in the fertile Platte River Valley. About 90 percent of the world's sandhill crane population, approximately 500,000, can be seen and heard along the 30 miles of Platte River between Kearney and Grand Island.

There are ample locations to view this remarkable migration, but specially constructed blinds are available at the National Audubon Society's Rowe Sanctuary near Kearney and at the Crane Trust near Grand Island. The best times for viewing are sunrise and sunset, when the birds depart and arrive at their roosting areas on the Platte. — *James Richardson* 



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Spectacular Sedona

An Awe-Inspiring Red-Rock Wonderland in North-Central Arizona

By Ken Reid

Spectacular! That's the word my wife, Gayle, and I use to describe our visit to the 140,000-acre area known as Red Rock Country, surrounding the town of Sedona, Arizona, in the Coconino National Forest. During our decades of travel by motorhome, we have rarely encountered a place that offers as many unusual points of scenic and photographic interest, coupled with such a highly developed infrastructure for accessing them. Along the well-maintained highways, there are many vista points, with displays that include substantial interpretive information about each location. There is also an elaborate system of more than 100 well-maintained trails, affording close encounters of a good kind

with virtually every attraction. Self-guided travel through this national treasure can be accomplished by motorhome, on foot, bicycle, or horseback. Guided tours and excursions are available via train, balloon, ATV, helicopter, raft or Segway.

Sedona, situated at an elevation of 4,500 feet, has a mild four-season climate, which is good news for outdoor enthusiasts. Whether you have an interest in history, geology, archaeology, art, photography, camping, hiking, biking, or just being surrounded by

Getting There ➞ From Flagstaff, take I-17 South to State Route 89A. Follow 89A 25 miles to Sedona. From Phoenix, take I-17 North 98 miles to State Highway 179 North. Continue on 179 for 14 miles (7.5 miles of this route is the Red Rock Scenic Byway — an All-American Road). Turn right at SR 89A.



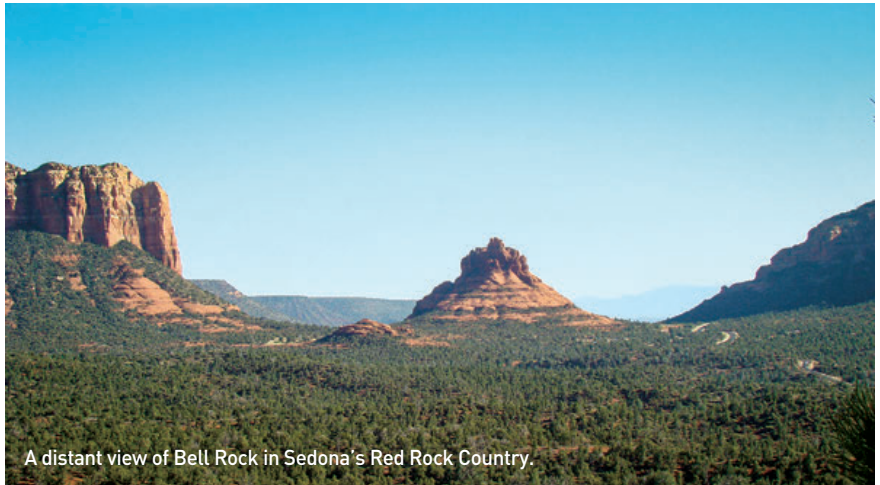
GETAWAY

SPECTACULAR SEDONA

nature in a place with wonderfully unique scenery, you will find plenty of things to see and do here. In fact, USA Weekend named Sedona one of the "Most Beautiful Places in America."

This is indeed red-rock country. Huge, awe-inspiring formations with names like Cathedral, Bell, Coffee Pot and Courthouse, stand tall against the skyline. Of course there are impressive chasms as well, including the very impressive Oak Creek and Sycamore canyons. Rising above Sedona is the Mogollon Rim, which is a 2,000-foot wall of limestone, mudstone and sandstone, from when the area was on the west coast of an emerging continent. The largest and best-preserved display of prehistoric rock art in the entire area is at the V-Bar-V Heritage Site. Sinagua Indians created the images between A.D. 900-1400. The visitor center is only about 100 yards from the parking area, and then it's a ½-mile walk to the art site.

In addition to all of the natural wonders to be found in the area, the



A distant view of Bell Rock in Sedona's Red Rock Country.

town of Sedona is home to a variety of art and cultural events: The Sedona Arts Festival (Oct. 11-12), Festival of Lights (Dec. 13), The International Film Festival (Feb. 21-March 1, 2015) and Sedona JazzFest (April 17-19, 2015) are just some examples. There are more than 80 galleries, metaphysical shops, specialty stores, antiques and even a large outlet-shopping district. Sedona

has world-class art galleries featuring paintings and photography of course, but also jewelry, sculpture, and a wide variety of Native American art. It also offers wonderful dining options, including French, Italian, Asian, Mexican and Southwestern. Unique fare like jams and margaritas made from the prickly pear cactus, tangy cactus fries, and unusual wines, tempt the palate. Nearby Page



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From the RV Sanitation Expert

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Verde Valley RV Resort is a centrally located 300-acre oasis with 265 full-hookup sites and plenty of amenities. V-Bar-V Heritage Site has the largest and best preserved display of prehistoric rock art in the area.

Springs and the Verde Valley are developing a reputation for some unique wines, so wine tasting is another experience to be had.

Whenever planning extensive sightseeing in an unfamiliar area, especially where hiking or biking is included, we like to set up a home base nearby and make day trips with our dinghy; that way we don't have to break and remake camp each day. We did see plenty of RVers touring Red Rock Country in their motorhomes, but except for those with very small rigs, options for parking and exploring seemed limited. There are many campgrounds and RV resorts in the area to choose from. Our itinerary included diverse areas of interest within a large map circle, so we chose to stay at Verde Valley RV Resort, near Cottonwood. It has plenty of amenities and is within easy driving distance of Sedona. The resort, a 300-acre oasis in the high desert, is situated adjacent to the Verde River and has 265 full-hookup sites, many of which are pull-through.

We recommend making your first stop at one of the visitor centers in the area. A lot of information can be obtained from the Chamber of Commerce in Sedona, as well as from centers operated by the U.S. Forest Service and Arizona State Parks, but the best overall source of information, brochures, and



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permits (including the Red Rock Pass required for visits to the many important viewing sites), is the Red Rock Visitor Center located along State Route 179, between Sedona and the junction with Interstate 17. It's a modern facility with an impressive inventory of literature, but perhaps more importantly has knowledgeable personnel who can save you time, expense and potential mistakes. One of the volunteers at the center gave us recommendations — based on his substantial personal experience — about which scenic routes and trails to take to get the most out of the time we had allotted. He broke it all down into segments that could be accomplished in two hours, a half day or a full day. He was also able to provide detailed information about the difficulty level of the hiking trails we were interested in.

For those who plan a self-guided tour, it should be pointed out that not all of the trails are open to mountain

bikes. Likewise, only certain trails are accessible by equestrians. Further, since May 1, 2012, there are new rules limiting where a motor vehicle may be driven within the Coconino National Forest. Asking a few questions ahead of time can save an embarrassing and perhaps expensive mistake.

We have one final recommendation for visitors: Follow the signs in Sedona to the airport, which is located high atop a mesa, at least three hours before sunset. There is a very large parking lot across the road from a viewing area that overlooks much of Sedona and Red Rock Country. If you get there early, you won't have a problem finding parking, even for a large motorhome. Then walk to the nearby Mesa Grill for an outstanding dinner. After dinner, walk to the viewing area and be there at least 20 minutes before sunset. Access to the viewing area is free, but a \$1 donation per person is requested. There you will find several

telescopes, and sometimes hundreds of other people gathered for the same experience. Take your camera and binoculars. Conditions permitting, you'll experience one of the most impressive sunsets of a lifetime.

Whatever amount of time you can allot for exploring this national treasure — whether hours or weeks — should prove to be a significant life experience filled with wonderful memories. Gayle and I are already making plans to return to Sedona next year. **M**

➤ FOR MORE INFORMATION

Sedona Chamber of Commerce

800-288-7336, www.visitsedona.com

Verde Valley RV Resort

877-570-2267, www.rvonthego.com

CHAPEL OF THE HOLY CROSS

Located at 780 Chapel Road, Sedona, this is a must-see attraction. Not only is it an architectural wonder, the view from the chapel is spectacular. Visitors can see Cathedral Rock, Bell Rock, Courthouse Butte and much of the eastern rim of Sedona from observation points around the chapel. Inside is also pretty amazing. Call 928-282-4069 for further information, or go to www.chapeloftheholycross.com.



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SHELLICIOUS SANIBEL ISLAND

A Snowbird's Paradise in Old Florida

When the weather howls, many RVers head for warmer climates. One of the least explored snowbird destinations is Sanibel Island, a sub-tropical barrier island in Southwest Florida with lots of warm emerald waters and gorgeous sunsets perfect for RVing. This sultry paradise also boasts some of the best shelling in the world, so we're Sanibel bound.

Laid-back island life is enchanting, but the costs of transporting motorhomes to

most islands make RVing prohibitive. Not so on Sanibel Island. In 1963, the 3-mile-long Sanibel Causeway replaced the ferry and, for \$6 (round trip), RVers can drive their rigs right onto this charming bit of sand. (A short bridge connects Sanibel with next-door Captiva Island.)

When the Sanibel Causeway was built, islanders feared rampant development would spoil their piece of Old Florida. They

established the Sanibel Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and today more than half of the island is preserved in its natural state. There are also restrictions limiting building height and chain businesses. The result is an island surrounded by azure Gulf of Mexico waters and filled with colorful tropical birds, mangroves and swamps, and manatees and dolphins that are a hop away from development and an

international airport, yet a world away. Sanibel is a place to slow down, take a deep breath, and say, "Ahhh."

We pull the motorhome onto the island and head straight for Periwinkle Park & Campground, the island's only RV park. Like many RV parks in Florida, Periwinkle reserves a number of sites for permanent residents, but they offer 80 full-hookup sites for travelers like us, including big-rig and smaller sites. The sites are grass- or sand-topped and some feature concrete patios. There are also showers, a laundry room and game room, but the real charmers are the bird aviary and duck pond, a 30-year project of owners Dick and Jerry Muench. A series of cages house smaller birds and colorful parrots and macaws. There are also big

The idyllic view from Cabbage Key Inn and Restaurant is mesmerizing.

aviaries for cranes and hornbills. There's even a large cage with fuzzy brown and ring-tailed lemurs. The pond, which is filled with a colorful show of wild and resident ducks and swans like mallards, ruddies and shovelers, features a coin-operated feed station where, for 25 cents, we create feathered frenzies tossing grain to the birds.

There are only two main island roads — Periwinkle Way/Sanibel-Captiva on the east side and West Gulf Drive facing the Gulf — and traffic can get pretty jammed up, especially on the south end where most of the businesses are located. Also, parking is limited, so we opt to park the motorhome and use our dinghy vehicle. It's a great decision because the roads on tiny Captiva Island, our first stop, are not RV-friendly with lots of tight turns, narrow lanes and dead-end streets.

Dolphins and Cheeseburgers in Paradise

We're up early to meet Captain Tom Jones of Captiva Cruises for a half-day, narrated sail on the 62-foot Lady Chadwick to Cabbage Key, one of the many tiny islands that dot the waters. As soon as Jones pulls the double-decker boat away from McCarthy's Marina, wild bottle-nose dolphins begin surfing in the boat's wake. They're just a few of the 400 resident dolphins that ply the Intracoastal Waterway year-round. Our tour guide tells us that dolphins like to hear and see us, which is why they turn on their sides as they cruise alongside. He says dolphins respond to shouting, clapping, whistling. Regardless of whether or not this is true, before long, the 30 or so passengers are whooping it up as dozens of pink-nosed

Dolphins ply the shallow waters throughout Pine Island Sound.



dolphins streak through the water.

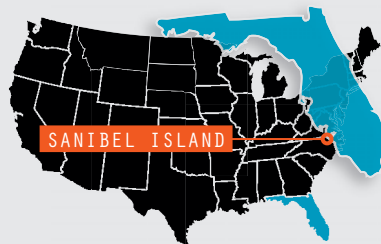
As we sip sodas and Bloody Marys under the boat's shady cover, we spot osprey and cormorants diving for breakfast in the shallow waters. While there's water as far as the eye can see, the average water depth is about 5 feet and Jones carefully navigates through the narrow channel. "If we run aground and have to abandon ship, just stand up," our tour guide jokes.

We cruise through Pine Island Sound, passing historic fishing shacks on stilts and a number of low-lying barrier islands, including Pine, Cayo Costa, and North Captiva. In the 1920s, a hurricane punched a hole through Captiva Island, creating Redfish Pass and North Captiva. Within an hour or so, we pull up to Cabbage Key, a small dollop of sand dotted with mangroves and several vacation homes,

including Cabbage Key Inn, the former home of playwright and novelist Mary Roberts Rinehart.

The restaurant is casual, with big screened openings and signed dollar bills covering the walls and ceiling. We order their juicy, signature burgers that reputedly inspired Jimmy Buffett to write the song "Cheeseburger in Paradise." After lunch, we have just enough time to climb the historic water tower and explore the short nature trail before reboarding the Lady Chadwick for home.

Back on land, we stop at Captiva's famous Bubble Room, an eclectic restaurant with three floors and five dining rooms with kitschy, over-the-top decorations (trains, antiques, circus collectibles, Mickey Mouse, twinkly lights, celebrity photos, Christmas decorations and more) and legendary cakes. We buy



How to Get There

From Interstate 75, take Exit 131 west to Summerlin Road. Turn left and go to the Sanibel Causeway (a \$6 toll). Drive across the causeway to Sanibel Island.



Shells catch the last rays of sun on a Sanibel beach. An osprey — a common raptor on the island — ferries food to its nest. Brown pelicans often land on pilings, giving visitors terrific views.

giant pieces of their signature Orange Crunch and White Christmas Coconut cakes to enjoy later.

On Sanibel, we scout out the Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum, the most comprehensive museum in the Northern Hemisphere dedicated to shells. We start with the 30-minute, “Mollusks on the March” video and learn that the island boasts 300 different types of mollusks both single-shelled gastropods (snails) and two-shelled bivalves. In the gallery, we find shells have been collected and used as money, jewelry, cookware and weaponry for thousands of years. There are beautiful examples of shells from Southwest Florida and around the world, including the giant goliath conch, the lightning whelk, the Atlantic triton’s trumpet and the horse conch. Before leaving, we buy a waterproof Sanibel and Captiva shell guide.

Birds and Shells Galore

The next morning, we meet Tarpon Bay Explorers for a 90-minute narrated tram tour of J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge. Darling was a cartoonist and environmental activist who served as the first director of the forerunner of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He organized a system of wildlife refuges like the 8,000 acres that makes up this refuge. As our tram navigates the 4 miles of paved roadway, tram guide and master naturalist, Don, points out different plants, including mangrove, wild coffee, and sea grape and birds like herons, osprey, eagles, cormorants, great and snowy egrets, and huge white-and-brown pelicans. “The waters are very shallow here,” Don tells us, “and rich with fish and nutrients so it attracts thousands of birds. It’s a veritable buffet for birds.”

Like many, Don is a volunteer.

With only six staffers, it’s the 250-plus volunteers, including a number of RVers, who sell tickets, drive the trams, staff the gift shop and lead refuge tours. They also offer four RV sites for volunteers, something that might be fun for us to do in the future.

We stop frequently to walk along boardwalks snaking through mangrove swamps to overlook ponds and lakes. Dozens of ibis pick up small fish with their curved beaks; brown-black anhingas and cormorants sit in low-hanging trees drying their outspread wings; flocks of comical pelicans march in unison like soldiers. We hungrily snap photos and wonder at the beauty all around us.

The tram isn’t the only way to experience the refuge. You can walk, bike, or drive your car through. (The refuge drive is closed to cars on Fridays.) Biking is especially popular and, with 22 miles of paved trails, you can explore nearly everywhere on the island, including the refuge, on two wheels. (Bike rentals available.)

After a quick lunch, armed with what we learned from our tour guide and a map from the Education Center, we spend the afternoon leisurely driving the refuge and taking more pictures.

It’s late, but we don’t feel like cooking. Instead, we heed the recommendation of a local and head for Traditions on the Beach at the historic Island Inn overlooking the Gulf. The Inn has been hosting guests since 1895 and part of the restaurant, including the bar’s wood-plank floor, is more than 100 years



Biking is a popular way of seeing the J.N. “Ding” Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

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Motorhomes tuck in at quaint Periwinkle Park & Campground on Sanibel Island.

old. Even some of the shells displayed in the restaurant's lobby were collected by guests in the early 1900s.

Traditions on the Beach itself is a step back in time. It's a supper club that harkens back to the 1950s-'60s, complete with a dance floor where couples sway to songs like "As Time Goes By" by a live jazz-swing combo. The Mediterranean-themed food features fresh, local ingredients and the creamy crabmeat manicotti, ultra-rich lobster ravioli and silky tiramisu leave me in a happy food haze.

The next day, we spend the morning at the Sanibel farmers market stocking up on provisions. Sandwiched in a courtyard between Old Florida wooden clapboard buildings, this market has it all — fresh vegetables, local meats and fish, handmade pasta, artisan cheese, single-origin chocolate, and freshly baked breads, pastries and cookies. Judging from the happy crowds, it's a favorite among residents and visitors alike.

We'd booked a naturalist-led kayak tour through the waters of the refuge with Tarpon Bay Explorers. However, the weather is unseasonably cool and, when we get to the launch point, the wind is whipping the waves. A few brave souls hit the water, but we opt to wait out the weather at Sweet Melissa's Cafe. The grilled romaine salad and uber-fresh local mussels in sweet-savory tomato-saffron broth are so good I want to lick the bowl.

Armed with our shelling guide from the museum, after lunch we head for the beach. Storms and strong winds bring millions of shells to the beaches of



Sanibel and the museum staff suggested choosing a beach facing the current wind direction. We drive to West Gulf Drive and pay for parking at one of the beach-access areas (\$2 an hour). The beach is loaded with thousands and thousands of shells, especially bivalves like tiger and buttercup lucines, white-as-snow Atlantic surf clams, white-and-yellow cockles, and orange-gray-and-yellow zigzag scallops. Before long, we're doing the "Sanibel Stoop," walking in the classic bent-over position of shell hunters.

Despite walking a ways, we're not finding the more interesting snail-type shells. That is, until we meet a crazy man wading thigh-high in the surf.

The wind is stiff, and this man, dressed in shorts and a hooded sweatshirt, stands in the chilly surf. Each time the waves retreat, he plunges his arm into the water. We watch perplexed. After a few minutes, he rushes onto the beach toward us, his hands filled with beautiful twisty horse conches, pear

whelks and king's crowns.

"You want these?" he says grinning. He hands over his booty and then plunges back into the surf.

By the time we leave Sanibel, our suitcases are filled with so many shells, we can hardly lift them. Sanibel truly is shellicious. **M**

For More Information

The Bailey-Matthews Shell Museum
888-679-6450, www.shellmuseum.org

Captiva Cruises
239-472-5300, www.captivacruises.com

J.N. "Ding" Darling National Wildlife Refuge
www.fws.gov/dingdarling

Periwinkle Park & Campground
239-472-1433, www.sanibelcamping.com

Sanibel-Captiva Chamber of Commerce
239-472-1080, www.fortmyers-sanibel.com

Tarpon Bay Explorers
239-472-8900, www.tarponbayexplorers.com

Visitors flock to the beach for a bit of sunset shelling on Sanibel Island.



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TRAVEL WITH A MISSION

A Sampling of Historic Outposts in the American West

Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to check out a mission in your travels. Cheesy? Maybe, but now that I have your attention, the subject is solid.

Missions, large and small, opened up the West. Besides the well-known Spanish missions in California and Texas and others in Arizona and New Mexico, there are the later missions that preceded gold and cattle and opened up Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon.

All have interesting stories of people and purpose, hardship and hard work, and cultural conflict. Good intentions and good deeds did not always add up to good. What some viewed as help, others saw as dominance.

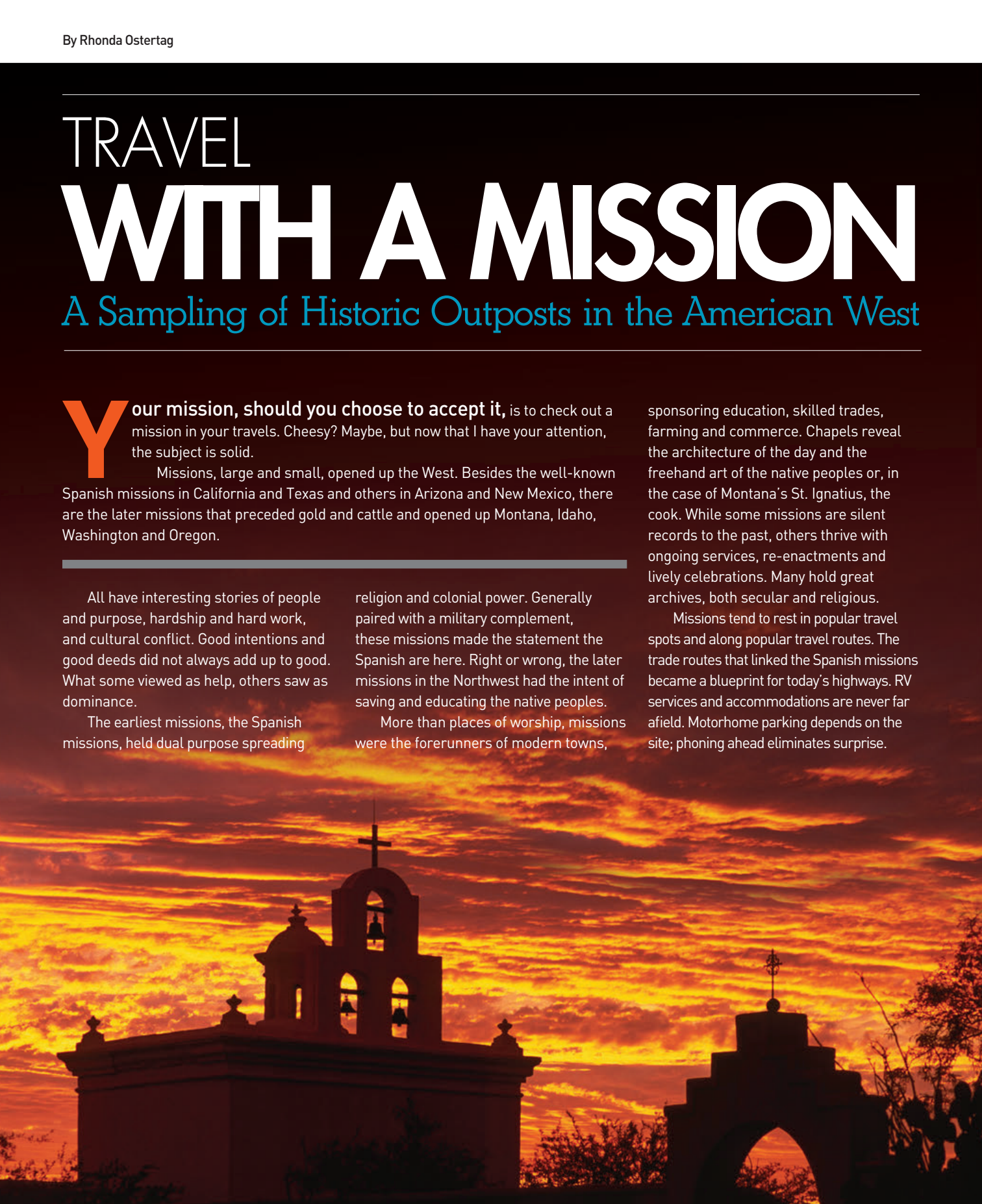
The earliest missions, the Spanish missions, held dual purpose spreading

religion and colonial power. Generally paired with a military complement, these missions made the statement the Spanish are here. Right or wrong, the later missions in the Northwest had the intent of saving and educating the native peoples.

More than places of worship, missions were the forerunners of modern towns,

sponsoring education, skilled trades, farming and commerce. Chapels reveal the architecture of the day and the freehand art of the native peoples or, in the case of Montana's St. Ignatius, the cook. While some missions are silent records to the past, others thrive with ongoing services, re-enactments and lively celebrations. Many hold great archives, both secular and religious.

Missions tend to rest in popular travel spots and along popular travel routes. The trade routes that linked the Spanish missions became a blueprint for today's highways. RV services and accommodations are never far afield. Motorhome parking depends on the site; phoning ahead eliminates surprise.

A photograph showing the silhouette of the Arizona Mission San Xavier del Bac against a vibrant sunset sky. The mission's architecture, including its bell tower and arched entrance, is clearly visible in dark silhouette. The sky is filled with horizontal bands of orange, yellow, and red, with some clouds catching the low light. The overall mood is peaceful and historic.

Arizona's Mission San Xavier del Bac at sunset.



The altar at Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá in San Diego, California.

The Mission Trail, California

El Camino Real, the Royal Road or King's Highway, knitted together 21 missions, each a day's horse ride apart, from San Diego to San Francisco. Together, they established Spain's presence in Alta California. Today, the Mission Trail roughly follows Interstate 5, U.S. 101 and California highways 82 and 37. By the 1920s, the El Camino Real Association had placed 450 bronze bells along the historic highway; many were stolen. Caltrans is the new keeper, and replacement bells are concrete not cast. Still, the bells are sentimental touchstones.

Missions in places like San Diego, San Juan Capistrano, Santa Barbara, Solvang (Santa Ines) and San Francisco readily fit vacation plans. San Diego de Alcalá, the first mission and a fine museum, illustrates how these centers of order, trade and settlement cleared the path for towns. A horseback ride (I-5 jaunt) north,

Mission San Luis Rey de Francia, east of Oceanside, is a gleaming white sanctuary in a sheltered valley with cross-shaped church, gardens and history.

Near Lompoc, La Purisima Mission State Historic Park recaptures the mission's pastoral-era lifestyle during the 1820s. The 37 restored and furnished rooms include dorms, barracks and pottery, leather and weaving shops. The mission housed hundreds of Chumash Indian workers and a force of Spanish soldiers, as well as the padres. Hand-cut beams, hand-turned adobe bricks and hand-fashioned nails and tiles; braying burros, milling sheep and cows, and nosing pigs; and cultivated fields and gardens promote the illusion of halted time. Living-history days advance the spell with period dress and historic chores.

In the north-central part of the mission chain, Mission San Juan Bautista, still owned and used by the Catholic Church, sits in the midst of San Juan Bautista State Historic Park, where the historic buildings and plaza recall California's Mexican-American period.

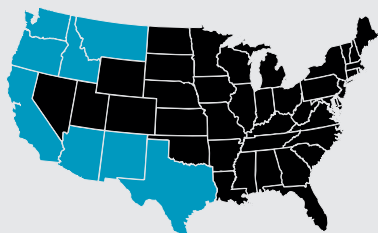
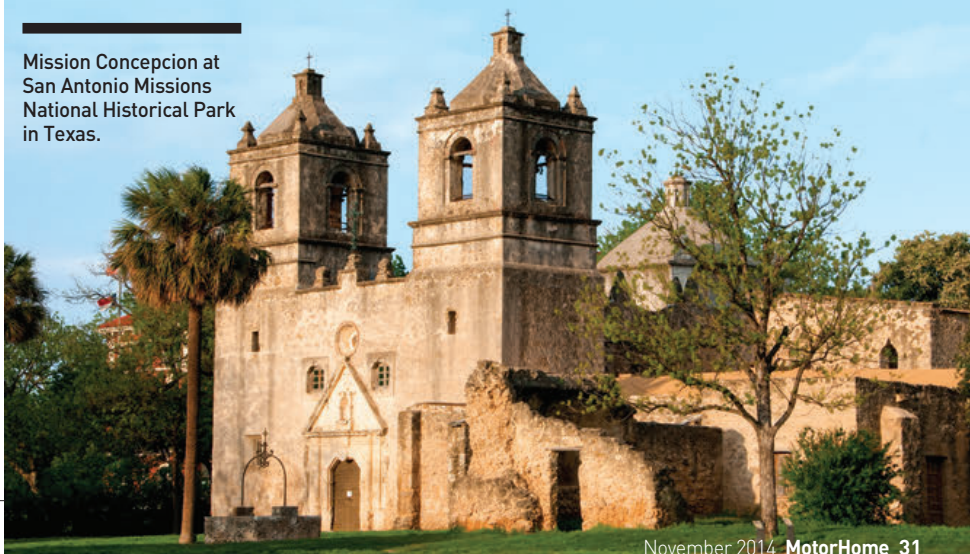
San Antonio Valley Missions, Texas

Dating to the 1700s, south to north along the mission highway, missions Espada, San Juan, San Jose and Concepcion make up San Antonio Missions National Historical Park. Not part of the park, The Alamo, to the north, completes the San Antonio lineup. With Apache raids from the north, drought and the rampant spread of disease, conditions were ripe for the Spanish missions with their foreign king and God to succeed among the peoples of South Texas.

Espada and San Juan captivate with an overall quiet. San Jose, rimmed by rock wall, holds the most complete compound. With auxiliary buildings intact, it provides a better picture of mission life. Concepcion has a commanding presence with towering walls, covered passages and skyline crosses.

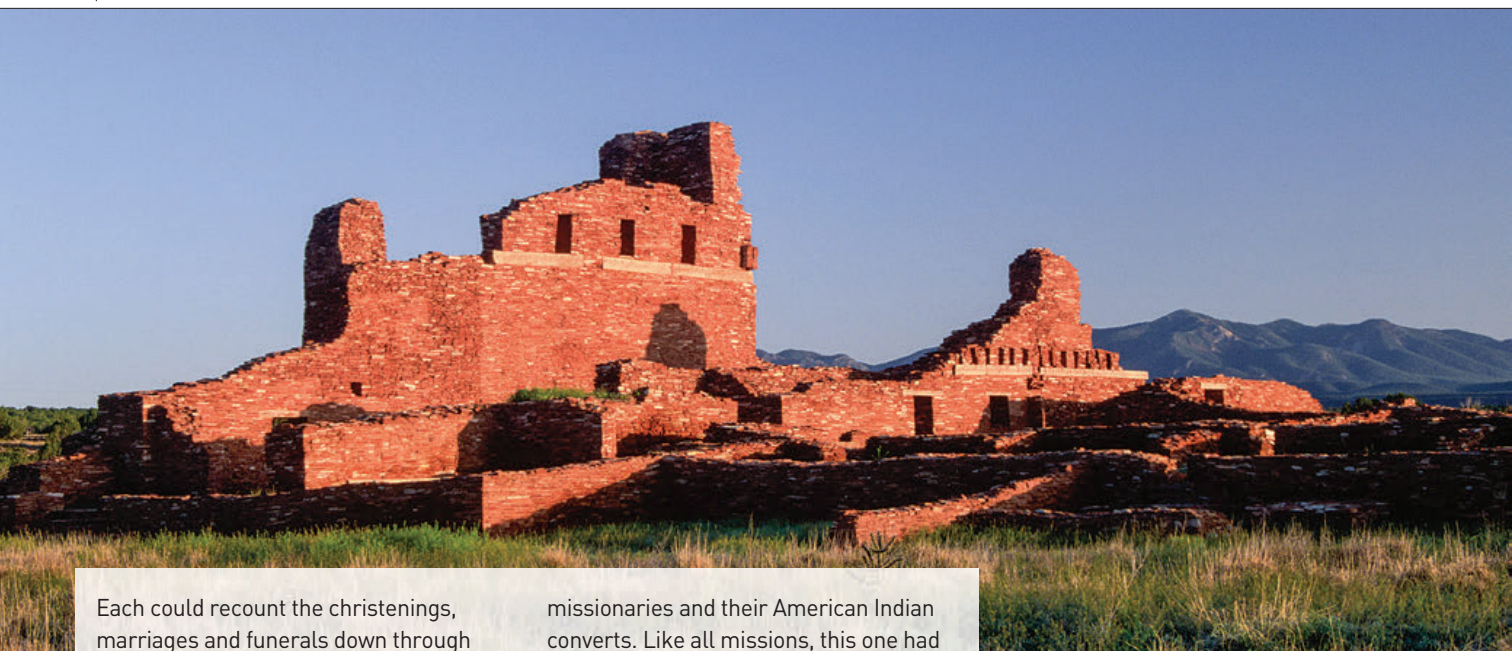
When we visited, Sunday services were being set up at Espada, San Juan and San Jose. Lilies decorated the hand-painted, thick-beamed mission churches. At one, we met parishioners who trace their heritage to the first American Indians who took services at the mission.

Mission Concepcion at San Antonio Missions National Historical Park in Texas.



Western Missions

Besides the Spanish-era missions in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, later missions preceded gold and cattle and opened up Montana, Idaho, Washington and Oregon.



Each could recount the christenings, marriages and funerals down through their family lines to their own life events. The halls gave practicing choirs a regal sound. At San Jose, we heard part of a mariachi service.

The southern three missions have large areas of lawn, big shade trees and flowers. At Espada, a pair of old cats patrolled the grounds and wind ornaments chimed. Where many modern churches overwhelm, these just melt into your spirit.

In the Lower San Antonio River Valley, 18th-century Spanish-colonial Mission Espíritu Santo State Historic Site was rebuilt by the Civilian Conservation Corps. It pairs with nearby Goliad, the presidio (fort) complex, to tell the story of the Catholic Church and the Spanish military in settling the New World. During the 18th century, this Franciscan mission held the largest ranching operation in Texas. Exhibits and artifacts reveal life for the

missionaries and their American Indian converts. Like all missions, this one had some beautiful hand-painted adornments. Side doors symbolize the converts spiritually entering and leaving church. When American Indians accepted Christ, they had to surrender their old ways. A ranger recounted opening the chapel door one morning to find the interior filled with fog. The high ceiling creates its own weather.

Tumacácori National Historical Park and Mission San Xavier del Bac, Arizona

Of the more than 20 missions founded by Jesuit missionary Father Kino to convert native peoples to Christianity and the Spanish way of life, Tumacácori, founded in 1691, is the oldest in Arizona. It was moved to its present site after the Pima (O'odham) Rebellion of 1751. In the mesquite highland, north of Nogales, you enter the mission and pass through time via the visitor center, where a video and

Abó Pueblo at Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument in New Mexico.

museum tell of the mission's founding, growth and challenges. The park offers self-guided tours and winter guided tours of Tumacácori, the offsite mission ruins, nature and history. Fiestas and concerts bring life and color to the mission. Area camping information is on www.nps.gov/tuma.

From the early adobe raised soon after its founding by Father Kino to the 1783 gleaming White Dove of the Desert, Mission San Xavier del Bac has served the Tohono O'odham Indians and beckoned travelers to its door. The scaffolding of an exacting restoration has been part of its recent persona. Hand-painted watercolor frescoes, gilding and 300 angels and 100 saints adorn the interior. Masses are conducted and events can add the aroma of traditional flatbread, the mystical notes of an American Indian flute or the energy of an open-air market. Guided and self-guided tours, museum exhibits and a video orient visitors.

Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument, New Mexico

Near Mountainair (southeast of Albuquerque), three units — Gran Quivira (the first and largest, protected since 1909), Abó, and Quarai (the smallest) —

Motorhome parked at the National Bison Range, just west of St. Ignatius Mission in Montana. Sweetwater County Park campground is 15 miles south of Mission Basilica San Diego de Alcalá.





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comprise this national monument. Of six remaining 17th-century Spanish-colonial churches in the United States, four are here. Ravaged by disease, drought and famine, the pueblan peoples in this area were receptive to the Spanish Franciscan ways. The kivas (native religious structures) seen at the missions likely eased the conversion process. Each unit holds Spanish missions, American Indian pueblos, and historic buildings and ruins, as well as a timeline of prehistoric village life. Gran Quivira holds the largest excavated pueblo, 226 rooms. Clues show early people hunted and gathered.

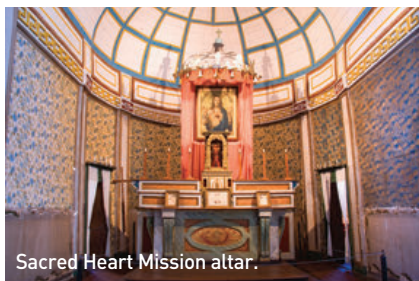
Willamette Mission State Park, Oregon

North of Salem, near the Wheatland Ferry, this riverside park holds the ghost mission of Methodist minister Jason Lee, the first white American to settle in Oregon Country's Willamette Valley. Lee arrived in 1834 to teach and minister to the Kalapuya Indians. He built a one-room mission house and ran it with four assistants. From 1834-1840, the building served as hospital, school, chapel, kitchen and residence. Conversion met resistance, and the mission fell to flood in 1861. Today, a short walk leads to a monument and cross-lake view of the skeletal representation of the mission. Near the monument grows the Mission Rose, its stock tracing to roses brought here in 1837. Mission Mill Village in Salem holds the Jason Lee house and parsonage. Trails, picnicking among filbert and walnut groves, and a record-size black cottonwood that marked the missionary era are other park attractions.

Whitman Mission National Historic Site, Washington

West of Walla Walla, you enter one of the saddest chapters in mission history. Here, sickness (measles), fear, distrust and cultural differences boiled deadly, leading to the 1847 massacre of the Whitmans and 11 others. Great Grave names the lost. A hilltop monument, visitor center/museum and walking path unravel life and events here and introduce Marcus and Narcissa Whitman and the native peoples. The Whitmans established their

mission in 1836. Stones at grass height map the site. The Whitmans aided Oregon Trail pioneers and adopted the seven orphaned Sager children. The boys were killed; the girls were ransomed along with other survivors. Despite only 11 Cayuse participating in the attack, white-American Indian relations were irrevocably damaged. Today's rural backdrop conjures a sense of the historic place.



Sacred Heart Mission altar.

Mission of the Sacred Heart/Cataldo (Old Mission State Park), Idaho

East of Coeur d'Alene, the mission, built 1850-1853, is the oldest building in the state and a national historic landmark. It was erected by Catholic missionaries and the Coeur d'Alene tribe. The site includes Sacred Heart Mission church, a restored parish house and a historic cemetery, all within attractive park grounds. An unusual twist, tribe members actually sought out the black-robed men, inviting them to share their powers with the tribe. In 1842, Father De Smet arrived. Flooding of the first mission led to relocation at the present site in 1846. The mission became a way station for settlers and miners and modern travelers.



Historic house at St. Ignatius Mission.

St. Ignatius Mission, Montana

Below the majestic Mission Mountains, on the Flathead Indian Reservation, sits this 1854 Jesuit mission. Today it houses the 1891 mission church, the original

cabin that doubled as the church, the 1864 dwelling of the Sisters of Providence, and mill stones from the 1864 mission mill. In the National Register of Historic Places, the mission exterior shows a classic design, constructed of brick from local clay. The interior holds 50-plus murals, the work of Brother Joseph Carignano, mission cook and self-taught artist.

As we strolled the grounds early one morning, we met a local who insisted on contacting the priest so we and a Texas couple could view the church interior. As detailed religious scenes and a repeating border directed our eyes around the room, we understood the local's pride of association. Besides the expected stained-glass windows and heavy wooden pews, there was the unexpected American Indian religious art that interpreted Christian stories in American Indian faces and emblems. Tours are offered. Donations keep the site maintained and open. **M**

For More Information

La Purisima Mission State Historic Park California, 805-733-3713, www.lapurisimamission.org

Mission Espíritu Santo State Historic Site 361-645-3405, www.tpwd.state.tx.us/state-parks/goliad

Mission of the Sacred Heart/Cataldo (Old Mission State Park) 208-682-3814, <http://parksand recreation.idaho.gov/parks/coeur-d-alenes-old-mission>

Mission San Xavier del Bac 520-294-2624, www.sanxaviermission.org

The Mission Trail www.parks.ca.gov or www.missionscalifornia.com

Salinas Pueblo Missions National Monument 505-847-2585, www.nps.gov/sapu

San Antonio Missions National Historical Park 210-932-1001, www.nps.gov/saan

St. Ignatius Mission, Montana 406-745-2768, www.glaciermt.com/st-ignatius

Tumacácori National Historical Park 520-398-2341, www.nps.gov/tuma

Whitman Mission National Historic Site 509-529-2761 or 509-522-6360, www.nps.gov/whmi

Willamette Mission State Park 503-393-1172, www.oregonstateparks.org



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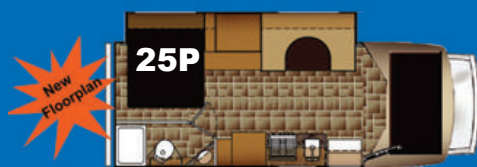
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FUN & GAMES

7 Mild-to-Wild Sports for RVers

Helen Keller once said, "Life is either a daring adventure or nothing at all." As my husband, Jim, and I have traveled the United States in our motorhome, we have met RVers who participate in sports and recreation at levels we never imagined possible. All of these people are doing what they love and living life to the fullest.

Kayaking

Roger Mosley and Marty Brodzik

Roger Mosley loves woodworking projects. He has refurbished five vintage Airstreams and has built four kayaks. Roger constructed three of the boats — two single kayaks and one double — from precision precut stitch-and-glue kits made by Pygmy Boats. The fourth was made at the Skin Boat School in Anacortes, Washington. It's a skin-on-frame boat similar to boats built by Arctic natives for thousands of years. The frame is made of red and yellow cedar, bound together with ties of artificial sinew (waxed nylon), covered with ballistic nylon and coated with urethane. All of Roger's kayaks are beautiful, like works of art. My husband, Jim, was so impressed by his friend's skin-on-frame kayak that we went to the Skin Boat School in August 2013 to build a tandem.

During their RV trips to Lake Powell in Arizona, the San Juan Islands in Washington, and Tomales Bay at Point Reyes National Seashore in California, Roger and his wife, Marty Brodzik, have their choice of kayaks. Roger says the singles are more fun, but the double is better when Marty wants to fish. He paddles the kayak to where she wants to drop her line. Doubles are also better for longer distances in open water.



Photo: Wind's Eye Photography



Mountain Biking

Mary and Jim Zalmanek

Ever since we bought our first mountain bikes in the mid-1980s, most of our vacations have involved biking. When we bought our first motorhome in 2002, the comfort level of our biking adventures improved significantly. For years I'd been intrigued by the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. It runs along the Continental Divide from Canada to Mexico for nearly

Photos: Mary and Jim Zalmanek

2,500 miles and 200,000 feet of elevation gain. The majority of Great Divide riders — most of whom are significantly younger than us — pull a bicycle trailer. Since I had neither the strength nor the desire to do that, I dismissed the idea until I saw a documentary about five teenage girls who did the ride with van support. I figured if a van could make the trip, so could our motorhome. We made plans to do it the following summer, starting by asking friends and family to drive the motorhome

for us for a week or two at a time.

We started the ride in July 2003. It was unseasonably hot for Montana, over 100 degrees. On the third day of our trip, during a stop at a convenience store, we talked to a customer while we sat in the shade and drank Gatorade. After a while he said, “You two look a little old to be doing this. What’d you do, lose a bet or something?” We were still laughing about his comment when we reached Mexico two months later.

Pickleball

Judy and Bob Lyle

When we first met Judy and Bob Lyle, we’d never heard of pickleball. It’s a game played on a badminton-size court with a slightly modified tennis net, a 3-inch hollow plastic ball and a solid paddle, reminiscent of an oversized pingpong paddle. The Lyles have been avid pickleball players for five years. They play from two to five days a week, and give beginner clinics when they are home in Colorado.

Within 10 minutes of meeting them at Voyager RV Resort in Tucson, Arizona, they offered to give us lessons. Judy told me pickleball is good for people who never thought they could play tennis. The paddles are shorter, making the hand-eye coordination easier. Since the court is smaller, less movement is required. With such enthusiastic and helpful teachers, we found that we really enjoyed the game.

Pickleball is quite popular at Voyager. The resort’s 11 courts are usually filled with friendly competitors. Voyager hosts the Tucson Senior Olympics Festival Tournament in January. In 2014, the tournament attracted a record 280 participants.



Radio-Controlled Boat Racing

Brian Smith

When Brian Smith, one of the owners of Diamond Lake Resort near Owensboro, Kentucky, has free time in the summer, he takes his radio-controlled (RC) boat to the lake. He’s often joined by other campers in lighthearted competition. Five years ago, Brian created Thunder on the Diamond, an RC boat race that attracts around 100 racers. These boats can travel in excess of 50 mph. The winner gets a trophy, and more importantly, bragging rights.

This event coincides with the ever-popular “Hillbilly Olympics” in July. That’s when Mr. and Mrs. Hillbilly are crowned and the Hillbilly torch is lit. Games include toilet-seat horseshoes, a truck drag and hay-bale rolling. Winners sit for photos on the Olympic podium, which consists of three toilet seats at different heights for gold, silver and bronze.

Rock Climbing

Dottie Cross

When Dottie Cross was 57, she left behind her 30-year career in Las Vegas, Nevada, as one of the first women blackjack dealers and pit bosses on the Strip. Ten years later, she still considers her decision to swap the Vegas lifestyle for a healthier one to have been a lifesaver. Even though the stereotypical rock climber may be a 30-something male, Dottie fits right in. For most of the spring and fall, she serves as campground host at the Smoky Mountain Campground, part of Castle Rocks State Park in southern Idaho. It's located near City of Rocks National Reserve, which attracts technical climbers from all over the world. Several days each week, she and her friends climb some of the area's 700 routes. She spends her summers in Wyoming and winters in Hidalgo, Mexico, near El Potrero Chico, a world-famous big-wall sport-climbing paradise.

While climbing initially drew Dottie to El Potrero Chico, the memory of a starving dog chained to a tree keeps her coming back. In 2011, Dottie and two friends rescued the dog and named it Fiona. These three women founded Fiona Animal Refuge of Hidalgo to care for abandoned and abused dogs. The refuge provides free spay and neuter services, flea and tick medication, and when necessary, food and shelter. In her free time in Wyoming, she writes grants to solicit donations for this 501(c)(3) organization. In Mexico, she gives tender loving care to the forgotten dogs. To find out more, "Like" Fiona Animal Refuge on Facebook.



Rodeo

Chris and Becky Pearson

Every weekend in the summer, Chris and Becky Pearson and their daughters, Emma, age 9, and Gracie, 6, hit the road in their 41-foot living quarters horse trailer with up to four of their horses loaded in the back. They travel to regional rodeos near their home in Nebraska and national ones like the Pendleton Round-Up in Pendleton, Oregon. Their RV allows the Pearsons to stay with their horses and give them the care they need to compete at a high level.

Chris has roped since he was in grade school and started steer roping in 1998. Becky has been a barrel racer for 17 years, competing in more than 90 races. For the Pearsons it's a family affair with Emma and Gracie competing in junior rodeos and local barrel-racing events.

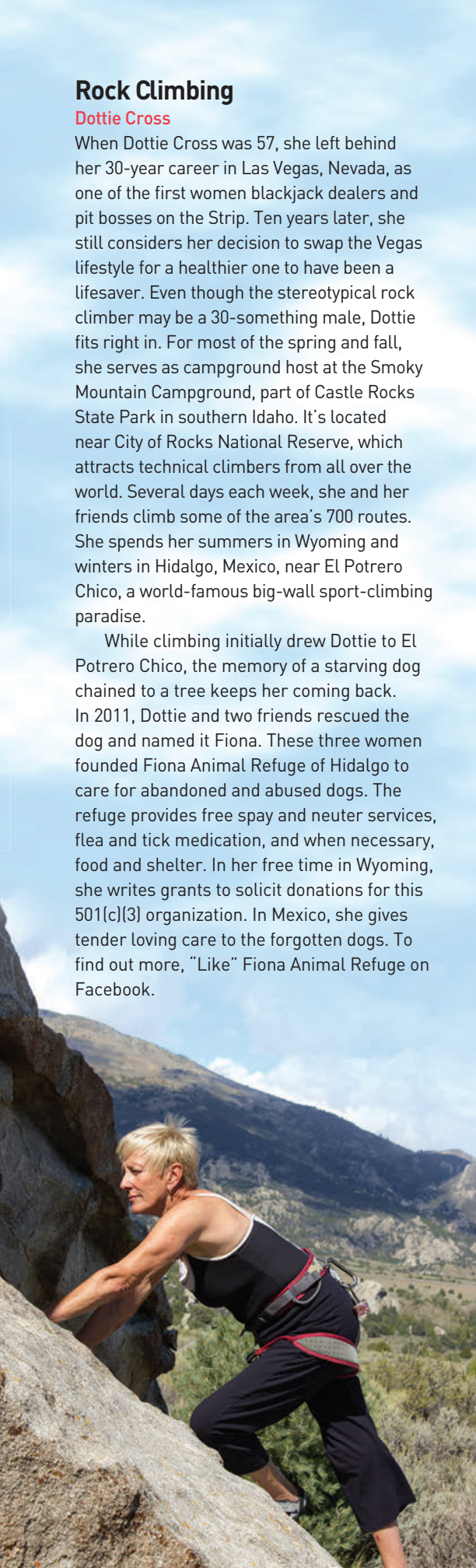
According to Becky, "If you are afraid of being embarrassed, you had better not rodeo!" Both Chris and Becky have had enough things go right to have had much success at the amateur and professional levels.

Shooting

Shirley List

Shirley List is another woman who participates in a male-dominated sport. She is one of three or four women in the world who compete in shooting .50-caliber rifles at a distance of 1,000 yards. Her Armalite AR-50 is a 50-pound gun she shoots from a seated position. She's really good at this, as the badges on her coat attest. Her best is a 4-1/8-inch group, which translates into firing five bullets across the length of 10 football fields and hitting the bull's-eye with each shot.

Shirley started shooting four years ago when she was 62. Now she and her husband, Martin, travel to competitions about 10 times a year. Shooting a rifle of this size isn't something they can practice, since there are only a handful of 1,000-yard ranges in the U.S. that allows a .50 BMG to be fired on their ranges, and not one of them is in their home state of Oklahoma. Nevertheless, she won two third-place plaques at a regional match at the NRA Whittington Center in Raton, New Mexico, in September 2012. Even more than winning, she enjoys the "1,000-yard grin" she gets after shooting her gun. The Whittington Center's RV campground with full hookups is open to the general public. **M**



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Upgrading an old system with a media-streaming box can open up a whole new world of entertainment

In today's fast-moving world of consumer electronics, a few years is all it takes for a device such as a TV to become obsolete. Of course, if you just want to watch cable or satellite TV, an older device may be fine, but if you are one of those TV junkies who has to have access to every possible source of streaming content, a TV that is more than a few years old is likely to disappoint.

When you go to a local big-box electronics store searching for a TV, you will hear the term "smart TV" mentioned. Basically, a smart TV is one that has numerous built-in apps or programs that allow you to get content via the Internet. This also means that you must have access to the Internet (Wi-Fi or a direct Ethernet connection). Sources such as YouTube, Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime, etc., are all built into modern TVs, which allows you access to vast libraries of content. Most of those content providers are subscription-based services with fees around \$10 a month per service, and they include movies, as well as full TV series if you enjoy catching up on a series you missed on regular TV. Many providers also allow subscribers access to content via smart devices such as tablets, smartphones, etc.

Since motorhomes come with TVs and audio systems built in, upgrading them is possible, but it is harder to do than in your traditional home. However,



Amazon Fire TV provides access to more than 200,000 TV episodes and movies, millions of songs and hundreds of games. It can utilize voice commands for searching titles.

if you are happy with the picture and other features of your current television monitor, there's another way to upgrade it to full smart-TV status. In order to get access to the features of a smart TV without the high expense, you can simply

add a streaming-media box to your current TV. There are several companies offering these devices, but the most popular are Roku 3 box, Roku Streaming Stick, Apple TV, Amazon Fire TV, and Google Chromecast. There are other



The Roku 3 (above) needs one HDMI to connect it to an AV receiver or TV, then use Wi-Fi or an Ethernet cable to connect it to the Internet. The Roku Streaming Stick (below) allows users to stream Netflix, YouTube and personal media from a smartphone or tablet to their TV.

Apple TV

If you have a large library of iTunes content, you may want to consider Apple TV, which can push content from your iPad and iPhone to your TV through the Apple TV device.



Many providers also allow subscribers access to content via devices such as tablets and smartphones.

devices on the market, but these are by far the best performers, and the most commonly used and recommended by users. Most online and magazine reviews put the Roku 3 at the top of the list, which is why we selected that unit as our device of choice for this article. The Roku 3, as well as the Amazon Fire TV and Apple TV box, retails for about \$100, while the Google Chromecast and Roku Streaming Stick are both less than \$50. Of course there are differences in the features and services each one offers, so if you have specific needs or want to target a specific source of content, make sure the device you purchase offers that content.

Since these are separate devices, they do have to be connected directly to your TV (or AV receiver) as well as the Internet. We are focusing on their use in a motorhome, so connecting to the Internet will normally be through Wi-Fi at the campground. When you are home, you can also connect the box directly to an Ethernet cable to get even faster speeds and more reliable service.

The connection to your TV/AV

receiver is super easy if you have a receiver with an available HDMI input. Simply locate the new box near your AV receiver and use the HDMI output of the streaming box (in our case the Roku 3) to an open HDMI input of your AV receiver and then plug it in to an AC power receptacle. It's really as simple as connecting those two wires.

Another nice thing about these devices is that they are fully compatible with high-resolution 1080 video and many services also feature 5.1-surround sound, which many motorhomes already have built in. You will feel as if you are sitting in a movie theater without ever having to leave the comfort of your coach.

These devices do use a separate remote control, which will be needed for setting them up as well as normal operation, so that is one negative compared to a fully integrated smart TV. Once connected, you will then have access to a whole range of streaming content that is not only economical, it is also easy to access and it allows you to watch the programming at your leisure

as well as start and stop it and resume at that same point in a movie.

When my wife and I travel, we used to rent or buy a stack of DVDs to take on vacation, but now we no longer have to take that extra step. We simply put the Roku 3 box in the motorhome along with its remote and we have enough content to keep us as busy as we want in terms of TV watching. When time permits, we like to "binge watch" a TV series where we go through an entire series of two to six seasons over a short period of time.

If you are a TV or movie junkie, upgrading your old system with a media-streaming box is not only easy, it is relatively inexpensive compared to buying a new TV and will open up a world of content that you may not have known even existed. **M**

Sources

Amazon Fire TV, www.amazon.com

Apple TV, www.apple.com/appletv

Chromecast, www.google.com/chrome/devices/chromecast

Roku, www.roku.com



BRINGING THE INSIDE ... OUT

Luxury parks work to offer snowbirds and year-round RVers services and amenities generally reserved for upscale hotels and exotic resort getaways

There comes a time when RVing isn't about roughing it, becoming one with nature or cavorting with local wildlife. Though those aspects may have originally drawn many of us to the RV lifestyle, we sometimes reach a point where we prefer the finer things in life. It's at about this time that RVers begin searching for fair-weather, resort-type getaways.

"Today's RVers are getting younger; they are active, successful people who really want to experience the outdoor lifestyle with indoor amenities," said Reza Paydar, president/CEO of Sunland RV Resorts, which offers resorts in California and Florida. "They are meticulous and they are very demanding — as they should be."

And resorts such as Sunland are pulling out all the stops. "We try to model ourselves after a five-star hotel to accommodate RVers," said Paydar.

Shelly Biele, resort home sales manager at Superstition Views, an Arizona Cal-Am resort, agrees. "Our resorts cater to those who want to be catered to, who demand the most out of their experiences, and who enjoy the newest amenities and

the ability to join like-minded visitors."

These upper-scale resorts tend to fall into snowbird-friendly destinations such as California, Florida and parts of Arizona, New Mexico and Texas, and can range from drop-in transient-type parks to exclusive, Class A-only coach resorts.

This isn't to say the resorts are strictly champagne and caviar. Favorite RV activities like pickleball, golfing and hiking are the norm, and often go hand in hand with wine tasting, spa services and big-name entertainment. Couple this with a knowledgeable, well-trained staff and it's easy to see why snowbirds and RVers flock to these destinations. "We focus on hiring the best resort managers we can, and make sure our resorts have active

schedules," said Maurice Wilder, owner of Wilder RV Resorts.

There are many reasons RVers find these types of resorts appealing, whether it's location ("Every resort we have is in a prominent area, where they can be used as a base camp," said Paydar); activities ("Cal-Am employs full-time activities directors to make sure there are always options for entertainment," said Biele); the experienced staff or even the overall bang for your buck; one common theme permeates throughout these high-end getaways: "The most important asset found at the resort is the people," said Chuck Le Blanc, vice president of marketing, sales and long-range planning at Outdoor Resort Indio. "They are among the friendliest and most good-natured people one could hope to meet. People tell us all the time about the wonderful lifelong friends they have met here."

The following RV resorts are fit for the snowbird season or any time of the year.

A view of the lake and clubhouse at Cypress Trail RV Resort in southwest Florida.



Cypress Trail RV Resort

Cypress Trail RV Resort is a new luxury resort in southwest Florida, conveniently located east of Interstate 75 and just minutes from historical Fort Myers. The ownership park is the ideal location for RV owners seeking the benefits of a tightknit RV community that is enjoyable, and, starting at \$49,900, very affordable.

"We are full-time RVers, and in our travels and work experiences, we have not been to a more enjoyable RV resort than Cypress Trail," said Hilary Pruitt, sales manager at Cypress Trail RV Resort who, along with his wife, Joy, comprise the sales team.

Cypress Trail was designed as a destination resort for all RVers. Rental sites are available for all types of RVs (at least 24 feet long; older than 10 years must send in a photo for evaluation), making it possible to try before you buy for a daily, weekly or even monthly visit. When completed, the resort will have a total of 472 lots. Most RV types are welcome.

Cypress Trail is also the only south Florida RV resort with certified nature trails in its own nature preserve, and it features two large lakes for fishing. In addition, the resort provides residents with a variety of special features and outdoor amenities, including spacious lots in a gated community with sidewalks (lakefront or back-in sites available); a 12,000-square-foot Old Florida style clubhouse featuring classrooms, a business center and ballroom/multiuse kitchen for catered dinners with live entertainment; a resort-style pool, hot-tub and large social area; hard-wired fiber optic cable TV/Internet at each site and Wi-Fi at the clubhouse; a billiards room, card room, library and arts-and-crafts facilities; a fully appointed fitness center; sports courts, including tennis, bocce, pickleball and shuffleboard courts; and organized events and planned activities with a full-time recreational director.

The Fort Myers area offers shopping and dining opportunities, in addition to the world-famous fishing, shelling and tropical beaches a short drive away.

The bottom line, said Pruitt: "Cypress Trail is all about fun and the wonderful, new lifelong friends you'll make."

**Cypress Trail Resort, 239-333-3246,
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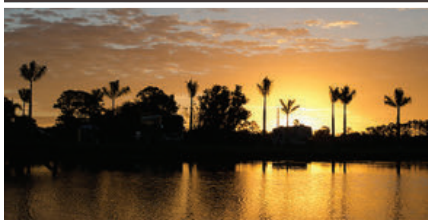
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Bringing the Inside ... Out

Wilder Resorts

For nearly 40 years, Wilder RV Resorts has been catering to RVers in search of fine resort living, and continues to be a great choice for snowbirds and year-round RVers alike. With an impressive 17 locations (seven in Texas and 10 in Florida), Wilder has the Gulf of Mexico covered, which means each resort offers convenient beach access and world-class fishing nearby. "We have some great locations close to beaches, amusement parks, flea markets, museums, shopping, casinos and restaurants," said Alan Nash, advisory board member at Wilder. "During peak season, we also have complimentary weekly bus trips at all resorts." Amenities include pools and hot tubs, craft rooms, themed dinners, billiards and card rooms, spacious event halls, fitness facilities, planned parties and socials, horseshoe pits and scenic bicycle rides. "We also have on-site activity directors at all resorts with a large variety of activities," said Nash. "From dances to bingo, shuffleboard, corn hole, pickleball, karaoke, water aerobics, picnics, even wood shops at some locations."

Highlights at just a few of the resorts include on-site 9-hole golf courses at Tropic Star in Pharr, Texas, and Blue Parrot in Lady Lake, Florida, to more than 2 miles of waterfront sites at Hawaiian Isles in Ruskin, Florida, to the quiet solitude of Pioneer Creek RV Resort in Bowling Green, Florida. And the massive 20,000-square-foot dance and entertainment complex at Trophy



Gardens in Alamo, Texas, is truly a sight to behold.

In addition to RV resorts, Wilder Corp. also includes manufactured home communities that provide outstanding facilities and amenities for permanent and semi-permanent residents in Florida and Texas. Wilder does not offer memberships, meaning it is open to most RV types, and has more than 10,000 total sites.

"From our warm, tropical resort in Fort Myers, Florida, to our scenic and beautiful resort in Harlingen, Texas, whatever your pleasure, our incredible family of resorts is sure to satisfy," said Wilder, who added, "Your enjoyment is so very important to us."

Wilder RV Resorts, www.rvresorts.com



Outdoor Resort Indio

Outdoor Resort in Indio, California, is an impeccably maintained, ownership Class A motorcoach resort with more than 400 sites ranging from \$85,000 to \$250,000. Maintained by an on-site HOA, there are thousands of brilliant flowers, waterfalls, fountains, and even a free 18-hole, par-3 golf course woven throughout the resort (which more than offsets the \$390/month HOA fees). For RVers looking for even more shots at the links, there are dozens of world-class golf courses only minutes away; in fact, the Humana Challenge Golf Tournament is right down the street.

This is an active adult-oriented resort with loads of amenities, including the services of an activity director to ensure fun activities and entertainment

throughout the season; you may feel the need to prioritize those activities over lunch at the Oasis Cafe. Among the countless popular activities are tennis and the ever-popular pickleball, bingo, movie nights, water aerobics, Zumba, thread therapy, theme dinners and many evenings with live entertainment, just to mention a sample of the dozens of options available to the owners and rental guests.

For on-site relaxation, ORI has four pools, five whirlpools and a newly refurbished fitness center. There is an owner's lounge with an HDTV and a recently updated sound system and a library for quiet reflection.

The ownership park offers site rentals, and site owners can build on to their sites for customization (provided additions are within HOA guidelines).

"People tell us all the time about the wonderful lifelong friends they have met here," said Le Blanc. "It is because of the wonderful people and beautiful surroundings that we count among our friends and neighbors people from as far east as New England and Florida and as far north as Canada and Alaska."

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Bringing the Inside ... Out

Cal-Am Resorts

Cal-Am offers 10 RV resorts located in Mesa, Surprise, Gold Canyon and Yuma, Arizona. Visitors can choose from more than 11,000 total sites and hundreds of activities and amenities. "Cal-Am Resorts are not just RV parks or manufactured home communities, they are a way of life!" said Biele. "They are a community for those who feel they deserve only the best."

Biele is especially excited about the wellness opportunities at Cal-Am resorts. "Not only do we have a fitness center, we have a personal trainer to help [owners] set up or follow a fitness program," she said. "Not only do we have tennis courts, we also have a tennis pro available."

Featured here is Superstition Views, an age 55-plus upscale RV resort and manufactured housing community that offers prospective buyers ground-set, stucco-walled casita homes with Southwest architectural style and more than 800 square feet of living space. The casitas start from \$89,900, with options for an RV pad (with full hookups), carport, RV garage or even an observation deck.

The casitas are ideal for RVers who want to have their vacation home and RV in the same location. "Baby Boomers who thought they wanted to be full time — while still having a place to call home — have found this a great way to ease themselves into the RV lifestyle," said Biele.



In addition, Superstition offers an impressive array of five-star amenities including a state-of-the-art fitness center, pickleball court, lighted tennis courts, a swimming pool, shuffleboard courts, golfing club/putting green, hiking club, massage therapy and themed events.

**Cal-Am Resorts, Superstition Views,
888-268-6123, www.cal-am.com**

Sunset at Sunland Resort's Silver Palms RV Resort in Florida.



Sunland RV Resorts

With more than 30 years' experience in the outdoor hospitality and RV resort industries — in addition to decades of background in hotel and real-estate industries — the Sunland team certainly knows its business. "We have listened long and hard over the years as to what the motorhome owner wants, in terms of site amenities for comfort, access and usability of the spaces," said Reza Paydar, CEO. "Sunland is the product of all our collective experiences in [all types of] real-estate development. We have

tried to amenitize these resorts to the Nth degree."

Sunland Resorts has translated that experience into a total of eight prime locations in California and Florida. Most RV types are welcome at each resort.

Sunland's site-rental resorts are characterized by extremely high standards and an impressive list of offerings, including concierge services, spas, fitness instructors and lifestyle directors. "The word 'resort' has been misused extensively," said Paydar. "I invite anyone to come and really



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experience what we consider to be a resort at Sunland versus what others call resorts.”

Though each of Sunland’s eight properties offer the requisite pools, clubhouses and fitness centers, a trio of them truly up the ante when it comes to upscale living. Emerald Desert (Palm Desert, California), Sunland’s luxurious “crown jewel,” offers 255 spacious RV lots, 33 acres of lush landscaping and world-class amenities. Golden Village Palms (Hemet, California), is the largest RV resort in California, with more than 1,000 sites and a multimillion-dollar recreation complex. And finally, Silver Palms (Okeechobee, Florida), is a fisherman’s paradise, encompassing 16 acres of wetland and wildlife in addition to a temperature-controlled, outdoor pool and spa, state-of-the-art fitness center and 9,000-square-foot clubhouse.

These premier-level resorts promote the active RV lifestyle in a big way, with fitness-oriented swimming pools; championship-level pickleball courts featuring league events; extensive entertainment options including tribute bands, quality shows and dinner theater; seminars on topics ranging from finances to health to computer skills; championship-style, tournament billiards rooms; and modern clubhouse and locker facilities. The resorts are pet-friendly with off-leash dog parks, offer high-speed Wi-Fi services and have gated entrances.

Sunland strives to engage the visitor, not unlike an experience on a cruise ship. “Everything we put into our resorts is geared toward keeping people active, getting them out of



their vehicle and getting them to participate in the events,” said Paydar.

But Sunland Resorts have actually been designed to enhance a destination, not necessarily to be one (though many are, in their own right). “There is a story behind every resort we have,” said Paydar. “We are not typical parks in the middle of nowhere.”

Sunland continues to look toward the future, with plans to expand its holdings in California. Currently, Sunland is undergoing a more than \$2 million upgrade on the Wi-Fi systems in its resorts, a project that Paydar says is unmatched in the industry.

But perhaps Sunland’s Creative Director, Jeff Wilson, sums up the resorts’ primary goal: “The people, the internal operations and the staff, they all work together to make that ‘Welcome Home’ feeling.”

Sunland RV Resorts, www.sunlandrvresorts.com 

Golden Village Palms RV Resort, located in San Jacinto Valley, California.





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Anthem 44SL

Entegra's highline all-electric coach offers room to roam for couples looking for luxury and road-hugging drivability

By Bruce Hampson

Most people associated professionally with RVs, whether from the manufacturing or sales side of the equation, will tell you that in about 80 percent of RV sales, it's the floorplan that clinches the deal. That motorhome may cost as much as a brick-and-mortar home, but you can't knock out a wall to enlarge the bedroom, revamp the bath or really even swap out the galley countertop without upsetting its balance, so you'd better make sure the coach you pick not only meets your immediate needs but those of the foreseeable future. It's not always a perfect fit, but neither is it a deal-breaker to accept a few compromises with a coach configuration that "almost" fits your lifestyle so long as it fits your budget.

Once you hit a certain price point, however, such trade-offs are no longer necessary.

As a highline manufacturer of diesel-pusher motorhomes exclusively, Middlebury, Indiana-based Entegra Coach doesn't play in that segment of the market where equipment is chosen as much for its cost as for its application. In fact, except for a single entry-level model within its Aspire line, everything this division of Jayco's motorized group builds utilizes a tag axle and its corresponding 12,000 pounds of added weight capacity, so the company really didn't have to be concerned all that much with choosing amenities based upon its impact at the scales, either.

One other thing Entegra is un-

apologetic for: Its coaches aren't always designed for families.

"There's plenty of room inside, to be sure, and the sofas in the main cabin convert to accommodate weekend guests — but our market really tends toward couples," noted Chuck Lasley, vice president of sales and marketing for Entegra.

That would explain a few tip-offs during our test of an Entegra Anthem 44SL — like the seeming incongruity of a 23-cubic-foot, stainless-steel refrigerator (a great choice for entertaining) alongside a relatively small two-burner cooktop in the galley. "Our customers don't tend to be doing a lot of cooking in these coaches," Lasley added, "but along with the Samsung SmartChef convection oven it gives them what they asked for, a high-burner, high-element cooktop — and

ABOVE: The quad-slide Anthem features an aerodynamic front cap, expansive one-piece windshield, full-body paint and heated side-view mirrors.

it also allowed us to create a galley which, with a slideout island, offers a lot more countertop space.”

One of six models in the Anthem line, the 44SL features a “traditional” rear bedroom suite arrangement with a mid-coach bath. Many of the differences between Anthem floorplans, in fact, revolve around changes to the bath configuration — be it a bath-and-a-half style, the placement of the water closet or a choice of single- or dual-lavatory sink setups — along with two primary configurations in the main cabin. That’s oversimplifying things, but hits the high points. The 44SL is the only model to include the main bathroom lavatory/sink in the forward part of the rear streetside slide housing the standard king-size bed (there’s a second, smaller sink along with the toilet in a curbside water closet).

Incorporating the lavatory into the slideroom really helps open up the shower area — not quite as much room as you’d get with a rear bath, perhaps, but neither does it adversely affect available space in the main cabin where, again, another tip-off to the Anthem’s “couples” intent was obvious in the size of the eating area.

Tucked into the backside of the sizable curbside sofa (and sharing the same comfortable, overstuffed, espresso-toned curves), the dinette can fit four people, albeit a bit snugly. A freestanding table with four chairs is an option, but the supple booth style of the standard dinette strikes us as the best compromise between long-term use and occasional guest incursions. Keep in mind, though, that in neither case will a diner facing forward be able to turn and watch the main TV, a 46-inch flatscreen mounted into the wall just aft of the dinette and above an electric fireplace. But if you want to watch the tube, you can always move to either of the two main sofas — or choose another TV: the Anthem boasts four. In addition to the main galley area, there’s a 32-inch flatscreen mounted between the cabinets above the cockpit and another of similar size above the curbside vanity in the bedroom; a 40-inch unit is part of the outdoor entertainment system. All the TVs in this all-electric, non-propane coach, by the way, are Samsung, with the TVs in the

BELOW: The living area is finished with glazed cherry hardwood cabinetry, high-gloss porcelain tile and Ultraleather furniture. Main bathroom lavatory/sink in the rear streetside slide helps open up the bath area. A 32-inch LED HDTV is located for easy viewing from the king-size bed.



bedroom and main galley augmented with a Bose sound system.

Like every other Anthem in the lineup, the 44SL features a four-slideout arrangement, and while neither the streetside entertainment center, food pantry and angled glass shower, nor the aforementioned sizable refrigerator and water closet on the curbside, are housed in slideouts, virtually everything else is. Curbside, that includes the bedroom vanity and dresser in the rear as well as the entire curbside galley (cooktop, convection microwave and two-basin sink) and sofa bed. Open, the slideouts dramatically increase the 44SL’s square footage, but even when closed there’s still room to walk through the coach, visit the privy or even spend time in the bedroom watching the telly.

Part of that is due to the well-thought-out interior design of the coach, and part is due to the fact that the 44SL is as

big as they come at Entegra, sharing its 43-foot, 11-inch length with a pair of other Anthem floorplans as well as its three Cornerstone-class siblings. And, like every Entegra coach, it rides on a Spartan chassis, powered by the same Cummins ISL 450-hp turbodiesel used throughout the Aspire and Anthem lines.

The chassis, though, isn’t exactly stock. Before being delivered to the assembly line, the chassis is retrofit with additional X-bracing to increase rigidity and, in conjunction with the 44SL’s independent front suspension (IFS), improve road manners. Along with its heavyweight construction, it all factors into what Entegra claims is the “quietest, best-riding coach on the market today.” We won’t haggle with what’s obviously a subjective statement — but while we didn’t spend untold hours behind the wheel of the motorhome, it was obvious during our trek to Eby’s Pines Campground in Bristol,

Indiana, that the 44SL owned exemplary road manners.

Driving a narrow, single-lane country “highway” can sometimes be harrowing in anything bigger than a Toyota, but the coach, equipped with the extra chassis bracing, IFS and Entegra’s SmartWheel steering, had no problems with the road. Even the inevitable buffeting encountered when passed by trucks headed west while we were eastbound didn’t untrack the Anthem. You can, in fact, drive one-handed with a pretty high degree of confidence.

Entegra improves the performance further by fitting the 44SL with larger Michelin 315/80R tires in front (Michelin 295/80Rs in back) to absorb a lot of the motion. It’s hard to offer an opinion on just how much of a difference that extra sidewall seems to make without something to compare it to, but from a seat-of-the-pants perspective, we were quite comfortable throttling down roads with turns sometimes seemingly built more for horse-drawn Amish buggies than a 8.5-foot-wide, nearly 45-foot-long motorhome.

Nor, for that matter, will we quibble over the Anthem’s solid and well-insulated build. Marine-grade wood is used in the 6-inch-thick subfloor, with 2 x 4s every 16 inches on center along with residential-grade fiberglass batting. (There also are aluminum studs every 16 inches on center throughout, not only in the side walls but also the roof structure.) The same fiberglass batting is used in the wall, sandwiched between wallboard, Astro-Foil and quarter-inch solid fiberglass; the wall is then carriage-bolted to the floor around the perimeter of the coach.

That’s all that you don’t see, and it contributes greatly to all that you don’t hear. Obviously, you don’t expect to hear much out of a rear-engine diesel when belted to the Ultraleather driver’s seat, so at one point of our trip we changed positions behind the IMAX-sized windshield so I could walk through the coach and into the bedroom — where, even under acceleration, it was obvious that you could hold a normal conversation. Or, for that matter, recline on the king-size bed (standard on all Entegra

coaches) and watch TV courtesy of the dual onboard Magnum 2,800-watt and 2,000-watt pure sine-wave inverters. These, along with switches for the unit’s optional twin 100-watt solar panels, dual Girard awnings, motorized antenna, Energy Command system (essentially an “auto-start” feature for the 12.5-kW Onan generator) and energy-management system, are housed above the entry door.

In fact, we really only had one gripe about the drive, and that was that everything on the dash was driver-centric and not really accessible to the passenger — including the monitor for the Sirius satellite radio and backup monitor. As Lasley noted later, however, that was done intentionally to improve driver vision. “A lot of OEMs will have that screen flat, so both people can see it, but that’s not ideal for the driver. That’s also why we mount our Allison transmission panel on line of sight of the windshield versus lower, because you don’t want to take your eyes off of the road.”

Besides, the dash-mounted screen is tied into the overhead TV, which is viewable from the passenger seat; switching it on allows the passenger to watch the view from the rear camera or the Rand McNally GPS system incorporated into the unit. When activated, the GPS system will take the vehicle’s size, weight, and even whether there’s an on-board propane tank into consideration and route you accordingly.

If you’re looking to attract a crowd, all you need do is pull into a “normal” campground the likes of Eby’s Pines RV Park & Campground, with a coach more

WHAT’S HOT

High-quality materials and construction, energy-management system, abundant standard features

WHAT’S NOT

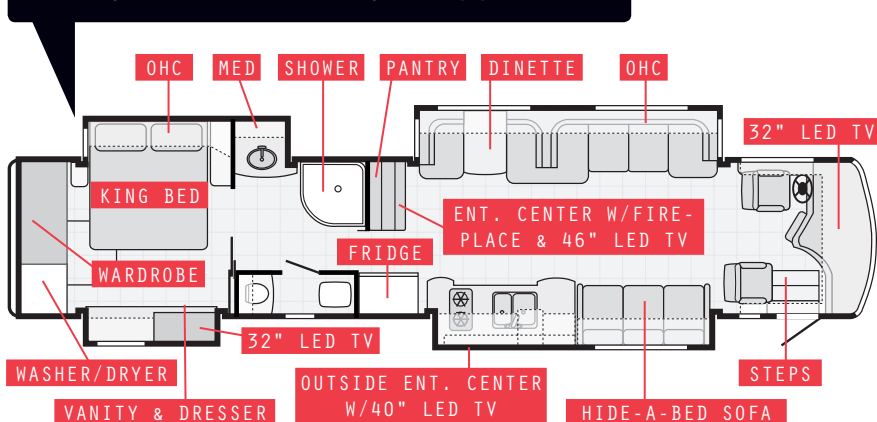
Big fridge but small stove, odd location for main TV and fireplace, driver-centric dash



suited to an upscale resort. While there was the typical cross section of campers that you’d expect, we didn’t notice another tag-axle-equipped, 44-foot-long, nearly \$500,000 luxury motorcoach anywhere else on the property. And while we didn’t experience anything more than a fair share of interest, Entegra has anticipated problems when “camping small” — and has updated the 2015 Anthem with its new energy-management system which will automatically shed loads when adequate hookup power is not available.

We didn’t overtax the electrical components enough to make the energy-management system kick in — pretty content, actually, to nuke some take-and-bake through the microwave and watch movies in the main cabin — but we did run the air conditioning quite a bit. Aside from

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Specifications

Chassis

Model	Spartan Mountain Master, IFS
Engine	Cummins ISL
SAE Hp	450 @ 2,100 rpm
Torque	1,250 lb-ft @1,400 rpm
Transmission	Allison six-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	4.88:1
Front Tires	315/80R
Rear Tires	295/80R
Wheelbase	320"
Brakes (F/R)	disc/drum air
Suspension	Reyco Granning independent front air; Hendrickson rear air
Fuel Capacity	150 gal
Fuel Economy	6-8 mpg
Warranty	5 years/100,000 miles

Coach

Exterior Length	44' 11"
Exterior Width	8' 5"
Exterior Height	12' 11"
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Wood and aluminum framing, 6-inch subfloor, fiberglass insulation with Astro-Foil, fiberglass hung walls, insulated caps, fiberglass roof
Freshwater Capacity	95 gal
Black-Water Capacity	50 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	50 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	On demand
LP-Gas Capacity	N/A
Air Conditioner (3)	15,000 Btu w/heat pumps
Furnace	diesel Aqua-Hot
Refrigerator	residential 23 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	(1) 2,800 watt; (1) 2,000 watt, pure sine-wave
Battery (8) 6-volt AGM coach (2) 12-volt chassis	
AC Generator	12,500 kW
MSRP	\$454,558
MSRP as Tested	\$469,393
Warranty	2 years/24,000 miles

Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)

Front Axle	15,145 lbs
Rear Axle With Tag	24,884 lbs
Total	40,029 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, (F/R/TAG)	17,000/20,000/12,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	49,000/64,000 lbs
ROCC	8,971 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)



The washer/dryer stack is conveniently located next to the closet on the rear wall in the bedroom. A radius shower offers a seating area, residential-style fixtures, porcelain tile and a skylight.



adding structural integrity and minimizing noise, the coach's construction provides the motorhome with enviable insulation. In fact, the Anthem carries an R-33 rating for the floor, with R-16 side walls, R-24 for the rubber-covered roof and even an R-19 rating for the front and rear caps — one of the only manufacturers to insulate the caps. That's combined with climate control in the basement to maintain storage temperature and prevent freezing of pipes and compartment contents, giving the Anthem four-season capability. It also helps keep the coach warm in the winter.

Another aspect of the Anthem build that bears mentioning is that the company has chosen to mount its lower cabinets directly to the wood subfloor rather than building the radiant-heated mosaic tile floor beforehand. "We put the wood cabinets on the wood floor for two reasons," Lasley noted. "First, there's no squeaking as you drive due to the wood rubbing on the tile — it may not happen for a year or two, but we believe that cabinets mounted atop tile will eventually begin squeaking as the coach flexes.

"Secondly, if there becomes a need to change out a tile because, say, someone drops a pan on the floor and cracks a tile, the repair person doesn't have to remove cabinetry in order to replace it."

The Anthem has all the bells and

whistles you'd expect from a luxury coach of this caliber — solid-cherry cabinetry, satin-nickel fixtures, solid-surface countertops, porcelain-tile shower, an Aqua-Hot 450 hydronic water and heating system, remote secure coach locking, a washer/dryer combo concealed behind one of the bedroom suite's cabinet doors alongside cedar-lined wardrobes — and a few other surprises.

There is, for example, the faux awning box on the street side that duplicates the real awning position and is also fitted with LEDs that — like the real awning — can illuminate at night, and a unique two-slide generator tray. Usually, when you pull out the slide tray the entire generator comes with it. By leaving the generator intact — it's released by pulling a second pin — you can access things like the wiper mechanisms and defroster without having to climb all over the genset.

When we left our campsite, we were reminded of yet another feature. If you listen closely, when you disengage the parking brake you can hear a series of "clicks" as air-activated rubber bumpers secure the exterior travel doors and snug up the corner of the entry door. The storage bays weren't filled on this trip — but they could have been. **M**

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SMARTER CHARGING

THE TRIMETRIC WAY TO AVOID RUINING A SET OF EXPENSIVE “HOUSE” BATTERIES

The batteries we use to provide our creature comforts can either be the key to off-the-grid motorhoming adventures or they can be a frustrating enigma.

When they are new, house batteries may perform well, providing the power we expect (monitored via a voltmeter). After a year or two, or sometimes even a few months, depending on the circumstances of our travel, they inexplicably may become wimpy, sagging earlier than usual. After an hour or two of TV, lights and other appliances in the evening, voltage may drop to low levels even though we haven't changed our routine.

Welcome to partial battery sulfation and loss of battery capacity that are the result of inadequate battery charging. And welcome to the possible expense of replacing a bank of batteries.

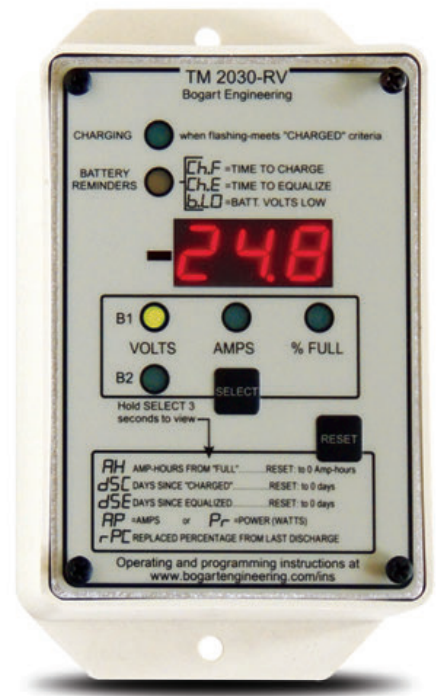
Why? We have solar panels, and we run our generators when our loads seem to outweigh our solar charging. But, we don't really know if it's enough. The DC current provided by our solar array may not be sufficient to fully handle our power needs, and we may not know how long to run the AC generator (powering a converter/charger) to make up the difference.

Undercharging often is more common than we may realize while dry camping, and in other situations such as storage. During charging, voltage levels may rise to what appears to be an effective range (14.2 to 14.8, varying with battery type and temperature). But there is more to the story, including length of charge time. We may unwittingly be creating sulfation, which is a buildup of lead sulfate on battery plates which, when left undisturbed too long, cripples batteries.



POWERFUL METER

The TriMetric meter is paired with a shunt and four-wire cable, enabling continuous monitoring of all DC current entering or leaving the battery bank.



Controlled Overcharging

To avoid the problem we must put more back into our batteries than we take out: a controlled overcharge. And we must do it fairly often. How much, and how long? Fortunately, "smart" converter/chargers and solar controllers may take care of these questions — but not always.

Monitoring this situation can be a challenge without a way to measure the effectiveness of our battery-charging methods. The TriMetric TM-2030-RV meter provides this capability.

The meter has the capability of measuring:

- Amps in or out
- Voltage
- Percentage of full charge (compared to total battery capacity)
- Elapsed time (in days) since full charge
- Low battery (audible)
- Discharge history
- Days since battery equalization (if applicable)

And more. The meter delivers a continually moving measurement of battery usage and the effectiveness of charging systems. It's intended to be programmed by the owner to his or her specific battery type and capacity.

Charging needs and methods vary with battery type (design), ranging from conventional lead-acid, open-cell, golf cart design to sealed absorbed glass mat (AGM) units. Recommended charge voltage for a set of open-cell (flooded) batteries may be 14.8 volts (at 77



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SMARTER CHARGING

degrees Fahrenheit), while the recommendation for a set of AGM batteries may be 14.3 volts at the same temperature — a big variable. Battery manufacturers provide this data, and more.

An effective smart charger or solar-panel controller should sense battery temperature and adjust voltage accordingly. Those that aren't as smart may allow battery damage by maintaining a set voltage regardless of temperature.

Charger Phases

Smart chargers and controllers feature bulk, absorption and float charging functions, as well as specific settings for different battery types. During the bulk stage, when most charging takes place, the charge current is at its highest. Battery voltage slowly rises until it triggers the absorption stage, after which the charger doesn't allow the voltage to rise further. Charging current gradually tapers off and this state usually is continued for a fixed time of 15 minutes to several hours, depending on the charger being used. Solar panels are ideal for this extended charge stage.

After full charge is reached, voltage is reduced to the float stage, 13.2 to 13.6 volts. The battery is held in this inactive mode while the converter provides



whatever power is needed for the coach.

Ideally, a "dumb" converter/battery charger should be replaced with a smart one, although the TriMetric meter enables the owner to know when undercharge is occurring and to do something about it.



A 500-amp shunt is spliced into the negative battery cable and a small-gauge wire feed transmits data to the meter.





[A] The meter can be toggled to read volts, amps or percent of full charge as well as a variety of other battery condition measurements. [B] In addition to display readings, reminders (flashing light) can be programmed for low voltage, time to recharge and time to equalize (if applicable). [C] The meter will also display number of days since full recharge, and other interpretations.

Full Recharge

How often should batteries be recharged fully? This interval is difficult or impossible to find in battery manufacturers' literature and websites, but smart chargers and solar controllers usually program their units for enough frequency to avoid battery problems.

Ralph Hiesey, an electrical engineer and founder of TriMetric, recommends full recharge at least every five days if batteries are being regularly discharged (unless batteries remain on float). The TriMetric meter is a product of his experience living in an off-the-grid home. Concorde Battery Corp., manufacturer of Lifeline AGM batteries, specifies a five-day interval in notices shipped with batteries, but it is not mentioned in its technical manual.

Installation of the TriMetric device involves placement of the meter on a wall surface where it's easily viewed, and installation of a shunt near the batteries, which measures all current flow. In our test case, a 500-amp shunt was spliced into the negative battery cable connected to a pair of Lifeline GPL-6CT 6-volt house batteries rated at 300-amp hours each (same rating for the pair, wired in series). A 4-gauge or 2-gauge battery cable of appropriate length (available at auto parts stores) is

used to connect one end of the shunt to the negative post on the battery bank while the motorhome's original negative cables are connected to the other.

A four-wire harness of very small gauge is used to connect the shunt to the meter up to 100 feet away, so it can calculate, display data and store it.

The harness includes one white, one red and two black wires. The black wires must be connected to separate posts on the meter, and it's necessary to identify them based on their being twisted inside the sheath with either the red or white wires. Use of four different wire colors would have been easier.

With everything in place, a 1-amp fuse was inserted in the battery wire and the meter went live, displaying three readings: voltage, amps (current) and percent full. Before the percent-full reading becomes accurate it must first synchronize with the batteries. It starts at 100 percent, and from there it tracks the amount of discharging and charging amps to calculate a percent-full reading. Every time the battery is charged fully, the meter resynchronizes with the batteries.

We checked voltage and amp readings with separate gauges at various loads and found them accurate.

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SMARTER CHARGING

Programming

At the outset, the TriMetric purchaser may be a bit intimidated by the instructions, which are extensive and detailed, even at the start-up level (available online at bogartengineering.com). But with close reading (and sometimes re-reading), it all comes into focus.

Several levels of monitoring are available to challenge even the most ardent battery nut, but entering basic data covers the bases to produce readings on voltage, amps in or out, battery percent full, as well as reminders for periodic recharge. A reminder for battery equalization (controlled overcharge only for flooded batteries) is available but not needed in our situation with AGM batteries.

The recharge or equalization reminders are important for motorhome owners who are off the grid because failure to recharge or equalize often enough can lead to sulfation and loss of capacity.

Determining Full Charge

The meter determines full charge based on two setpoints: voltage and "charged setpoint current" [amps].

Voltage: One example is the charge voltage specified by Lifeline, 14.3 at 77 degrees Fahrenheit. But the battery bank is not necessarily fully charged when voltage rises to 14.3. An adequate charge voltage must be sustained over an adequate length of time to result in low setpoint current.

Setpoint current: As voltage and battery state of charge rise to full charge, current flow drops due to battery internal resistance — the battery signaling that it's nearing full. Lifeline defines full charge as the point at which current flow drops below 0.5 percent of rated capacity (1.5 amps in this case) while voltage is maintained at the proper level relative to temperature.

Recommended charge voltage for the aforementioned Lifeline batteries varies widely: 15.10 at 30 degrees Fahrenheit, to 14.04 at 100 degrees Fahrenheit, hence the important role of the "charged setpoint current" in determining full charge.

Specific battery settings must be acquired from the battery manufacturer's website.

Smart Chargers

Sound complicated? It is, and well-designed smart chargers and solar controllers are designed to automatically take all this into account. But the rub occurs if batteries are too depleted on a daily basis for the solar array to keep up, and/or generator running time is too limited.

Incomplete charging can continue for weeks or months, while sulfation increases. Also, inadequate wiring may cause voltage drop between charge source and batteries that deceives the charger or solar controller into registering full charge when it hasn't happened yet.

The telltale signs of sulfation are loss of capacity (the usual DC loads result in lower voltage readings, or dead batteries). As a result of sulfation, charging for lengthy periods at the specified voltage may not cause current to taper to the "charged setpoint." Some of this may also happen as well-cared-for batteries age.

The TriMetric TM-2030-RV meter starts with the basics and offers about as much battery monitoring as even a dedicated unhooked RVer would want, even to the point of recording every amp-hour withdrawn from a battery bank during the years of its lifetime. The installation is easy, depending on how far the wiring harness must be routed; again, programming requires some study, especially to get beyond the basics.

The meter is an accurate way to determine if an investment in an expensive battery bank is being protected. It's priced at about \$190 (including a shunt) at RV accessory retailers, including sellers of solar panels and related equipment. Warranty is four years. Bogart recently introduced a solar controller, the SC-2030, which operates in conjunction with the TM-2030-RV meter. **M**

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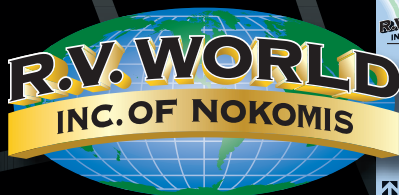
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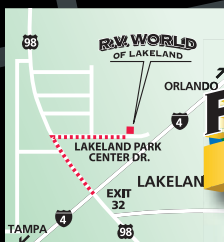
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Don't Get Zapped!

Tips on How to Make Your Motorhome Safer During Lightning Strikes

According to the National Weather Service, there are more than 22 million cloud-to-ground lightning strikes on average each year in the U.S. Even though the chance of being struck by lightning is low — only 1 in 600,000 — it does happen. I interviewed a lightning-strike survivor who suffered two secondary lightning strikes on one rainy day while in a campground. The first strike hit while he was sitting under an awning in an aluminum chair. The second strike, 15 minutes later, sent him to the hospital and occurred while checking on the breaker that fed power to the coach that had tripped off after the first strike. In spite of his exposure, he was one of the fortunate few who survived a lightning strike without any long-term health effects.

Understanding the Dangers

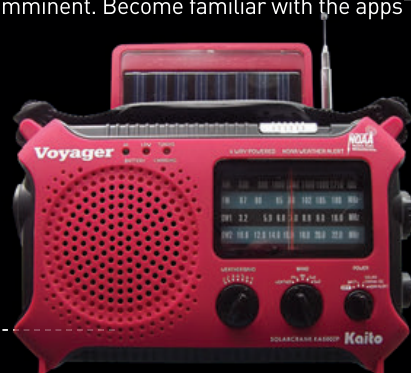
Lightning does not always come straight down from a cloud at a 90-degree angle; it follows the most conductive path along ionized air from charged clouds and can strike at a 45-degree angle from above. An approaching thundercloud or retreating cloud is just as dangerous as those directly overhead. Danger occurs when people or equipment become all or part of the conductive path as this energy charge reaches for the earth to

dissipate its energy. Because there is a natural resistance in the earth, and in any objects on the ground, this zone of dissipation can cover a large area, putting everything in that area at risk of high-voltage current flows over multiple pathways.

Risk Awareness and Assessment

Become informed of the weather risks before you travel or engage in outdoor activities, and carry a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) portable weather radio.

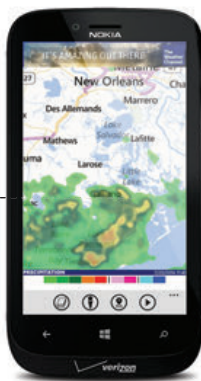
Test the radio for signal quality at your destination location. Smartphones with data plans may have the WeatherBug or Weather Channel apps that show forecast warnings that lightning storms are imminent. Become familiar with the apps and/or listen to the weather radio or local AM/FM radio and TV stations. NOAA stations do not have complete coverage, nor do cellphone towers, so sometimes



This multipowered portable NOAA radio is a great help to receive thunderstorm warnings.

the only forecasts available are from nearby radio or TV stations. If you have an Internet connection, you can use websites such as www.weather.com or www.wunderground.com.

Smartphones with weather apps can keep you informed of weather events when a tower is nearby. Apps can also show radar and/or satellite views of approaching or receding weather fronts.



Minimize the Risk

Minimize your risk from lightning storms and take immediate evasive action when strikes occur: Get off the water, seek shelter or occupy low ground if caught in the open. The safety rule to remember is that if you see a lightning flash and hear the sound from it in less than 30 seconds, you are in danger of having a strike at your location. Electrical storms travel fast; seek shelter right away. Do not consider trees shelter; trees are often struck by lightning, and when hit, often explode from the intense heat.

In June, "NBC Nightly News" ran a clip of a moving pickup that took a direct hit of lightning as it motored along the highway. The lightning ruined electronics in the truck and the occupants reportedly couldn't get out without help, but it proves the next point. When a lightning storm is present, you are safer inside; inside nearly anything, except a tent or tent-like structure. The Faraday effect helps to keep you safe inside your home, motorhome or car. If caught out in the open, find and go to the lowest ground or ditch, while avoiding water, and stay put for at least 30 minutes after the last thunder boom.

Campground and RV Lightning Safety Factors

Staying safe from lightning strikes at campgrounds is a responsibility shared by the motorhome owner and park operator. Motorhome owners should test power cables for continuity and check and maintain electrical connections or have their service provider or dealer perform an electrical safety check annually.

To maximize safety there are three wiring details that should be, but are rarely completely understood. All three are of equal importance and must be fully functional to work together as a system to reduce the risk of injury and equipment damage from lightning that strikes anywhere in or even nearby the park. Let's take a closer look at these details to understand how this risk can be mitigated by testing and complying with standards.

Grounded Conductor

On U.S. electrical systems, one current-carrying conductor is connected to the earth. In your RV's wiring system, the neutral wire when correctly installed at a common three-prong 120-volt AC outlet will be the wider contact. The neutral (white) conductor is a part of the normal circuit-return path for operation currents powering all 120-volt AC lights and equipment on board. Lightning striking any one of the nongrounded current-carrying conductors will travel through lights, equipment, appliances and electronics to reach earth through the neutral conductor path unless you have sufficient surge protection on these lines. Every motorhome connected to a pedestal on the same transformer circuit shares the surge risk if any lines are hit.

Bonding Wire

Household living areas including motorhomes are required to have a bonding wire commonly referred to as the "ground" in 120/240-volt AC electrical circuits; it can be color coded green or be bare copper. Although this wire is also grounded in the electrical service panel or at the pedestal to the same lug buss assemblies as the neutral, its main purpose is not to carry normal operating currents. Its main purpose is to provide an alternative return path for any electrical voltage escaping from its intended return path, the neutral wire. This bonding (aka ground) wire then serves two primary functions. First, shunting the user of electrical equipment from becoming part of a return path in the electrical circuit; its other job is tripping the circuit breaker to off when a to-equipment-case (short) fault occurs. When using a surge protector on a power cord, the neutral wire (and in some surge models the bonding wires) provides the return path for surges higher than a specified voltage. Typically any voltage higher than 300 to 600 volts are shunted by the surge protector.



Lightning True or False?

Lightning does not strike twice in the same place. **(False)** The same area can be hit multiple times in a lingering storm.

It's safe to help a victim of lightning. **(True)** It's OK to administer CPR and render aid; the victim does not stay "electrically charged."

Rubber shoes will keep you safe from lightning. **(False)** Lightning voltage is too high for shoes or rain suits to make a meaningful difference.

Being inside a car is not safe. **(False)** The metal shell provides some protection.

Golf clubs or umbrellas will not attract lightning. **(False)** Any metal object and added height increases the risk.

These surges (overvoltages) can occur from primary or secondary line faults, problems at a substation or generation station, and from lightning strikes anywhere on the electrical supply line.

Grounding

The sole purpose for grounding is to carry voltages from lightning strikes harmlessly to the earth. At the motorhome, the primary electrical path to ground from a lightning strike will be found through the bonding wire and the grounded conductor (neutral) wire because they are both connected to the same lug. Non-intended secondary paths may also be present from metal pipes or cables used to hold down awnings or any other metal objects or wire touching the motorhome and the pavement or earth under and around it.

Two risks are evident when you hook up a power cord to an electrical pedestal. The first is the quality of the connections for the bonding and neutral wires on the electrical cord and plugs that connect to the outlet on the pedestal. This is true whether you connect with 120-volt AC; 15, 20 or 30 amp; or 120/240-volt AC 50-amp connections. The second risk is that the pedestal may not provide a sufficient path to ground for all the electrical energy present in a lightning strike. Any excessive resistance to ground on the neutral conductor and the bonding wire at the pedestal can lead to severe risk of electrical shock for anyone coming into, going out of or standing near the motorhome when a direct or secondary strike path occurs. Regrettably, many RV parks have been wired in such a way that the only good grounding is at the service panel at a building, on a pole-mounted service distribution panel or at a dedicated ground-mounted distribution panel, often a great distance from the RV. Sure, the neutral conductor and the bonding wire may well be in place and conducting to that point, sometimes 600 feet or more away from the RV hookup pedestal, but that is not always good enough when protecting the occupants from lightning strikes. The aboveground voltages in this scenario could be in the range of thousands of volts, and every RV hooked to that circuit is at risk of incurring exces-

sively high aboveground voltages from a strike and risk becoming part of the lightning current's shared path to earth.

To further understand this, consider the common sight of the bird on the powerline wire. A crow lands on a 70,000-volt power-distribution wire, crows a few times, flies away and nothing happens to it. The bird and the wire it landed on could be 70,000 volts or more above-ground potential but there was no ground path anywhere nearby. If everything is connected and there are no alternative paths to ground, there is no risk of shock or injury. RV park owners can protect their visitors by making sure that all the ground wires and neutrals back to the service panel are intact, connected tightly and properly grounded to National Electrical Code standards.

With supplemental ground rods at every pedestal and with the ties back to the distribution panels intact and grounded to meet code when lightning strikes in an RV park, it brings the entire park up to whatever voltage the lightning strike is for an instant. All the RVs in the park become like the birds on a wire with no alternative paths to earth for the current from a lightning strike to follow. A larger area of dissipation provided by multiple interconnected ground rods with low resistance to earth reduces the potential risk of damage or injury.

Safety-Checking Items on Your RV

Here are some ways to minimize your personal risk. First, with the inverters and generators turned off and also while not plugged in to any power source, periodically inspect the quality of your power cord. The plug tongs should be straight and clean, and the cable/cord should be undamaged with no wires showing or any of the cable sheathing frayed or cut away. Check the connections on the bottom of the power-distribution (breaker) box for tightness of the wires on the connection lugs; they should all be snug, tightly holding the wires. Repair or replace any damaged cords, plugs or sockets.

Next, test the resistance of the power cord. Bring the cable-end plug in to where the main power-distribution circuit breaker box is located. Use a volt/ohm/

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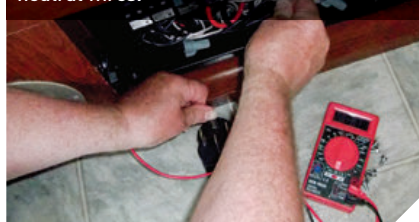
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A small volt/ohm/amp meter can be used for testing the resistance of the ground and neutral wires.



amp meter to measure the resistance at the ground prong to the bonding connection lugs in the breaker box. Do the same for the neutral wire.

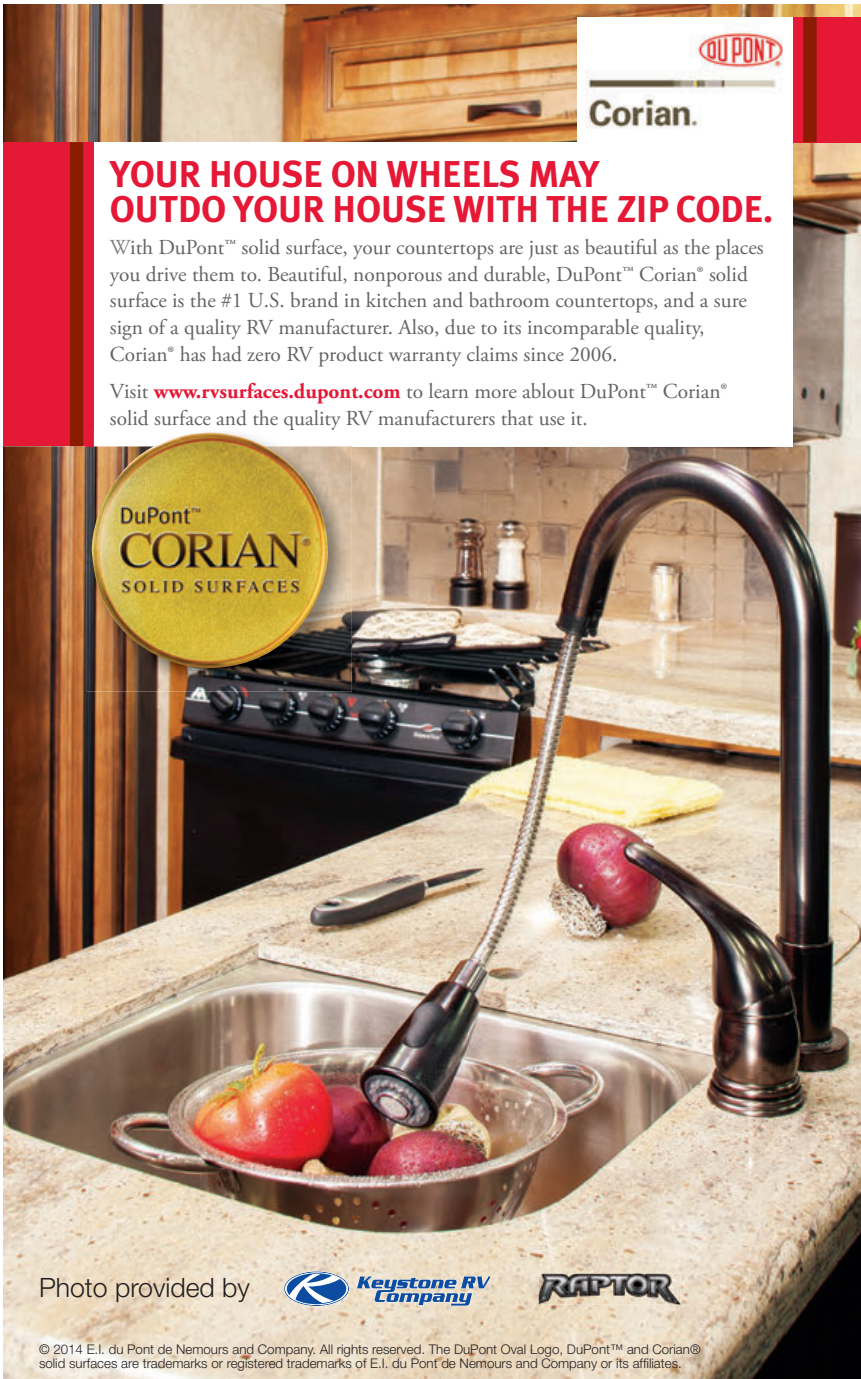
Testing the line resistance from the plug end to the bus lugs in the breaker box should be done at least once each year. Calculate or tape measure the total wire distance from plug to the breaker box to determine the ideal resistance for the wire size. Theoretically, if the reading is much more than .033 to .004 ohms (.0011 ohms per foot) for a 30-amp 25-foot-long power cable, or higher than .01 to .02 ohms (.0004 ohms per foot) for 50-amp 25-foot-long cables, then some replacements or repairs are indicated. In reality, most inexpensive meters will show about 1 to 2 ohms for the full length of a 25-foot cable plus the connections leading to the breaker box. Test both the neutral (grounded conductor) and the bonding conductor. The two readings should be very nearly the same unless the cord has a smaller-gauge wire for the bonding connection. If the readings are more than



This tester, made by Commercial Electric (\$11), is intended for use in outlets. An adapter can be used to extend the tester for use in 30-amp/120-volt AC outlets.

10 ohms, you have an issue that needs immediate attention. In more modern coaches, the bonding lug and the neutral lug in the breaker box are not connected except when plugged in at the pedestal. That is why the next step, to test the park's pedestal outlets before connection, is so important.



The third task to **(continued on pg.86)**



YOUR HOUSE ON WHEELS MAY OUTDO YOUR HOUSE WITH THE ZIP CODE.

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By Kevin Livingston

SUCK IT UP

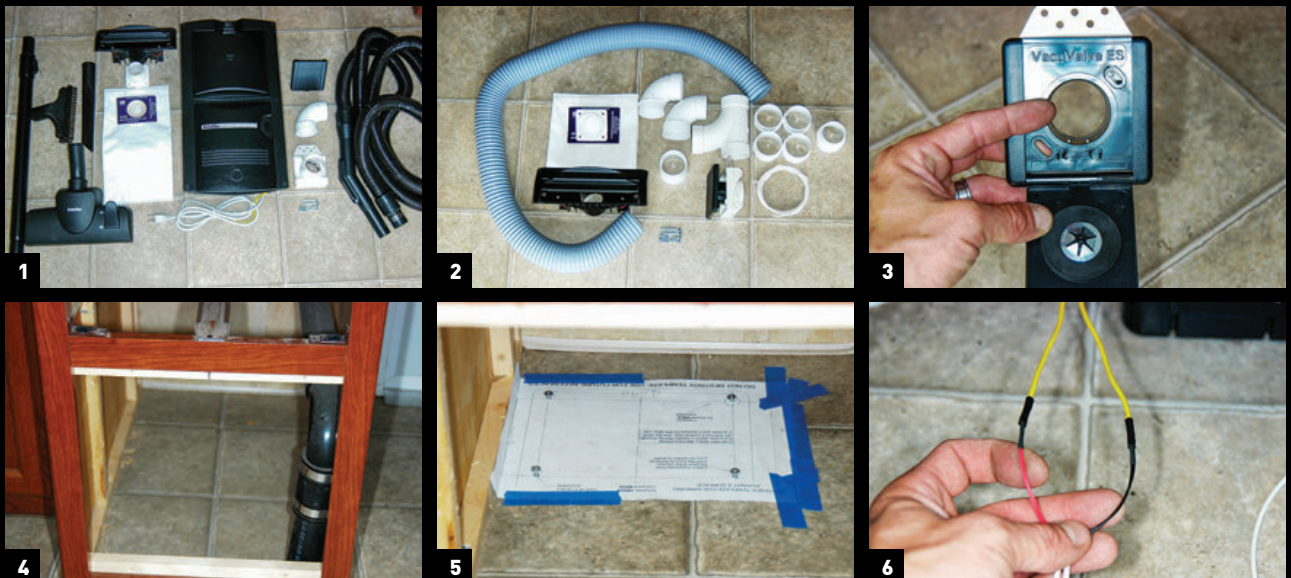
Installing an InterVac remote vacuum-cleaner system in an unused area saves space and makes cleanup a breeze

Whether you're parked in a low-dust, paved campground or in the middle of off-road racing pits, the dirt always manages to find a way inside a motorhome. Keeping a coach clean also helps keep it functioning, since dirt wreaks havoc on many appliances and accessories. There is an abundant selection of cleaning supplies and specialty items (think "As Seen on TV") for home and motorhome use, not to mention the huge varieties of specific-purpose cleaning machines. Out of all these choices, the vacuum cleaner reigns king for most messy situations.

Quite often when dealing within the confined living quarters of a motorhome, storage space for a full-size stand-up house vacuum cleaner — or any vacuum for that matter — can become a bit of an issue. To the rescue is InterVac Design Corp., a company that has made a longtime

commitment to developing practical, small-scale, high-power central vacuum systems. The company put itself on the map over the years as a leading manufacturer of permanently mounted, remote home, boat and RV vacuums. The InterVac Design vacuum systems consist of a small rectangular, rugged polycarbonate plastic housing, weighing around 9 pounds and measuring 9.5-by-8.25-by-3 15/16 inches deep. Of course, this is no ordinary plastic box; inside is a small yet powerful 12-amp, 120-volt AC motor creating impressive suction that makes the RMH model (remote mount hanging) practical for motorhome installations. The vacuum uses an internal five-layer, hypoallergenic filtration bag to catch and contain all debris. The company also backs up its fully American-made products with an astounding six-year guarantee.

Without a doubt the best attribute of the InterVac is its



[1] InterVac's RMH model kit comes with all the components necessary for a remote installation. [2] A great option for the InterVac system is the VacPort inlet that's installed in the wall at floor level in a convenient location, usually where there is no carpeting. [3] Inlet valve for the main vacuum system can be installed in a central location; multiple valves can be used if necessary. [4] For this installation, an unused compartment at the floor was used to mount the vacuum housing and necessary hoses and fittings. [5] An accurate template is provided with the kit for determining the location of the fasteners that hold the vacuum housing in place. Here, the screws were driven through the paper. [6] Two 20-gauge wires are routed from each valve port to the yellow wires in the bottom of the vacuum housing.

chameleon-like ability to adapt to nearly any situation. No matter what style or shape motorhome you've got, the InterVac has got an application that will suit just about any installation configuration. This is especially notable for the RM series if you're seeking a truly custom remote location; the unit is designed for mounting in a basement or outer compartment. However, just because this particular model is mostly intended for a basement installation doesn't limit installation possibilities. With a little imagination the unit can be installed in any area deemed dead space, which is exactly how we installed this vacuum.

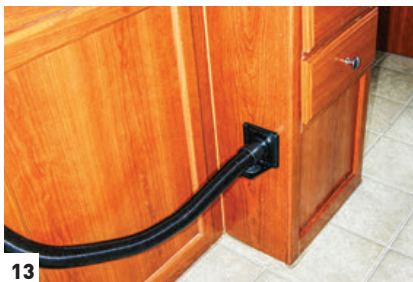
Most InterVac models can be mounted by securing to a floor, flush mounting or hanging on a wall as long as there's enough "breathing" space for the machine. To begin this install, the most important step is to find an ideal location to suit individual needs. Making sure there's a good 120-volt AC power source that can be tapped into via a plug or hard wiring is one of the primary requirements. We used some completely out-of-the-way space under drawers that was not being utilized for anything and it also had access to a power connection relatively close by. If it's necessary to route power to the vacuum housing, a receptacle and Romex wiring can be routed to the appropriate area.

After locating a home for the RMH vacuum housing, the install procedure relies on the well-written instructions, which have all the necessary mounting templates that are very accurate. Tape the cutout template to the chosen mounting surface and begin by marking the four screw positions with a pointed tool, like an awl. Since the template will likely not be needed again, just drive the screws right through the template and remove once all four screws have been set, leaving about 1/8 inch of the screw head sticking out.

The next step involves hose and duct routing, which is ultimately dependent on the number of inlet valves used (for connecting the hose) and where they are located. In our case, we installed one valve in a



[7] Romex wire was routed from a power outlet box in a nearby compartment to the area where the vacuum housing was mounted. [8] A new power outlet was installed next to the vacuum housing, which has a pigtail with a standard plug that can be connected directly to the outlet. The vacuum can also be hardwired into the 120-volt AC system.



[9] The inlet valve picks up power from the vacuum housing and when the flap is lifted for inserting the hose, the motor starts automatically. [10] The backing plate for the inlet valve provides a seal between the hose and plumbing to the vacuum housing. [11] Configuring the pipes requires the use of PVC cement to make necessary connections for routing the hoses from the vacuum housing to the inlet ports, including the VacPort. [12] The whole works fit nicely in the compartment and there is easy access for changing the dust bags and filters. [13] A 30-foot hose provides good reach to all points inside the motorhome. Standard-type tools for cleaning carpet, floors, window coverings, etc., attach to the end of the hose. [14] When the door to the VacPort is lifted, LEDs illuminate the area where debris can be swept into the opening without bending down.

central location. Use of the backing plate provides a proper seal between hose and the plumbing. At this point it's a matter of configuring the 2-inch PVC pipe and connectors using the appropriate glue and primer — and any other items to facilitate the install like cable ties and hose clamps. As mentioned earlier, unleash your imagination and creativity when designing the installation.

We also opted to install a VacPort, which is an inlet that is installed floor level at the base of a cabinet. It takes a little more effort to integrate this component into the system, but it allows debris to be swept close to the port and sucked into the vacuum bag without using the hose. The kit comes with the correct cutout pattern and a selection of flex hoses, elbows, T's, Y's and pipe that can be run between the vacuum and valves. When the flap on the VacPort is lifted, a pair of LEDs illuminate the area, the vacuum motor starts and the debris is sucked away as it's swept into the opening. Obviously, the VacPort is best mounted where there is no carpeting. The vacuum is also activated every time any port door is lifted for inserting the ultra-user-friendly (light-weight) hose that stretches to 30 feet.

Pretty much all that's left to do is the wiring. In most cases, when using the RMH (the model with the attached power cord and plug), no serious wiring is needed as it simply plugs into a receptacle. For this particular install we opted to run Romex wire from another outlet to a new one we had mounted on the floor right beside the vacuum housing. Coincidentally, the plastic outlet box was also mounted in such a way to help lock the RMH in place and allow it to be removed quickly for any servicing such as replacing an exhaust filter. Aside from finding the most suitable 120-volt AC power source, the only other wiring necessary is to the square and VacPort inlet valves. Two 20-gauge low-voltage wires are routed from each valve to the two yellow remote power wires located in the bottom side of the vacuum housing.

Once the installation is completed, using the InterVac RMH takes no more effort than plugging in the stretch hose along with your favorite convenient and

highly functional attachments, which are part of the tool kit and offer all the basics. Additional tools and accessories are available. Dust bags can be purchased from the manufacturer or from online suppliers and can be replaced by removing the door on the vacuum housing, pulling out the full bag and tucking the collar from the new bag over a pipe.

The RMH model, part of the RM-120 series, can be found at Camping World

and on the Internet for around \$265; the VacPort is another \$37. Both make great tools for streamlining cleaning of any motorhome while conserving precious storage space. **M**

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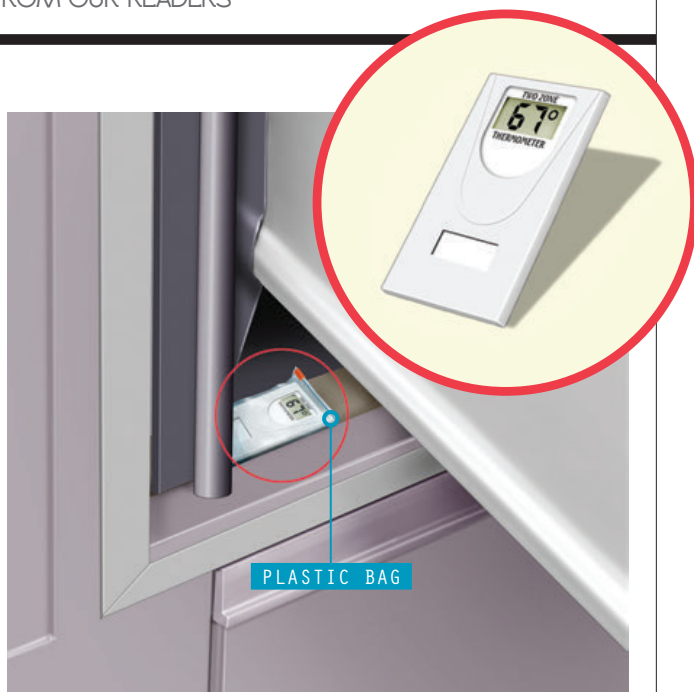
Outside Temperature Sensor

I have a SkyScan digital clock that displays inside and outside temperature. After trying to find a location, when parked, that the outside transmitter unit could sense air temperature without being in direct sun any part of the day, I decided to place it in a wheel well on top of the tire. That worked OK until I left on a trip and forgot it was there. Obviously, it didn't survive being rolled over by several tons.

I needed a better location for the replacement unit that I wouldn't have to always tend to. The perfect place turned out to be in the channel forming the bottom of the slide opening. There's plenty of room so the transmitter and the slide don't interfere with each other, and the inherent shape of the channel keeps the unit in place.

A small plastic bag with a zipper protects it from moisture, and it never needs tending except for an occasional battery change.

Tom Becker | Albuquerque, New Mexico



More Prep Space

Our motorhome just doesn't have enough counterspace, so I inserted a cutting board into the galley sink edges. It fits perfectly and I still have room for a colander to wash fruits and vegetables.

Pete Chiarolanzio | Florham Park, New Jersey



Spray-Head Holder

We found that the holder for the toilet spray head on the side of the toilet was in an inconvenient location. It required bending over to pick up the sprayer and if I forgot that there is a cabinet over the toilet when I stood up, it added scars to a head that has enough scars from being chewed on by a grizzly. The sprayer and hose were also in the way when we put bottles of toilet chemicals beside the toilet.

We solved the problem with a 3M Command Jumbo Plastic Hook with Adhesive Strips. It fits the spray nozzle perfectly and securely holds the spray head as high as the hose will permit (somewhat above waist level). The hook is available in stores such as Wal-Mart, Home Depot, Lowe's, etc. Installation takes about 15 seconds. The hook has been performing flawlessly, summer and winter, for about 15 years.

Jim Magowan | Anchorage, Alaska



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

A large Smokey Bear mascot, wearing a tan hat with "SMOKEY" on it and a matching belt, stands in a forest. He is hugging a young woman on his left and a young man on his right. Both hikers are wearing large backpacks and have sleeping bags rolled up and attached to them. The woman has a blue backpack and an orange sleeping bag. The man has a red backpack and a blue sleeping bag. The background is a dense forest of evergreen trees.

BRING IT IN FOR A BIRTHDAY BEAR HUG

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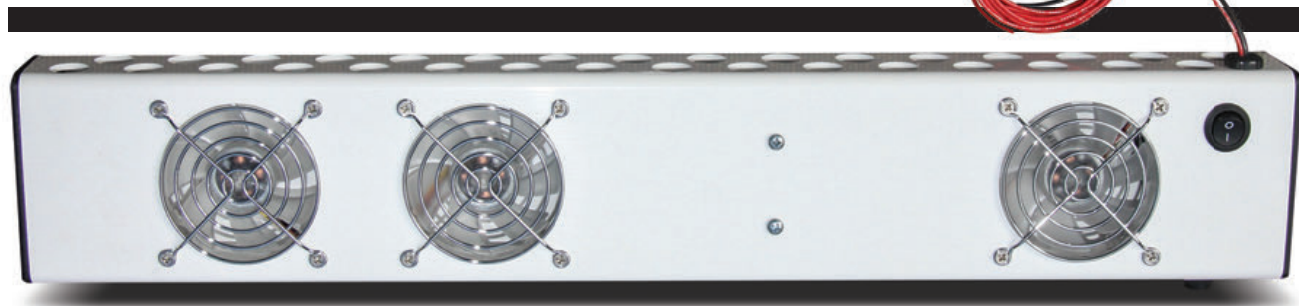


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Fridge-Fix

This add-on fan box from Smart RV Products beefs up interior circulation for more efficient operation and less food spoilage

By Bill and Jenn Gehr



APPLIANCES

Cost: \$64.⁹⁵ - \$109.⁹⁵

Time: 60 minutes

Difficulty: 5/10

RV gas/electric absorption refrigerators are subject to improper installation and high-ambient temperatures that can significantly affect the cooling process. When outside temperatures

soar to 100 degrees Fahrenheit and higher, refrigerators need all the help they can get. A simple solution is to add a Fridge-Fix by Smart RV Products, a compact box with three waterproof fans and a pleasant blue light.

RV refrigerators are not equipped with interior fans, so there's no circulation; it's not uncommon to see box temperatures higher than 45 degrees — warm enough to lead to food spoilage. When refrigerators are overloaded with excess food, the temperature zones become far less efficient. When condensation builds up on the condenser fins, cooling can be reduced by up to 25 percent. Often, this excess moisture can turn to ice, and adequate cooling is further affected.



The Fridge-Fix kit comes fully assembled and installs easily using hook-and-loop fasteners. Smart RV Products offers applications to fit most motorhome refrigerator models.

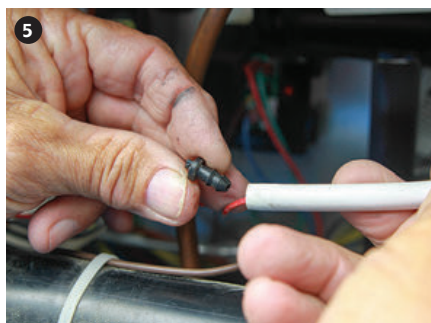
Ice buildup is a common problem that affects nearly half of the RV refrigerators on the market today. Ice and additional condensation buildup can be caused by worn-out door gaskets or any food that has been left uncovered. When the thermistor, the refrigerator's temperature sensor, becomes encapsulated in ice, a false temperature reading occurs, and airflow across the cooling fins is diminished. The Fridge-Fix eliminates frost buildup and accurately regulates cooling with its increased airflow.

Fridge-Fix is guaranteed to shorten cool-down time and cool all zones by quietly circulating inside air 10 to 12 times per minute, yet it draws only .5 to .75 amps. The high-quality fans are designed to last a minimum of 50,000 hours of operation.

While Fridge-Fix offers applications to fit most refrigerator models, the install was done on a Norcold model 1210. For this installation, the top shelf and drip tray are replaced by a modified new version. Removal is easy, but make sure the condensation drain hose is not pulled out of place. In some models, like the Norcold 1210, the interior light will be in the way of mounting the Fridge-Fix. If this is the case, simply remove the lens and the two screws holding the light fixture in place; the light will be relocated later in the installation.

There are no holes to drill; the Fridge-Fix mounts securely using hook-and-loop fasteners. Clean the area where the

The Fridge-Fix is equipped with internally mounted LEDs, an added bonus for RV refrigerators that lack adequate interior lighting.



[1] Determine the location for the Fridge-Fix assembly. Remove the refrigerator's interior light if it interferes with the fan assembly installation. [2] Clean the areas using a mild household cleaner and finish with an alcohol wipe where the Fridge-Fix will attach with hook-and-loop fastener. [3] After peeling the hook-and-loop backing, press into place for 10 seconds to ensure a complete adhesion. [4] Attach the ground clip to one of the refrigerator's interior evaporator fins and route the red wire through the condensation drain tube. [5] Remove the rubber plug from the condensation drain tube at the rear of the refrigerator and pull the red wire through. [6] Using the supplied Scotchlok, attach the red wire to the refrigerator's incoming positive wire.

hook-and-loop material will contact the surface of the refrigerator when the unit is in place, dry thoroughly and wipe with alcohol. Peel the backing from the hook-and-loop and push the box in place; hold for 10 seconds with firm pressure. Be certain the Fridge-Fix is tight against the cooling fins.

Attach the ground clip to any of the metal fins, which may require a little help from a small hammer. The interior light is then mounted to the bottom of the Fridge-Fix with two Phillips screws that are already in place. In this model refrigerator, we decided to run the red positive wire through the condensation drain tube. Some refrigerators will have constant 12-volt DC power to the light assembly for even easier installation.

Remove the outside access panel to expose the rear of the refrigerator and remove the plastic plug from the end of the condensation drain tube. Feed

the wire down through the drain tube and attach to the positive wire running to the refrigerator's circuit board with the supplied Scotchlok connector. Cut a small slot in the drain tube and reinstall the supplied drip tray. Attach the drain tube to the supplied drip tray and use a small amount of sealant or putty tape to prevent possible leaking of condensation. Reinstall the top shelf and locking rails.

Total installation time runs around 60 minutes. Since the shelves have to be cleaned and the refrigerator turned off before installing the Fridge-Fix, this is a good time to clean out the refrigerator.

We began testing the new fan in an ambient temperature of 68 degrees. The inside of the refrigerator was allowed to reach the same temperature as the interior of the motorhome. After installation of the Fridge-Fix, the refrigerator was set with the thermostat on No. 2 with the door closed and never opened during the cool-down period. Before the install, we recorded the cool-down time from 68 to 38 degrees at four hours and

40 minutes. We were able to shave 22 minutes off that cool-down time after the installation of the Fridge-Fix.

When opening the door for the first time, we could feel the circulation of cold air from the three very efficient fans. There is no question that the Fridge-Fix will save electricity and LP-gas with its highly efficient air-circulation system.

Fridge-Fix fits most model RV refrigerators but not all. It is important to be certain of the correct size and model of your refrigerator before ordering the Fridge-Fix. The Smart RV Products website has good references for choosing the right model. You can also email specific questions to the company via info@smartrvproducts.com. Just be sure to have the model number of your refrigerator handy.

Prices range from \$64.95 to \$109.95. The Fridge-Fix is backed by a two-year, no-questions-asked warranty. **M**

Smart RV Products
877-472-7799, www.smartrvproducts.com

Elusive Warranty Reimbursement

Thinking that his claims with an extended warranty company had fallen through the cracks, a reader asked Hot Line to intercede on his behalf. He wrote:



“ I purchased an extended warranty for my 2005 Beaver Monterey from ACC Warranty Group in November 2012. In January 2014 I took my motorhome in for repair due to an inoperative leveling jack, which was stuck in a partial down position. After the diagnostic, I called ACC and spoke with Steve Burgess, the company president. He said that they would only pay to have the jack system rebuilt, not replaced. I had the work done and paid the bill. I submitted the paperwork and a claim for \$998.27 to ACC via the company’s website on March 6.

During the jack replacement, the service technician had told me that one of my air bags was not working. I took the coach to a facility that works on air bags and the bill for that service came to \$377.73. I then submitted another claim online via ACC’s website.

A few days later I contacted ACC and spoke with Burgess who stated I should be receiving payment by e-check within a few weeks. As of March 31, I have not received payment. I am asking Hot Line for help in obtaining reimbursement for warranty work performed.

Lee Williams | Round Hill, Virginia

Hot Line contacted ACC Warranty Group on Williams’ behalf. The company did not respond to our inquiry, but we did receive a follow-up from Williams that provided a happy ending. It read:

“ On April 22 I received payment via e-check from ACC RV Warranty Co. Thank you for Hot Line’s assistance in this matter.

L.W.

Turbo Trouble

Frustrated by multiple turbo replacements on his motorhome, a reader sought Hot Line’s assistance. He wrote:

“ I have an issue with Cummins related to the turbo unit on the ISB 300 diesel engine in my 2006 Winnebago Journey. This issue started in July 2010 when the check-engine light came on. I took the motorhome to Sacramento Truck Center in Sacramento, California. The turbo had failed and was replaced at that time with

35,956 miles at a cost to my extended warranty of \$3,556.25 and \$83.90 out of my pocket.

In August 2012 the check-engine light came on again. I again took the coach to the same truck center. This time with 42,230 miles, the turbo had to be replaced to the tune of \$3,988.01 out of my pocket. My extended warranty did not pay because the company said it was a pre-existing condition.

In December 2013 the check-engine light came on again. Now, with 45,900 miles, the turbo has been replaced for the third time at the truck center. My cost for the repair was \$4,858.92. That makes three turbo replacements at a total cost to me of \$8,930.83.

Apparently, Cummins told Sacramento Truck Center that it would cover 75 percent of the cost of the last turbo, but nothing toward labor. I do not think this is acceptable; Cummins should reimburse me for my repairs and extend the warranty to at least 24 months. I hope that Cummins would help us also not only with the cost of parts, but also labor.

Can Hot Line please help us?

Jim Clark | Lincoln, California

Hot Line’s standard letter of inquiry was sent to Cummins along with a copy of Clark’s complaint. We received the following note from Clark regarding the outcome of his case. It read:

“ In response to Hot Line’s letter to Cummins, we would like to thank you for your assistance. We received a partial reimbursement for our turbocharger issues. We appreciate Hot Line’s help in getting some compensation for our expenses. **M**

Take Action

Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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69052/69111
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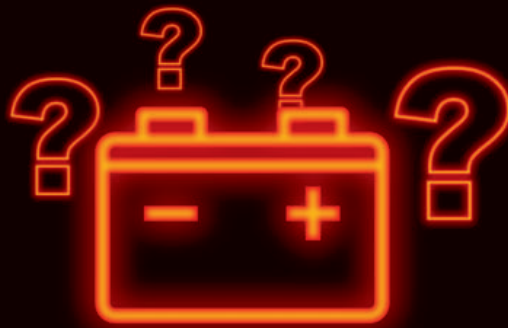
This is only an outline of the plan's features. Please read your Plan Description carefully to understand all the services available to you, as well as any terms, conditions and limitations. Names changed for privacy. GTA34100 - 0714

By Ken Freund

Batteries Go Dead

Q I have a 2000 Fleetwood Southwind Storm. I was reading your March 2013 column about a guy who had an electrical problem and used a jumper wire around the chassis battery disconnect relay ("Electrical Problems Solved"). I have a similar problem. I bought two new batteries for the auxiliary and one for the main. There seems to always be an issue if I use the disconnect switches over the door marked main and aux. The coach batteries keep running down. First, the steps quit working but the step lights work. Do you think this is the same problem? I've had it checked and no one knows what to do. Once the battery is fully charged, everything works great. I had the battery tested and was told it's completely drained. Once they do a charge, it's ready again.

Larry George | Snow Camp, North Carolina



A Motorhomes have many parasitic draws that will discharge batteries. If the disconnect switches are set in the open position, no current should flow in or out of the batteries via the wiring, period. You should verify that both disconnect switches actually work. The step motor draws a lot more current than the light does, so a weak battery could still allow the light to work.

Towing a 2011 Grand Cherokee

Q We own a 2011 Jeep Grand Cherokee that we were told has a button to put the transfer case in neutral to tow. How does it work? Do we need bungee cords to secure the steering wheel while traveling? We have a Blue Ox setup on our 2007 Winnebago Adventurer and are looking into what we need on the front of the Jeep to tow it.

**Donna and Charles Baldwin
Williamsburg, Massachusetts**

A Whether or not you can tow this vehicle depends on its four-wheel-drive system. The Grand Cherokee with Quadra-Trac I cannot be flat towed, but models equipped with the Quadra-Trac II/Quadra-Drive II systems are towable. According to our 2011 Dinghy Roundup, this is the procedure for the 2011 Grand Cherokee: "Turn the ignition switch to the ON/RUN position, but do not start the engine. Press and hold the brake pedal. Shift the transmission into neutral. Press and hold the recessed transfer case neutral button for 4 seconds, until the light behind

the N symbol starts to blink, indicating shift in progress. The light will stop blinking (stay on solid) when the shift to N (neutral) is complete. Start the engine. Shift into reverse. Release the brake pedal for 5 seconds. Turn the engine off and leave ignition switch in the unlocked off position. Firmly apply the parking brake. Shift the transmission into park. Hook up the vehicle to the tow bar. Release the parking brake. Disconnect the negative battery cable, and secure it away from the negative battery post."

There shouldn't be any need for bungee cords attached to the steering wheel, but you will need the usual baseplate and towbar combination for the Jeep, along with safety cables, wiring and an auxiliary brake system. I also recommend adding a battery charge line.

New Motorhome Owner's Questions

Q I am new to motorhoming and have a few questions. I have a 1998 Coachman 25-foot Class C on a Ford E-350 chassis. Sometimes I tow our Subaru. I have a hard time when passing

a vehicle deciding when to return to the right lane. I can't see the Subaru at all, so I'm paranoid about turning. I look in the right-side mirror and just guess when I have enough distance. I turn on the blinker and slowly change lanes, figuring if I am too close, I will hear a horn. Is there a safer way to judge this distance?

Also, if the black-water tank is more than half full, an odor comes into the cabin if I have the driver or passenger window open. When I close the windows the odor goes away. Is it being sucked into the cabin from a roof vent? If so, is there a cure? I like driving with the windows down as much as possible.

And finally, once, when I was running the generator to power the roof air while driving through a very hot area (105 degrees Fahrenheit), the generator stopped running within a few minutes after I stopped at a fuel station. Did it overheat and shut down?

Ed Pavone | Vancouver, Washington

A To answer your first question, some people mount flexible stalks with a tennis ball or other brightly colored object sticking out from the rear corners

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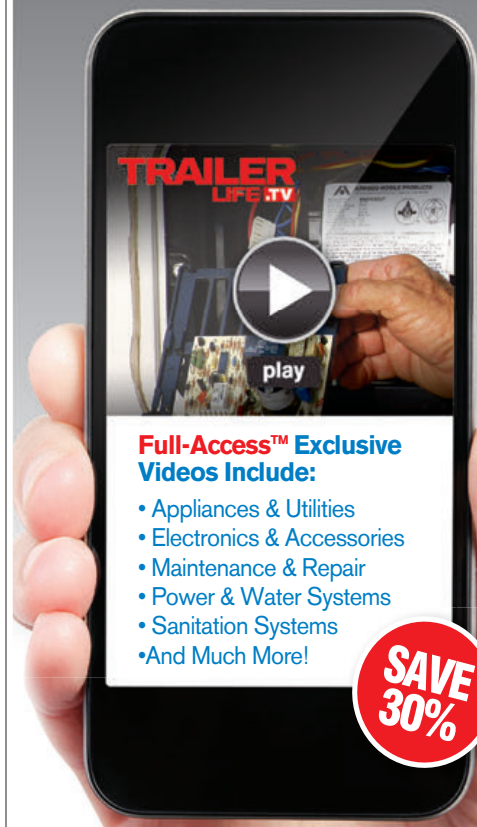
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of their dinghy vehicles. You should also consider extending the mirrors and adding convex fisheye mirrors to improve rearward visibility. You could also add a rear-view monitor to your coach and aim the camera back so that you have a full view of the Subaru. That would give you a somewhat better idea when you're in the right spot for the lane change.

Regarding your second question, you should not drive your motorhome with the side windows open. While you won't like this answer, it will eliminate your problem, as you have already discovered. Airflow along the side of the motorhome sucks air out of the coach creating a partial vacuum in the motorhome. The vacuum sucks noxious fumes from the holding tanks and anything nearby.

The answer to your third question is that most RV generators have automatic shutdowns for low oil and overheating, and that's probably what happened if it was 105 degrees and you were stopped, so airflow was reduced. If it hasn't done it since, I wouldn't spend money chasing the problem, especially since you don't live in a hot area.

Engine Failure

Q We are the second owners of a 2006 Georgie Boy 36-foot Landau and we tow a GMC Canyon 4x4. The motorhome has a new V-10 Ford engine because the original one with 6,000 miles on it threw a rod and put a hole in the block. The oil level was good, because I checked it, and the gauges were normal. I was using the tow-haul button on the motorhome and had a BrakeBuddy installed. Is it possible that the BrakeBuddy may have been adding some drag? It was the first time I towed the Canyon. Was its weight too much for the motorhome?

Armand Massey | Calgary, Alberta, Canada

A It's difficult to say what happened without a careful teardown of the engine. I consider a failure analysis to be an important part of such a repair, because otherwise it may happen again.

In my experience, when a fairly new healthy engine throws a rod, it's because the engine was being over-revved or ran low on oil, although other reasons are possible. Generally a hard pull due

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Everyone likes the look of a clean and shiny motorhome or dinghy vehicle, but not everybody wants to break out the hose, buckets and towels each time they want their coach to look great. Prolong Super Lubricants Waterless Wash & Shine and Super Protectant offer a way to quickly touch up, spot clean and protect motorhomes in less than 15 minutes without water. These products feature advanced technology, which the company claims is better than using soap and water for washing light to moderate levels of soiling.

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Prolong's Waterless Wash & Shine is available in a 17-ounce bottle for \$7.99 and 1-gallon refill bottle for \$30. Super Protectant is available in a 17-ounce bottle for \$8.99 and 1-gallon bottle for \$45.

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to dragging brakes won't put a rod through the block. You didn't describe the operating conditions leading up to the failure. Were you driving in the mountains, uphill, in hot or otherwise challenging conditions? Was the engine laboring, straining or overheated? You should carefully inspect the Canyon's brakes to see if there's any sign that they were dragging, such as discoloration of the rotors and/or a burned smell from the brake pads. Also test-drive the pickup and check to see if the Canyon's brakes get hot in normal driving.

Alternator Overcharging

Q I have a problem with the alternator overcharging on my diesel-pusher motorhome powered by a 350-horsepower CAT engine. It reads 16.7 volts. I've also had issues with turn signals not working, and then suddenly working. What do I need to do?

Waymon Ragsdale | Via email

A The voltage regulator controls maximum charging voltage, so that needs to be replaced quickly before more damage is done to voltage-sensitive components. The batteries and many other items can be ruined by excess voltage. Once the charging voltage problem is corrected, test the turn signals and repair if needed. It's quite possible that the signal flasher was affected by wildly fluctuating voltage and might work normally once that's fixed.

Allison Angst

Q I just bought a 1997 Coachmen Catalina Class A motorhome with transmission problems, and I need some advice on where to start. It has an Allison MD3060 transmission and the coach has around 166,000 miles on it.

As I was driving it home, I noticed that when the coach downshifted at times, the service light on the transmission gear selector would come on then go off. It also downshifted really hard going from fifth to fourth (normally this is when the light came on). But it also did it on other downshifts and some upshifts. I haven't pulled the codes yet from the panel. I am

going to service it (new fluid and filters) but want to know if there is something else I need to keep an eye on. I am a mechanic by trade, just not very familiar with motorhomes or Allison's.

Brandon Robicheaux | Via email

A Before plunging in, check the codes first. It's probably a small problem. The Allison transmissions are widely used in motorhomes and many heavy-duty and commercial vehicles, and are quite robust. With that mileage, it's a good idea to change the fluid. Allison recommends that customers use an Allison Approved TES 295 automatic transmission fluid to extend drain intervals and enhance transmission performance and durability in all operating environments with on-highway products. I suggest using the synthetic fluids that Allison recommends and approves for a permanent fill. The list is online at www.allisontransmission.com/parts-service/approved-fluids/on-highway-fluids.

Microwave Problem

Q The microwave turntable in my motorhome is making a noise and having a problem turning. I have checked everywhere and no one sells a microwave small enough to fit the opening, and I can't find replacement parts. It was suggested that I redo the cabinets to fit in a larger microwave, but I would hate to lose any cabinet space.

Carol Hatch | Corona, California

A Parts for some brands of microwaves are still available from some suppliers. These include Dometic (www.dometic.com) and PPL (www.pplmotorhomes.com). **M**


Have a Tech Question?

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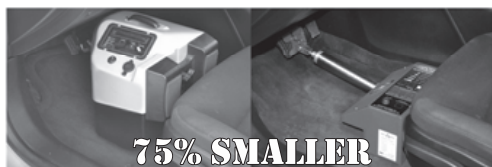


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(continued from pg. 70)

reduce risk is testing the park's pedestal. Test for the following at the park's pedestal for the 15-, 20- or 30-amp outlets before you connect for these indications: open ground, open neutral, bad ground and reversed polarity — all indications of an incorrectly wired or faulty pedestal. Beyond the potential for damage to your equipment, any of these faults increases the risk of injury from a nearby lightning strike.

If the 15/20-amp circuits and 30-amp outlets are not correct, odds are the 50-amp may not be either. Do not hook up to any pedestal that fails these tests.

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Let My People Go

Loading up the motorhome with friends and family can make the upcoming holidays downright unforgettable

By Alan Rider

Having just returned from a quick four-day RV trip to the Northern California coast with my wife's big, fun-loving family, I find myself reflecting on the experience of traveling with the assortment of friends and relations I consider "my people."

You see, the nature of my work means I inevitably spend much of my time on the road alone. Which makes me appreciate the rare occasions, like this past weekend, when I'm able to share my passion for motorhome travel with these folks all the more.

If you can relate, allow me to float what may seem like a radical suggestion. Since the fast-approaching holiday season is a time when most people are already planning to take a timeout from their hectic everyday lives, why not fill your rig with all the customary goodies and decorations, pack up your peeps and enjoy the annual festivities someplace entirely new this year?

Now I know that, for many individuals, the traditions surrounding Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, Christmas and even New Year's are not things to be trifled with. That said, breaking out of even the most beloved and time-honored of routines is bound to make these celebrations more memorable, while simultaneously refocusing them on what it is that makes them so special in the first place.

Because, when you set aside their cultural or religious significance, on a practical level the holidays are really about coming together to spend quality time with the ones we love. Everything else — from grandma's antique sideboard groaning with a dozen side dishes to the

kids' stockings hung by the chimney with care — is just window dressing.

Of course deciding to hit the road during the holidays doesn't mean we have to abandon these traditions altogether. It may require some improvising — deep-frying or smoking that 20-pound turkey outdoors, for example — but trying new twists on familiar foods is what keeps life interesting.

The same goes for tweaking all those other little rituals surrounding the holidays. Instead of slumping half-asleep in front of the TV watching football (which, thanks to the popularity of mobile satellite dishes, is still an option for hardcore traditionalists), get your people moving

and spend the afternoon exploring tide pools or bird watching on nearby nature trails. Or wrap up that tray of homemade cookies, fill a thermos with hot chocolate and spend the evening under the stars watching for Santa's sleigh and exchanging gifts around a crackling campfire.

As for where to go, the possibilities are limited only by your imagination. While heading south to places like Turkey, Texas, or Christmas, Florida, have a certain obvious appeal, don't overlook destinations with deeper connections to the holidays.

Like Massachusetts' Plimoth Plantation (www.plimoth.org), where you and yours can dine on many of the same dishes that graced the tables of our Pilgrim forefathers at that first Thanksgiving feast in 1621. Or one of my favorite holiday events, the huge bonfires built and set alight by locals atop the Mississippi River levees between New Orleans and Baton Rouge (www.neworleansplantationcountry.com) to help Papa Noel find his way on Christmas Eve.

Ultimately, where you and your people end up spending the upcoming holidays matters less than the gifts that come from celebrating them together in new and novel surroundings. Namely, the chance to create the kind of lifelong motorhoming memories that are what keep us all out here exploring The Road Ahead. **M**

“Holidays are really about coming together to spend quality time with the ones we love.”

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Fig. 1 Saturn



Fig. 3 Asteroid Gaspra



Fig. 5 Mercury

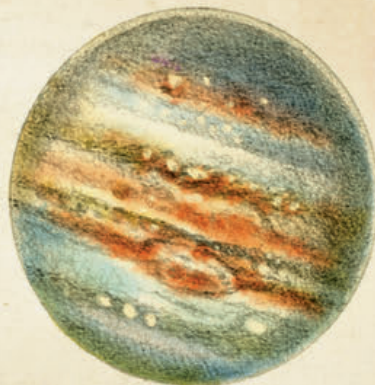


Fig. 7 Jupiter



Fig. 2 Neptune

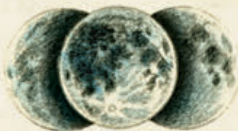


Fig. 4 Phases of the Moon

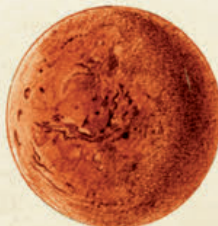


Fig. 6 Mars

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