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ON THE COVER

The sporty Winnebago Travato (see test on page 48) travels along Minaret Road near Mammoth Lakes, California, which has a scenic overlook that offers a panoramic view of the Minarets. Photo by Donya Carlson.

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In 1967, Triple E built Canada's first motorhome prototype, The Caravan, which was 22 feet long and equipped with toilet facilities, hot and cold water, a shower, oven, refrigerator and wall-towall carpeting. **Pg. 18**

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MotorHome

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By Bob Livingston

Dinghy Towing Made Easy

utumn is a special time of year for motorhome enthusiasts. Many of us have recently come off the road after a summer of travel and have lots to think about. The big guestion, "Do we get back on the road and take advantage of the spectacular fall scenery or do we put the motorhome in storage?" Those who live up north and have the opportunity to flee the frigid winter temperatures will usually head out of Dodge in late fall. Regardless of the plans, the days before winter sets in should be used to evaluate the condition of the motorhome and accessories, make the necessary repairs and perform required service/maintenance.

As part of any end-of-season evaluation, consideration must be given to the dinghy vehicle. It's pretty rare to see a motorhome without a vehicle in tow and for obvious reasons: It's not practical to tool around town or tour surrounding areas with the motorhome, and who wants to break camp to run to the grocery store or visit some friends?

Whether or not it's time to replace the dinghy vehicle is a big decision. Maybe your current vehicle doesn't fulfill your needs because of a lifestyle change — or it's just plumb worn-out. To help with that decision we publish an annual guide to vehicles that can be towed on all four wheels without drivetrain modifications in early spring. Look for that booklet with the April 2016 issue. In this issue, however, we've prepared a comprehensive article on everything else necessary for towing a vehicle behind a motorhome (see page

54). The purpose of this editorial is to keep owners abreast of the latest tow bars, braking devices and accessories that make the process easier and safer.

Baseplates are the key to hooking up a dinghy vehicle and tow-bar manufacturers are getting pretty clever in concealing equipment that would be otherwise unsightly hanging on the front of the vehicle. As part of the process of assembling this guide, we installed a couple of baseplates to keep our knowledge current. One was on an older Suzuki, which is no longer built and the other a brand-new Ram 1500 truck. We were fairly cavalier about removing the necessary fascia and front-end components to install the baseplate on the Suzuki; it's already been around the block many



times. But hacking away at frame members on the new Ram was a little more disconcerting, even though the final product turned out beautifully.

When installing any baseplate, patience is a virtue. Dinghy-towingcomponent manufacturers use maybe one or two of each model vehicle as test beds for fitment. CAD programs produce precise models and subsequent parts are usually consistent, but we've learned that auto manufacturing can leave slight variances during the assembly process. Be prepared for minor alignment issues and let creativity overcome any grumbling.

If your favorite front-wheel-drive vehicle is not towable, based on the manufacturer's specifications, don't fret; you can always enlist the help of a tow dolly. While the argument can be made that dealing with another piece of equipment is less convenient, current dollies are compact and some can even fold to take up less storage space.

It's hard to imagine traveling without a dinghy vehicle in tow, and the current crop of suppliers has certainly opened up that universe.

"... tow-bar manufacturers are getting pretty clever in concealing equipment"

Contributors November



Kristopher Bunker, the former editor of Trailer Life magazine, is an avid camper and has been RVing for more than a decade. He is currently a freelance writer living in the central Texas area.



Emily Fagan and her husband, Mark, have been traveling full-time since 2007. They chronicle their ourney with lively stories and beautiful photography at http:// roadslesstraveled.us



Donya Carlson is the managing editor of Trailer Life. She grew up camping and loves the outdoors. Previously, she was the managing editor of the motorcycle enthusiast and travel magazine, Rider.

Bobbie Hasselbring is an awardwinning 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.



Dennis and Cheryl DeNoi are full-time RVers and proud owners of a rare 1983 Apollo Sceptre motorhome. Dennis is a retired Marine and police officer; Cheryl is a retired school principal.



Mary Zalmanek and her husband, Jim, enjoy traveling in their 2003 Safari Trek when they are not at home in Colorado. Mary is the author of "The Art of the Spark"



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Do you have a washer and dryer in your motorhome? If so, is it worth the space and expense, and how well does it work?

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

No More Quarters

We have been full-timers for 14 years, and having a washer/dryer combo is a necessity for us. Our 2006 Winnebago has a Splendide combo unit. The space it takes up is 24 inches wide by 33 inches high by 21 inches deep.

We run smaller-size loads, but our machine works well and we can do laundry anytime. With the onboard unit, we don't have to save quarters, make a special trip into town, and load and unload our dinghy.

If we lived in a house we would have a washer and dryer. We live in our motorhome and you can be sure it will always have a washer/dryer! Bonnie and Vance Clegg Green Cove Springs, Florida

Heavy Load

We have been full-timing for two years in our 2014 Winnebago Journey. I wouldn't trade my washer and dryer for anything. I can fit six pairs of jeans in the washer, the beds for our 90-pound dog and our cotton throw rugs. In fact, the only thing that won't fit is our queen-size quilt. We have not had any maintenance issues with either machine.

Jen Stoffa | Livingston, Texas



Pack Less Clothing

When we decided to upgrade to a Class A, my wife had three demands — two bathrooms, a king-size bed, and a washer and dryer. The first two items were a given; however, I had reservations about the washer and dryer. My concerns didn't last long.

Since we are still working, we found that doing laundry before we pack up and head for home allows us to spend a little longer at the campsite instead of doing it at home. The washer is also a great place to store dirty clothes until washday. Another benefit is that we don't have to bring extra

Featured Letter

Splendid Spendide

It's absolutely worth it!

My wife and I did a lot of research and ended up buying a Splendide combo unit that vents to the outside. My wife loves it and uses it all the time; however, there are a couple of important things to consider.

If you are just a weekend warrior, don't bother with this, but if you are like us, spending weeks or sometimes months on the road, it is a splendid idea. If most of what you do is dry camping, you are likely to encounter tankcapacity issues and it is probably not worth it. On the other hand, if you don't mind a full-hookup site once in a while, a washer and dryer is invaluable. Last, and most importantly, if you decide to get a washer/dryer combo or two separate units, make sure the dryer vents to the outside. We have met several coach owners who opted for units that recirculate the dryer air in the motorhome. As a consequence, they get so much moisture in their coach they never want to use the dryer, wasting the space and the investment.



While most of us can always use more storage space, losing a little space to a washer/dryer as well as the procurement cost is absolutely worth it. The load capacity is much smaller than that of a home unit, but cleaning and drying is just as good.

Odd and Inger Friis | Black Diamond, Washington

clothes along, instead wash a load while watching TV in the evening. Just remember to keep the gray tank open.

When we respond to questions about why we RV, we say that we have our own bed, bathroom and kitchen, and now our own washer and dryer. You just never know what was washed before your turn at the laundromat. **Denny and Peggy Widhalm**

Aurora, Colorado

Dry Camping? No Washing

We travel three to five months a year in our Class A motorhome. We move around a lot and stay at many campgrounds. In our previous Class A, we had a combo washer/dryer, which worked but was not very efficient.

Our present Class A has a stacked washer and dryer, which is much more efficient. The washer has a larger capacity and the dryer has a much faster drying time than the combo unit.

If you're dry camping, it's not a good time to run the washing machine. It will use up your freshwater and fill up your gray-water tank. I highly recommend being hooked up to water and sewer when doing laundry. Sandy Donovan and Dick Kashdin Buffalo, New York

Time Saver

We bought a new 40-foot Tiffin Phaeton in 2012 that came with a washer and dryer. I tried them for about a month, and then went back to using the laundry facility at the campground. Upon our return home, I had the units removed by the dealer. My husband and I turned the space into a hanging closet for coats with storage shelves below. I can do a week's worth of laundry in two hours, whereas the onboard units take 12 to 14 hours to do the same amount. **Robert and Joyce Skoien**

Port Townsend, Washington

Two For the Road

We are full-timers living in a 42-foot Holiday Rambler Scepter. We have a washer and a dryer. It was the one "must-have" on my list as we launched our search for a motorhome. I use the appliances for all of our laundry needs. I have had a learning curve: pods work best, smaller



loads are better, and, even following those guidelines, the washer still shakes during the spin cycle more than one grounded in a brick-andmortar home.

After touring for a year, my sisters asked me what I missed most in my previous home. My answer surprised them: "I miss my laundry room." But it's not what you think. In our motorhome there's no counter space to fold clothes after laundering. Not only that, with the laundry cabinet doors and dryer door open, there isn't room to carry a load to the bed for folding. A simple solution would be a laundry basket on the floor, and then close the doors. But I don't want a laundry basket, so I manage. And I don't ever want to be without my washer and dryer.

Sue S. Puetz | New Braunfels, Texas

The Fine Print

My coach is equipped with a Splendide combination washer/dryer that weighs 150 pounds empty and takes up 11.5 cubic feet of space. The cost to purchase, install and operate (when on metered power) are significantly greater than using a coinoperated laundry facility; however, the convenience factor is huge. My machine has operated flawlessly, but there are some restrictions and other factors to be mindful of.

Wash cycles can vary from 35 to 100 minutes and dry times can vary from 70 to 120 minutes. On average, it takes roughly three hours for one load.

The drying cycle draws up to 11 amps of power, which adds significantly to overall power consumption.

The maximum load capacity is fairly small (15 pounds dry weight).

It uses 7 to 18 gallons of water per load, so you must have water and

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sewer hookups.

Wrinkled clothing is very common because the drum is small and the spin cycle (up to 1,200 RPM) is very fast. Expect to add an iron and (small) ironing board to your loading list.

Special procedures are required to winterize the appliance so that all water is displaced with antifreeze. The manufacturer's instructions for winterizing must be followed carefully.

Avoid using bleach at RV parks with septic systems because it kills the bacteria that decompose sewage.

Make certain the dryer vent is operating properly and unobstructed. Hot air during the drying cycle must be able to exhaust freely outside. Edward Phillips | Greers Ferry, Arkansas

Wash and Go

Our first three coaches didn't have a washer/dryer, which was fine with us. Then we found our dream coach. The fact that it had a washer/dryer combo was a negative, or so we thought. We changed our minds after our first trip — we ended up using the washer/dryer every night.

Our biggest pet peeve is with people who think having to do several small loads is a drawback. I say this: You can wash clothes anytime of the day or night while you do other stuff. I'd rather have my wife relaxing, sipping on something cool than sitting in a noisy laundromat for hours.

We'll never have another coach that doesn't have a washer/dryer in it. **Ed and Vernelle Williams | Via emai**l

Stacked Units Work Better

We had a washer/dryer combo unit in two previous coaches and now have a washer and dryer stacked unit in our 2013 Tiffin Phaeton 42 QBH. The combo unit got the job done, but with small loads the clothes wrinkled more often than not. The combo unit also took a long time to complete a load. It was better than using a laundry facility, but not as good as the stacked unit, which is simply a three-quarter version of a regular washer and dryer.

We spend an average of 130 nights a year in our coach. The benefit of not

returning to our brick-and-mortar house with multiple loads of laundry is wonderful. I have seen campground laundry's facilities that charge anywhere from \$1 to \$4 to wash and \$1 to \$3.75 to dry. At two loads a day and 130 nights of use, that adds up to \$1,300 a year. Soap, dryer sheets and anything else you may use is a wash (no pun intended) as you would use that in either case.

Mark Manfredi | DeBary, Florida

Endless Clean Towels

We have a Splendide washer/dryer combo in our 2007 Class A Holiday Rambler Admiral. I love it and will never be without one.

My first experience sold me on it. Our dogs and grandson came back from an adventure at the beginning of a campout at the lake covered in mud and used every clean towel I had. If it hadn't been for the onboard washer/ dryer, I would've had to go to town to find a laundromat.

When we travel, I can do laundry in the comfort of my own rig while enjoying a glass of wine or reading a book instead of going to an RV park facility and hoping someone left the machine clean.

Joe and Darlene Torrez Santa Maria, California

Beats Going to the Laundromat

My husband and I are first-time RV owners and after looking at our new full-time home, we decided that we didn't want the combo washer/dryer. We found out quickly that we were glad the dealership did not remove it per our insistence. I may have to do several loads at a time, but it is an amazing little machine. I use both the pods and liquid, it doesn't seem to matter. You can interrupt the wash or dry cycle at anytime to check the load.

I love the multisettings, from my delicates to my husband's jeans. I can wash two large towels, two washcloths and a hand towel with no problem. It's fast and convenient.

As for the needed space, I found that if I moved things around under the bed, we didn't miss the space the washer/dryer takes up. It's a great product for the price and beats going to the laundromat in the rain. **Mrs. Steve Holland | Arlington, Texas**

Storage Versus Convenience

We are a family of five with a 2005 Sportscoach Encore. We recently completed a cross-country trip with two other families, one of which does not have a washer and dryer in their coach. Prior to this trip, we were 50/50 on the washer and dryer versus the extra storage. After 16 days on the road we are 100 percent sold. We are so glad our unit came equipped with the washer and dryer.

Yes, you can only run small loads, but after staying at a campground that charged \$7 to wash and \$7 to dry, small loads are fine!

Fred and Teresa Chambers Stafford, Virginia

Dry, Don't Hang, Wet Towels

My wife and I have had both the combo washer/dryer and now have the stackable separate washer and dryer. The separate washer and dryer is by far the best and more efficient of the two. We live in a high-humidity climate and it is great to just throw a wet washcloth or towel in the dryer at night, as they will not dry inside the motorhome by just being hung up. **Mike Biggs | Houston, Texas**

The Not-So-Direct Route

Buying direct ("The Direct Route," August) would have spared me problems some years back when a dealership salesman assured me that every modification and customization I wanted on my new diesel-pusher motorhome could be done. Only after I had signed the purchase contract, which included all the modifications I wanted, and paid a deposit, and my coach was being readied for delivery, did the service manager inform me that the rear roof ladder that the salesman had promised was not possible, because there was no way it could be attached to the coach's rear cap. He offered a side ladder — which would have certainly produced a

unique appearance, along with a sideclearance hazard — or a folding ladder in a storage compartment. You can guess which one I had to accept. Furthermore, I was informed that no one should walk on the roof, not even to clean the solar panels installed there. **Kenneth Crosby | Livingston, Texas**

Custom Design

We read with interest the article on buying factory-direct RVs. We have had our Sportsmobile conversion for 14 years (a 2001 E-350) and absolutely love it! It is a wonderful vehicle and we have so many memories. To be able to design just what we wanted was absolutely wonderful! For us, Sportsmobile was the best choice. **Michael and Diana Elkavitch**

Dublin, New Hampshire

Basic or Bling?

In my opinion, it's no secret that coachbuilders have poor quality control and cut corners to remain price competitive. These same companies spend a lot of time and money providing glitzy amenities like extra TVs, exotic lighting, fancy paint jobs, and over-thetop fixtures, cabinets, flooring, window treatments, etc.

I would like to know if other readers would be willing to give up many high-end features in exchange for superior quality control. Would they rather spend "X" amount of money on a plain Jane motorhome that rarely has system failures or the same amount on a "fix-it-mobile" with lots of WOW factor?

Kenneth Neal | Palo Alto, California 🖾

Question of the Month

Have you noticed improvements in either the quality of the construction of motorhomes or the amenities offered? Which one is more important to you and why?

Send your comments to: MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com The Nation's Premier Supplier for Sprinter Suspensions, Brakes and Accessories.



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Go Retro ℈

Add some old-school fun to your table with RV-inspired, BPA-free melamine dinnerware from Camp Casual pg. 16



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Thomas Jefferson's Monticello

Life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness

By Morey Edelman

ome visit Monticello, where for more than 40 years, President Thomas Jefferson continually built and modified his plantation home, resulting in the impressive grounds still on display more than 240 years later. Jefferson brought his experiences and love of science and architecture into the design and furnishings of the plantation home. While overseeing the construction of the house and gardens located just outside Charlottesville, Virginia, Jefferson authored the Declaration of Independence, was the third president of the United States, sponsored the Lewis and Clark Expedition and founded the University of Virginia. Furnishings in the home include relics from all of these experiences. This is the only pres-

idential home designated a World Heritage Site.

Daily tours are available, including a 40-minute and a longer 90-minute tour of the home. Additional guided tours include a garden and grounds tour, and a slavery tour that focuses on the experiences of the enslaved people who lived and worked on the Monticello plantation.

In addition, there are exhibits and a museum shop at the visitor center entrance. Reservations are recommended, and parking for large motorhomes is available in a designated area near the entrance.

For more information, call 434-984-9800 or visit www.monticello.org.

ROAD FOODIE

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Holiday Baked Oysters

Before we know it, the holidays will be upon us. Our holiday table — whether we're on the road or at home — always includes some traditional family favorites. But I also try to offer at least one special dish that gives a "Wow" to the meal. And this one will have your guests coming back for more: Baked Oysters with Italian Breadcrumbs.

If you're not an oyster fan, you may be saying "yuck." However, this is an oyster dish that just might change your mind. The recipe was conceived by iconic Northwest chef, Jimella Lucas, who for 25 years owned and operated the famous Ark Restaurant on the Washington coast. The dish combines the flavors of butter, lemon and Parmesan cheese with chewy, garlicky homemade Italian breadcrumbs. When paired with the slightly briny flavor of fresh oysters, it's a dish that'll have you shouting "Happy holidays!"

The holiday months are the perfect time for this baked oyster dish. It calls for freshly shucked oysters and, as the weather cools ocean waters, oysters are at their best. While oyster stuffing is traditional in many families, Lucas' Baked Oysters with Italian Breadcrumbs are more versatile. You can pair them with a glass of bubbly as an appetizer or serve them as a side dish, or even as a decadent entrée. While the dish is rich, you may be surprised at how quickly your guests gobble up these little gems of the sea. If you're serving them as an appetizer, plan for two to three oysters per person; as an entrée, three to five.

Perhaps best of all, this is an easy dish that anyone can make, even in a modest RV kitchen. It calls for just a few ingredients and it's quick to fix. If you're on the road, sourcing fresh oysters at local oyster farms, seafood markets, or even gathering them yourself makes for a fun outing.

Food writer James Beard wrote that he had never seen anyone who "glorified the great gifts from the sea" like Chef Jimella Lucas. Sadly, Chef Lucas passed away in 2013, but you can still order her famous Baked Oysters at Nanci & Jimella's Café & Cocktails in Ocean Park, Washington (http://jimellaandnancis.com).

Or, try your hand at making them yourself.

Chewy and Garlicky

Butter, lemon and Parmesan cheese delectably combine with briny oysters in Baked Oysters with Italian Breadcrumbs.







From above top: You can order baked oysters at Nanci & Jimella's Café & Cocktails in Ocean Park, Washington. As the weather cools ocean waters, it's the perfect time for fresh oyster dishes.

Jimella Lucas' BAKED OYSTERS WITH ITALIAN BREADCRUMBS

□ Fresh shucked oysters (3-5 per person for an entrée; retain shells for baking/broiling)

Italian breadcrumbs (see recipe below)
 Lemon juice

Clarified butter

Grated Parmesan cheese

▶ Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit. Place each oyster in a half shell and top with 1 tablespoon of the Italian breadcrumb mixture and a squeeze of lemon. Drizzle with clarified butter and sprinkle with Parmesan cheese. Bake or place under broiler for 3 to 4 minutes (breadcrumbs may burn if placed too close to the flame).

Italian Breadcrumbs

- □ 1 clove fresh garlic
- □ 2 slices day-old bread
- □ 2 sprigs fresh parsley
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan cheese
- Tabasco sauce

▶ In a food processor or blender, grind garlic, and add both slices of day-old bread until finely ground. Add sprigs of parsley without stems, grated Parmesan cheese and a dash Tabasco sauce. Yields 1½ cups of crumbs.

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WHEELS & GEAR by Chris Hemer



RV Dinnerware

Packing plates and bowls into your motorhome every time you head out on the road can be a pain, and using paper plates sure doesn't add much to your mealtime experience. Camp Casual brings back the fun with a colorful, retro-inspired 12-piece dining set. The vintage-style dishes feature RV-themed designs and are made of 100 percent BPA-free heavyweight melamine. The set contains four unique plates, four salad plates and four bowls. The company also recently introduced its five-piece kid-friendly mealtime set, which includes a three-part divided plate, a bowl, cup, fork and spoon. The kids' set is packed in a reusable box with a handle. The company claims the sets are top-shelf dishwasher-safe. MSRP: \$49.99/12-piece set; \$19.99/kids' set Camp Casual, 818-864-2707, www.campcasual.com



Zebra Power

One of the biggest headaches faced by RVers is keeping the house batteries charged when stored or parked in primitive locations. With the SunSparks Solar Charging System by Zebra Energy, RVers can easily keep the batteries charged by harnessing the power of the sun. Using solar panels mounted to the roof and connected to the house battery bank through a charge controller, the SunSparks system can help keep batteries charged without having to run the generator. Plus, it works in conjunction with existing equipment and is expandable, providing a powergenerating capacity of 150 to 450 watts. The SunSparks Plus kit also includes a wall-mounted LCD monitor, which lets you easily keep tabs on system performance and battery capacity. Prices vary depending on the system. **Zebra Energy LLC, 855-932-7285, www.zebra-energy.com**

Plug That Leak

Flat tires always seem to happen at the most inopportune times (but, is there really ever a good time for one?). Ideally, they should



be repaired from the inside out — but in an emergency, that's not always possible. The Stop & Go Tire Plugger is designed for onthe-wheel repair to virtually any tubeless tire, according to the company, and it seals the puncture on the inside. The Plugger is a spring-loaded gun that drives the plug into the hole; the shaft of the plug expands under pressure to fill the puncture. At the same time, the mushroom head of the plug seats on the inner wall, preventing leaks. The kit contains everything needed to repair the tire, and is easily stored too — the hard-sided plastic case measures 6 inches by 9 inches by 1 inch and weighs less than 2 pounds. MSRP: \$49.95. **Stop & Go, 800-747-0238, www.stopngo.com**

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botanical rodent repellent is a safe, nontoxic biodegradable product guaranteed to keep mice and rats away. It won't harm children or pets, according to the company, and its natural balsam scent freshens the air. But mice and rats hate it, because it masks the urine trails they use to navigate the dark nooks and crannies where they live. This makes it impossible for them to find their way around, so they leave and don't come back. Just place Fresh Cab pouches in the RV's living, sleeping and food-storage areas and your rodent problems are solved. MSRP: \$59 for a 12-pouch pack. Earthkind, 800-583-2921, www.earthkind.com

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NOTEWORTHY

Good Eats in the National Parks ⊖



America's national parks house some of the world's

greatest natural wonders. What many people don't realize, however, is that in addition to offering sweeping vistas and amazing, fun outdoor activities, the national parks offer some of the best dining experiences available. Here is the National Park Hospitality Association's list of Great Places to Dine in America's National Parks.

California, Yosemite National Park The Ahwahnee Dining Room and The Mountain Room

California, Lassen Volcanic National Park Drakesbad Guest Ranch

Arizona, Grand Canyon National Park El Tovar Dining Room and Lounge, and Grand Canyon Lodge at the North Rim

Utah, Bryce Canyon National Park The Lodge at Bryce Canyon Virginia, Blue Ridge Parkway Peaks of Otter Lodge

Virginia, GW Memorial Parkway Indigo Landing

Wyoming, Grand Teton National Park Elk Island Cruises on Jackson Lake, Jenny Lake Lodge and the Mural Room at the Jackson Lake Lodge

Wyoming, Yellowstone National Park Lake Yellowstone Hotel



Triple E Celebrates 50 Years \bigcirc

What began as a family-owned, three-man operation in 1965 has grown into a Canadian success story as Triple E celebrates its 50th anniversary.

Triple E was founded by P.W. Enns, an entrepreneur who operated a plumbing and heating facility in Winkler, Manitoba, Canada. He took an interest in manufacturing trailers while visiting Elkhart, Indiana. Enns then recruited his two sons-in-law, Phil Ens and Peter Elias, to build the first Triple E travel trailer — a 13-footer. The three E's — Enns, Ens and Elias — became the components of the name Triple E.

In 1967, they designed the first Canadian-built motorhome — a 22-foot unit called The Caravan.

In 2008, the corporation acquired Leisure Travel Vans, an RV manufacturer based in Morden, Manitoba. This allowed Triple E to expand its dealer network and target the U.S. market.

During the recession, Triple E discontinued Class A's to focus on its Class B and C motorhomes. The company's Unity, branded under Leisure Travel Vans, featured an automatic queen-size Murphy bed — an industry first.

In 2013, the Leisure Travel Vans brand represented the majority of the RV division's product sales. That summer, Triple E ceased production on its Class C Regency GT, the last Triple E product in production, and the company devoted all its efforts to the Leisure Travel Van products. **For more information,** visit www.leisurevans.com/50 — Walter Siemens

RV SHOWS | NOVEMBER



Nov. 4-8, Conyers, Georgia | The Great American RV Show-Conyers, www.gsevents.com Nov. 5-8, Tampa, Florida | Tampa Bay RV Show, http://frvta.org Nov. 6-8, Estero, Florida | Fall Clean Sweep RV Show, http://frvta.org

NEWS BRIEFS

Roadtrek Offers 6-Year Warranty

Kitchener, Ontario, Canadabased Roadtrek Motorhomes Inc. has launched a new 6-year bumper-to-bumper warranty for its line of Class B motorhomes. "Roadtrek has always prided itself on quality; our customers expect it and we will continue to provide it on every model and product we offer," said Jim Hammill, president and CEO of Roadtrek. "Our new warranty is a testament to the quality of our products and our commitment to our customers. We want Roadtrek owners to travel with peace of mind, knowing we are behind them every mile of the road." Roadtrek's 6-year warranty covers the manufacture of the motorhome (excluding the chassis), appliances, electronics, plumbing and EcoTrek batteries. The warranty is being applied to new vehicles sold by Roadtrek dealers as of Aug. 1.

Idaho Falls Camping World

In August, Camping World Inc. and Good Sam Enterprises LLC opened a new supercenter in Idaho Falls, Idaho. The location, named Camping World of Idaho Falls, offers RV sales, service, parts and accessories. The facility is a relocation from the OK Trailer RV dealership formerly located in Shelley, Idaho, that Camping World acquired last fall. "In our ongoing efforts to offer consumers a convenient, one-stop location to serve all their outdoor and RV needs, we acquired space for a new, larger facility that is conveniently located just off Interstate 15 and less than 9 miles north of the previous facility," said Marcus Lemonis, CEO and chairman of Camping World and Good Sam.



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SSROADS

Hot Springs, Arkansas

Get Into Hot Water in Arkansas' Spa City



hoto: National Park Service

Taking a stroll down Bathhouse Row in Hot Springs National Park, you will see eight historic bathhouses built in the early part of the 20th century. Two of the facilities are still in operation: Buckstaff Bathhouse offers old-style mineral baths in full-size tubs, and the Quapaw Baths & Spa has large thermal-water soaking pools. At the southern end of Bathhouse Row is the Thermal Water Jug Fountain, where visitors can fill up bottles with the potable mineral water. Don't miss the visitor center, which is located in the Fordyce Bathhouse, to learn about the area's history.

Native Americans visited these hot springs for many years before the Dunbar-Hunter Expedition of 1804 "discovered" them during survey work for the Louisiana Purchase. In 1832, the federal government set aside a portion of the hot springs as a federal reservation and in 1921 it was designated a national park.

The park has 47 hot springs that originate almost a mile underground with an average temperature of 143 degrees Fahrenheit. Each day, the park collects 700,000 gallons of the water for use in public drinking fountains and bathhouses.

RV parking is available at the visitor center. The park's Gulpha Gorge Campground, just a few miles away off U.S. Highway 70B, is big-rig friendly and offers full hookups on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more information, call 501-620-6715 or visit www.nps.gov/hosp — Morey Fdelman



Leaf-Peeping in Southern West Virginia

If your fall travels take you near the New River Gorge National River, be sure to make a stop at Babcock State Park, one of West Virginia's oldest state parks. Located near the park's headquarters is the Glade Creek Grist Mill, which makes for a great photo op in autumn. The mill has an interesting history: Completed in 1976, it is a fully operational re-creation of a mill that once sat in the same location, and is made up of parts and pieces from three different mills.

The 4,127-acre park is accessible from U.S. Highway 60 via State Route 41 near the town of Clifftop, and has a campground (with some electric sites) that's open mid-April through October 31 (weather permitting). For more information, call 304-438-3004 or go to www.babcocksp.com — James Richardson 🖾

Photo:







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Gulf Coast Charmer

Cedar Key, Florida, is a worthy off-the-beaten-path retreat

By Dennis and Cheryl DeNoi

GETAWA

ocated in Florida's upper Gulf Coast between Gainesville and Ocala is the laid-back town of Cedar Key. The key sits 4 miles out in the Gulf of Mexico and is part of a small chain of keys (islands formed from coral reefs). It's just the kind of place we dreamed of discovering as we navigated the highways and byways of America in our motorhome. Our destination in Cedar Key was the Low-Key Hideaway Motel, RV Resort and Tiki Bar. The open-air Tiki Bar at Low-Key Hideaway sits on the water and is known as the best spot on the island to enjoy sunsets.

The pastel-hued Low-Key Hideaway is a family-owned business that relies on word of mouth rather than advertising, which is exactly how we first heard about it. We were traveling from California through Texas on our way to our favorite RV destination — the more famous Florida Keys off the southern tip of the "Sunshine State" — when we had a chance meeting and conversation with one of our new RV neighbors. With the usual greetings and small talk out of the way, we were told, "Since you are going to be traveling along Florida's Gulf Coast, you must go to the Low-Key Hideaway!" After a very enthusiastic and passionate explanation as to how unique and special Cedar Key is, we had to go there.

With yet another modification of our trip route and a call ahead for reservations (something highly recommended since there are only four RV sites and five motel rooms), we arrived at the cutest little RV park we have ever seen. If you can't

Getting There Cedar Key is located approximately 55 miles southwest of Gainesville, 135 miles northwest of Orlando and 150 miles north of Tampa. From Interstate 75, take state Route 24 west. The town of Cedar Key is on Way Key, the only inhabited island in the chain of low-lying keys.

CEDAR KEY, FLORIDA

GETAWAY CEDAR KEY, FLORIDA

get a reservation at Low-Key, there are other RV parks in Cedar Key, including Sunset Isle RV Park located next door.

Every room and RV site at the Low-Key Hideaway is right on the waterfront and close to Low-Key's unique Tiki Bar. We were assigned to RV site No. 4, which in our opinion is the best as it is next to an undeveloped lot and motorhomes have the option of nosing in or backing into the site depending on how you want to enjoy the spectacular views. Also, sites 1 and 4 have raised wooden decks that hang over the water and come with deck furniture. Sites 2 and 3 are no slouches, as each has either a hammock or bench swing along with their waterfront view.

After a friendly check-in, which included being personally guided into our site, it was time to explore this small, but very impressive, oneof-a-kind RV park. One of the first things that impressed us was the very personable managers, Pat and Cindy Bonish, a husband-and-wife team that has completely transformed what was once a "boys-only" fishing camp into this tropical adults-only retreat. The owner of the property has turned this dynamic duo loose to do whatever they need to do to make

The colorful Low-Key Hideaway Motel, RV Resort and Tiki Bar is just what the name implies — a laid-back retreat.



A bird's-eye view of Way Key, the primary island upon which the city of Cedar Key is built.

this the best little motel, campground and Tiki Bar in Florida, and now there is no stopping them. The Bonishes have extensive knowledge of how a campground should be run, as they have been full-time RVers for many years who also founded an RV-based website (www.everymilesamemory .com) that they maintained as they toured the United States. Their extensive RV experience, personal touch and nonstop imagination can be seen throughout Low-Key, but is most apparent in the ever-evolving, open-air Tiki Bar. Just when you think you have seen and picked out every

unique and special little detail in and around the bar and grounds, you see 10 more — just another reason to return. The Low-Key's Tiki Bar is known throughout Cedar Key as the best spot on the island to enjoy the fabulous island sunsets, meet new friends and have a cold one!

The grounds of Low-Key Hideaway have an abundance of pleasant surprises for its lucky few guests, such as hammocks hanging from palm trees, Adirondack-style chairs on the lawn and a covered swinging bench — all arranged perfectly for viewing the Gulf of Mexico, the diverse



Clockwise from top: Cedar Key's Dock Street is lined with shops and cafés. This signpost was painted by children and gives directions to everywhere on the key. Guests enjoy a full-moon party at Low-Key Hideaway's Tiki Bar. Seabreeze is one of many restaurants along Dock Street.

bird population and, as previously mentioned, the dazzling sunsets.

As spectacular as this little vacation hideaway is, you must venture out into the historic fishing village of Cedar Key, which is an easy walk. bike ride or short drive away. Once there you will want to taste the local, right-off-the-boat seafood, farm-raised clams and award-winning clam chowder. This small island town was named the Clam Capital of the U.S. because of the large amount of farm-raised sweet littleneck clams it produces. You will find a nice mix of local businesses, art and antique shops, along with the usual tourist establishments for such a town. You will also want to sample the clam chowder at Tony's Seafood Restaurant, which has won the title of world champion three years running, was placed in the Clam Chowder Hall of Fame and ultimately retired from further competition, as three world titles is the most any one competitor is allowed

to win. Oh, you can also have Tony's ship its chowder anywhere in the contiguous 48 states.

This Old Florida island town has plenty more to offer and you should never be far from your binoculars! The Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuge is home to one of the state's largest rookeries for colonial nesting birds; this means an abundant, year-round presence of white ibis, egrets, herons, pelicans and cormorants. In addition, osprey and eagle nests can be seen all over town and around the islands. Hundreds of other species pass through the area on a seasonal basis.

With shallow waters, a coastline with multifaceted tidal creeks, channels and bayous, the waterways around Cedar Key are full of delights to explore; you can kayak on your own or arrange for guided tours. In addition, there are walking trails, boardwalks with viewing areas, picnic tables, playgrounds, swimming beaches and a state park — Cedar Key Museum State Park — with a small museum detailing the area's history.

Cedar Key is also home to a number of outstanding artists and craftsmen. The city boasts numerous galleries, shops and studios, where local art and crafts are displayed. Every April the town hosts its Annual Fine Arts Festival, a juried art show that draws thousands of visitors to Cedar Key.

If you find your travels take you to Florida's beautiful Gulf Coast, remember to check out Cedar Key and the Low-Key Hideaway. We don't think you will be disappointed and it just could be your new favorite place to call home for a few days, a week or even a month or two!

Cedar Key Chamber of Commerce 352-543-5600, www.cedarkey.org

Low-Key Hideaway 352-543-0700, www.lowkeyhideaway.com

Sunset Isle RV Park and Motel 800-810-1103, www.cedarkeyrv.com

Tony's Seafood Restaurant

352-543-0022, www.tonyschowder.com

ARZONA'S WIDSIDE

The Sonoran Desert offers an impressive array of colorful flora and fauna, scenic drives and outdoor recreation – all a stone's throw from the urban sprawl of Phoenix

26 MotorHome Nove

he central Arizona region of the Sonoran Desert is a lush landscape full of exotic vegetation, unusual wildlife, colorful flowers and even a few rivers and lakes. Best of all, this natural beauty is very accessible, even for RVers staying within the city limits of Phoenix and Scottsdale. It is no wonder that snowbirds flock to Arizona every winter to escape the northern blizzards and enjoy the wonders of the desert.

Phoenix is the sixth largest city in America, and it sits on a massive, flat expanse of land that is dotted with ancient volcanic mountain peaks jutting up from the desert floor. Many of these hillsides have been set aside as recreation areas for the public, and there are huge hiking, biking and horseback-riding trail systems just a few miles in every direction from the heart of the city.

For decades, urban Phoenicians have taken to the outdoors at lunch and after work on the popular trails at South Mountain and Piestewa Peak in Phoenix, and on Camelback Mountain next door in Scottsdale. In recent years (even as recent as last year), the extensive Sonoran Desert Preserve and McDowell Sonoran Preserve trail systems in these cities have been enlarged with new trails.

Miraculously, it takes just a few steps on any trail for the chaos and clamor of the city to vanish behind. These trails are wonderful places to commune with cactus wrens, cottontail rabbits and the many species of cactus, especially the saguaro cactus that stand tall with their arms raised high as if they were being held up by a Wild West stagecoach robber.

For RVers staying in Phoenix or Scottsdale, these urban trails make

for an ideal excursion, but the real treasures of the Sonoran Desert are but a short drive and just a few miles farther east of the metro area. On a recent trip, my husband, Mark, and I used Mesa, Arizona, as a home base for exploring the wild side of Arizona's deserts, and we spent many a happy day discovering the gems of the Sonoran Desert that lay just beyond our RV site.

One of our favorite daytrips was a drive along the extraordinary Bush Highway, which runs between state routes 87 and 202 northeast of Phoenix. This stunningly scenic drive follows the pretty Salt River through some of the most eye-popping landscapes in central Arizona. Although this state isn't known for having four real seasons, when autumn arrives in late November and December, the whole area erupts in vivid fall colors, and nowhere are they more vibrant than along the Salt River.

We stopped at the Blue Point Picnic Area and walked along a trail on the banks of the Salt River. Looking back across the water toward the mountains, the bushes and trees flashed brilliant gold and orange in the setting sun. High up on a rock precipice, a great blue heron stared down at us while a fisherman stood in the middle of the river casting his



Phoenix is located in south-central Arizona. It is accessible from the north via Interstate 17 and via Interstate 10 from all other directions. Phoenix is 150 miles from Flagstaff, 110 miles from Tucson and 300 miles from Las Vegas .

net. It was hard to believe we were just 30 miles, as the eagle flies, from the high-rise office buildings of downtown Phoenix.

As we hiked back to our rig, a winter storm began to brew, and the sky turned black. An eerie light from the glowing sun and dark sky filled the valley. On the northeast horizon in the distance, we could see that it was raining in torrents, and as the sun fell lower in the sky a huge rainbow appeared above the forest of saguaro cactus before us. We held our breath watching this magical scene unfold as the rainbow glowed brighter and brighter over the cactus.

A herd of a hundred or more wild horses calls this area east of Phoenix home, and they can often be seen at the various scenic overlooks along the Bush Highway. We were very lucky one afternoon to follow a trail from the Stewart Mountain scenic overlook and come across a mare and stallion grazing with a very young colt. The colt couldn't have been more than a week old or so, and its spindly legs and knobby knees were adorable. The mare raised her head for a moment to





Opposite page: Hikers climb to the Upper Cliff Dwellings at Tonto National Monument. This page from far left: The evocative ancient Anasazi cliff dwellings at Tonto National Monument have a view of Roosevelt Lake. Wild horses and their colt graze on the desert grasses.

ARIZONA'S WILD SIDE



From far left: The Sonoran Desert region east of Phoenix, Arizona, is laced with many beautiful waterways, including the Salt River. This river was dammed to form lovely Saguaro Lake, which has a marina and is the launching point for guided tours on the Desert Belle doubledecker boat.

give us a quick glance, but she wasn't too concerned with our presence. These horses are popular, and they are used to being in the spotlight; we later met a production crew that was filming them for a special program on the Travel Channel.

A little farther east on the Bush Highway is an entirely different habitat, where the Salt River was dammed to form lovely Saguaro Lake. Here the arid desert gives way to a big lake whose waves lap lazily on the shore. There is a marina at one end of the lake, and on weekends the boating community is very active with lots of locals taking their small power and sailboats out for a spin.

Tourists can enjoy the water aboard the Desert Belle, a double-decker boat that gives guided tours down the long, skinny lake into the canyons where the desert hillsides rise up from the shore. Spotting a bald eagle soaring on the thermals was a high point on our excursion. Back at the marina restaurant, a tasty cheeseburger and a beer on the deck with a fantastic view of the lake made a perfect lunch stop. What an ideal place to take a selfie to send to friends back home who are shoveling snow!

For RVers who want to be immersed in the beauty of the Sonoran Desert, there are three outstanding public



campgrounds with paved loops, sites big enough for large motorhomes and electric and water hookups: McDowell Mountain Regional Park, Usery Mountain Regional Park and Lost Dutchman State Park. Each has an RV dump station to empty the holding tanks at the end of your stay.

The beauty of staying in one of these parks is that there are great hiking trails and gorgeous Sonoran Desert scenery right outside your door. A hummingbird feeder will attract cute crimson-headed hummers within an hour, and a shallow dish of water on the ground will bring songbirds and small critters. These are all extremely popular spots for RVers in the winter months, and advanced reservations are highly recommended.

McDowell Mountain and Usery Mountain regional parks feature wonderful mountain-biking and hiking-trail systems, offering both easy and challenging loops for all skill and fitness levels. Our favorite hike was the Wind Cave Trail at Usery Mountain Regional Park. We followed the trail to the top of the mountain that flanks the park, and the views at the top were worth every huff and puff it took to get there. The little chipmunks at the summit were very cheeky, and few hikers could resist sharing a crumb from their sandwich or protein bar with these little guys. We hadn't noticed before our hike that lichen covering all the sheer rock walls gave the cliffs a yellow tint, even from ground level; however, those amber rock walls soon became an easy landmark for us to spot as we drove around the area.

Lost Dutchman State Park is a perennial favorite among snowbirds, and the entire park is presided over by the majestic Superstition Mountains. During our stay, we could take in a fabulous view of the column-like cliffs right from our RV window. At dawn each morning we woke to the haunting cries of the Gambel's quail, a wistful call that gives the desert an almost melancholy air. These small, pudgy birds wear a single black feather as a topknot on the top of their heads, and we got a kick out of watching their little feather headdresses bobbing around as they scampered across our site.

Located in Apache Junction, Lost Dutchman State Park marks the beginning of the incomparable Apache

Left: The Superstition Mountains provide a stunning, dramatic backdrop to the campsites at Lost Dutchman State Park in Apache Junction.



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Trail (state Route 88), a scenic drive that goes through some of the most pristine and awe-inspiring Sonoran Desert terrain in the state. You'll need to leave your motorhome at the campground and take your dinghy on this route. A significant portion of the byway is unpaved, though the first 20 miles of the Apache Trail is paved and winds between hills and valleys filled with saguaro, prickly pear and cholla cactus. After passing the vivid blue waters of Canyon Lake, you'll encounter the little town of Tortilla Flat, population 6. There is a U.S. Forest Service campground here, open October through April, with water and sewer hookups and a dump station. Shortly after leaving town, the road turns to dirt for the next 20 miles and continues its weaving path through exquisite desert landscapes and passes a breathtaking viewpoint high up on a plateau.

This dirt road is not recommended for large RVs, as it is narrow and goes through many twists and turns. For intrepid drivers, the reward in the middle is a dramatic view of Apache Lake from high above, and the reward at the end is the engineering marvel of Roosevelt Dam. This dam, built in 1911, holds back the Salt River to create Roosevelt Lake. Where Saguaro Lake is long and skinny, Roosevelt Lake is broad and wide, and high up on its southern shore is Tonto National Monument, home to ancient Native American cliff dwellings that were built by the Salado people 600-800 years ago. At the end of Route 88, take a right on state Route 188 and drive for 3 miles to Tonto National Monument on the right.

There are two levels of cliff dwellings at Tonto National Monument, and the lower cliff dwellings are open for all to see. After climbing the steep path up to the ruins and ducking under the low doorways within the dwellings, we peered down at the valley below us and marveled at how these people managed to sustain life in such a high place. They must have been extremely fit! The upper cliff dwellings can only be viewed on a guided hike with a ranger on certain days and at certain times. We took the excellent \$3 "Photo Tour" hike to see them. Panting by the time we got up there, we realized that if hauling water from the river hundreds of feet below to the lower cliff dwellings had been a challenge for those ancient people, getting water to the upper level must have been a gargantuan task!

From Tonto National Monument travelers have two options: Either

return to Lost Dutchman State Park by retracing the route or continue on in a loop through Globe along Route 188 and U.S. Highway 60. If you choose to drive the loop, there is some attractive scenery along the way, but it's nothing like the awe-inspiring sights you have already enjoyed on the Apache Trail. Besides, your shutter fingers have probably grown weary from taking so many photos.

If the word "desert" has always evoked images of camels and vast sand dunes for you, take your motorhome to the Sonoran Desert in central Arizona, and discover the color and vitality of this unique place!

For More Information

Eagle View RV Resort 480-789-5310, www.eagleviewrvresort.com

Lost Dutchman State Park 480-982-4485, https://azstateparks.itinio .com/lostdutchman

McDowell Mountain Regional Park 480-471-0173 www.maricopa.gov/parks/mcdowell

Tonto National Monument 928-467-2241, www.nps.gov/tont

Usery Mountain Regional Park 480-984-0032, www.maricopa.gov/parks/ usery





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WHITE SANDS AND DESERT DWELLINGS From subterranean curiosities to an ancient cliff city to a painting

bear, southern New Mexico is a desert wonderland

ince New Mexico lies due south of our home state of Colorado, it's a state my husband, Jim, and I visit often, usually on our way to somewhere else. We frequently notice places that look interesting and promise ourselves to go back someday. Last winter, we explored southern New Mexico for almost two weeks, zigzagging from east to west, and loving every minute of it.

Our first stop was Carlsbad Caverns National Park, a subterranean wonder 250 million years in the making. Development began when a reef formed in an inland sea. The reef was buried under gypsum and salts when the sea evaporated. Sulfuric acid dissolved the limestone along fractures in the rock. Billions of drops of water formed the stalactites and stalagmites over hundreds of thousands of years. We learned all of this and more on our self-guided audio tour of the Big Room. Just one of 119 known caves at Carlsbad, the Big Room is the most accessible, with paved and lighted trails. It's the largest single cave chamber by volume in North America, covering 8.2 acres. We stood in awe at the three massive speleotherms (cave formations) known as the Hall of Giants. Visitors can explore six other caves in ranger-guided tours. Some of these tours are for adventurous visitors willing to crawl, squeeze and climb through undeveloped caves.

Carlsbad's other must-see attraction is the Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park. It features plants and animals that live in the southwestern Chihuahuan Desert. the largest desert in North America. Many of the park's inhabitants are injured or orphaned birds, mammals or reptiles that can no longer survive in the wild. We walked along the 1.3-mile paved walkway to see mountain lions, pronghorns, bison and the zoo's most famous resident, Maggie Oso, a black bear well-known for her artistic abilities. The gift shop sells her original paintings and greeting cards. Maggie's birthday is celebrated on the third

Saturday in January each year. The highlight is watching Maggie open her birthday present, a carton of dried fruits and nuts, wrapped with a fruit ribbon and sealed with peanut butter instead of tape.

When we returned to the Carlsbad KOA, we took the short nature walk to a nearby bird refuge. Frankly, we saw more birds in the trees in the RV park, but it was a lovely walk nonetheless. We got back just in time to have barbecue dinners delivered to our site. Baby back pork ribs, brisket and several other meats are smoked on site with pecan and mesquite woods. This was a first for me: an RV park that delivers delicious barbecue.

When we checked in at White Sands RV Park and MH Community in Alamogordo, I asked about attractions in the area besides the obvious. The young woman's eyes lit up as she told me about Pistachio-Land, which includes McGinn's Pistachio Tree Ranch and Arena Blanca Winery. It's easily recognized on U.S. Highway 82; a giant pistachio sculpture sits outside. The familyowned business has 12,300 pistachio trees and close to 7,000 grapevines. We tasted the candies, flavored pistachios and wines, and bought a bagful of our favorites. Outdoor motorized tours of the orchards





More than 700 years ago, ancient Puebloan people built about 42 rooms inside five natural caves in the Gila Cliff Dwellings. Archaeologists believe eight to 10 families lived in this cliffside village.

and vineyards are offered year-round, weather permitting.

Fifteen miles southwest of Alamogordo, White Sands National Monument lies in the Tularosa Basin, a mountain-ringed valley in the northern Chihuahuan Desert. The glistening white sands cover 275 square miles, making it the largest gypsum dune field in the world. During our visit, the park was filled with families picnicking, teenagers playing rugby, children building sand castles and people of all ages sliding down the dunes on sand sleds. At sunset, Jim and I joined a ranger-led tour. Our guide pointed out the amazing adaptability of desert plants and how they survive among shifting dunes. He pointed to a sand hill with what looked like a few small trees on top. It was actually a full-grown cottonwood tree covered by sand. When the dune moves on, the tree will be fine. The enthusiastic quide answered all of our questions, including why there's no alcohol allowed in the park between February 1 and May 31. That seemed to me like an odd time frame for such a restriction, but that covers Easter, spring break and graduation. The rule is intended to prevent broken glass in the park.

Historic Old Mesilla is not far from

White Sands National Monument covers 275 square miles, making it the largest gypsum dune field in the world.

the Hacienda RV Resort in Las Cruces. Mesilla has a colorful past. In 1848 the first permanent settlers built near the Plaza to defend against Apache raiders. In 1853, the Gadsden Purchase was signed in Mexico City, making a 29,670-square-mile region of present-day southwest New Mexico and southern Arizona part of the United States. Mesilla was a lively social center in the 1880s, attracting Billy the Kid and other outlaws. Today the Plaza is a popular spot for shopping and dining. The courthouse where Billy the Kid was sentenced to hang is a gift shop. What was once a stagecoach stop is now a popular restaurant. La Posta de Mesilla. Diners can choose authentic "New Mex" cuisine like faiitas and chile rellenos and a wide variety of margaritas from the tequila bar. Our waiter offered us a \$350



The 500+ Mile Route

This southern New Mexico tour begins at Carlsbad Caverns, follows U.S. Highway 82/70 west to the junction with Interstate 10, then north on U.S. Highway 180 before heading south to Rodeo.

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During the author's visit to White Sands National Monument, it was filled with families picnicking, teenagers playing rugby, children building sand castles, and people of all ages sliding down the dunes on sand sleds.

margarita made from Jose Cuervo's 250th Anniversary Tequila. I imagine it would be an excellent margarita, but I was perfectly satisfied with my prickly pear margarita for \$8.50.

From Las Cruces, we headed west on Interstate 10 to Deming. The Deming Luna Mimbres Museum has an impressive collection of Mimbres pottery, baskets and arrowheads. We noticed holes in many of the pottery bowls. The Mimbres used pottery as part of their burial customs. These "kill holes" were created with a sharp tool to "kill" the bowl, releasing the bowl's spirit and the spirit of the deceased. The bowl was then placed upside down on the deceased's head. Beyond the Mimbres Pottery Rooms are eclectic collections that include Japanese porcelain, ladies' hand fans with instructions on how "fan flirting" was done in the 1700s, office equipment from the 1900s and specialty liquor bottles including a complete set of Old Crow Whiskey bottles shaped like chess pieces, just to name a few. On several occasions, I thought we'd seen everything, only to discover another wing or floor of the museum.

Two state parks in southwestern New Mexico, Rock Hound and City of Rocks, are worthy of detours off I-10. Rock Hound State Park, south of Deming, sits aside the Little Florida



Mountains. We arrived without a reservation to find a full campground. Just as we were ready to head on down the road, someone left early and opened a campsite for us. We were feeling lucky, so we thought we might find some of the gem rocks abundant in the area. Visitors are permitted to collect up to 15 pounds of mineral specimens, including quartz, jasper, geodes and thunder eggs. Serious prospectors come with hammers and chisels. For us, it was a good excuse to explore the area's hiking trails. We left happy, but empty-handed.

City of Rocks State Park was created about 35 million years ago from a volcanic eruption a thousand times greater than Mount St. Helens. Wind and water then sculpted the rows of monolithic blocks that gave the park its name. Clustered in 1 square mile on an open plain, the rocks resemble a small city. The park, 30 miles north of Deming, is far enough from city lights to provide spectacular stargazing, even to the naked eye. If you time it right, you could be at the park for one of its



"star parties" in the observatory.

We spent two nights in Silver City so that we could check out the town and visit the Gila Cliff Dwellings. Silver City's charming business district, built in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is now home to restaurants, shops and galleries. Always on the lookout for out-of-the-ordinary attractions, we found one at Syzygy Tileworks. They produce exquisite handmade artisanal tiles. The showroom — "one part sales, one part tile museum" according to production manager Josh White — features tiles made in-house and from other artisan tile-makers in the U.S. Syzygy offers free tours to the public. Later that day, 25 schoolchildren would be coming to play with clay and paint designs on tiles. Our tour was not so hands-on. We were content to hear White explain how each tile is cut, pressed and glazed with up to eight layers, and watch the artisans and craftsmen do their work. It takes about 10 days to turn a block of clay into tiles. Custom orders can take much longer. Such beauty comes with a price tag; Syzygy tiles retail from \$26 to more than \$300 per square foot.

The Gila Cliff Dwellings, 45 miles north of Silver City, were home to

From far left: The Big Room in Carlsbad Caverns National Park, the largest single cave chamber in North America covering 8.2 acres, is filled with massive speleotherms (cave formations). A giant pistachio sculpture sits outside McGinn's PistachioLand, while candies, flavored pistachios and wines tempt customers inside the shop.



WHITE SANDS AND DESERT DWELLINGS



Above from left: Syzygy Tileworks, makers of exquisite handmade artisanal tiles, offers free tours to the public. The Plaza in historic Old Mesilla near Las Cruces was a lively social center in the 1880s, and serves as a popular spot for shopping and dining today.

ancient Puebloan people more than 700 years ago. They built about 42 rooms inside five natural caves. Archaeologists believe eight to 10 families lived in this cliffside village. Why they stayed only a few decades remains a mystery. Located within the 558,000-acre Gila Wilderness, the 533-acre park became a national monument in 1907. When we arrived at the trailhead, we were greeted by National Park Service volunteers who pointed us in the right direction. From there, we climbed 180 feet above the canyon floor on the 1-mile-loop trail. At the dwellings, another volunteer shared her fascination about the area's history.

Our final stop was at Rusty's RV Ranch in the tiny town of Rodeo. We had a lovely site at the edge of the park with an unobstructed view of Mount Chiricahua just across the Arizona border. We visited the Chiricahua Desert Museum, known for its living collection of 35 species of rattlesnakes, with about 100 snakes in total. It also houses the largest collection of herpetological (reptiles and amphibians) wildlife art in the world. Much of the art, including more than 60 paintings and a 15-foot-tall rattlesnake-tail sculpture that rises above the Desert Botanical Garden, is the work of wildlife artist Tell Hicks. A gift shop carries Native American jewelry, Tell Hicks paintings, T-shirts and some of the prettiest greeting cards with embossed flowers I'd ever seen.

Our trip through southern New Mexico was all we'd hoped for and more. While well-known wonders like Carlsbad Caverns and White Sands National Monument lived up to their reputations, it was the little surprises that made our trip memorable: a bear that paints, learning how to flirt with a fan, and picturesque and peaceful campsites.

For More Information

Carlsbad Caverns National Park 575-785-2232 www.nps.gov/cave

Carlsbad KOA 800-562-9109 www.carlsbadrv.com

City of Rocks State Park 575-536-2800 www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD/ cityofrocksstatepark.html

Deming Luna Mimbres Museum 575-546-2382 www.lunacountyhistoricalsociety.com

Hacienda RV Resort 888-686-9090 www.haciendarv.com

Living Desert Zoo and Gardens State Park 575-887-5516 www.emnrd.state.nm.us/SPD/living desertstatepark.html

PistachioLand 800-368-3081 www.pistachioland.com

Rock Hound State Park 877-664-7787 www.stateparks.com/rock_hound_state_ park_in_new_mexico.html

Rose Valley RV Ranch 575-534-4277 www.rosevalleyrv.com

Rusty's RV Ranch 575-557-2526

www.rustysrvranch.com
White Sands National Monument

575-479-6124 www.nps.gov/whsa

White Sands RV Park and MH Community 575-437-8388 http://westernm.com/White%20Sands

Visitors at Rock Hound State Park are permitted to collect up to 15 pounds of mineral specimens, including quartz, jasper, geodes and thunder eggs.
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Luxury coach resorts make RVers feel at ease by offering top-notch amenities, loads of on-site activities, and friendly staff and neighbors

By Kristopher Bunker

here's nothing like coming home after a tough day on the job ... or on the road. Something about the smell of familiar surroundings, the views from your windows, even a casual wave from your neighbor they all work in concert to remind you that you're back in your safe, warm abode.

RVers know that comfort isn't confined to residential housing; we drive with our homes on wheels, exploring the country. And though wanderlust is a big part of the RVing lifestyle, there is also satisfaction in knowing where you're headed, and whom you'll see there.

It's those feelings of stability and camaraderie that may have you thinking about visiting or even purchasing a site at a motorhome resort like the ones featured here. "Each season our owners or long-term guests can't wait to begin enjoying their extended family for another season," said Roger Wolfe, vice president of the board and director of sales and marketing for Outdoor Resort Indio. "The feeling is almost like anticipating a return to summer camp, only this one is for pampered adults who look forward to seeing their motor coach friends for another extended season."

And although the transient-type lifestyle is likely part of the romanticism that drew us to RVing, so is the laid-back, everybody's-a-friend mindset that is embraced by these resorts.

"We often have guests come and make friends, and they look forward each year to return and see them, year after year," said Alan Nash, board of advisory member at Wilder Resorts.

Of course, it doesn't hurt that these are first-rate facilities that offer guests/

owners everything from catered meals to personal trainers to blockbuster entertainment.

"We have a full state-of-the-art fitness center for our residents who would rather exercise indoors, and two sparkling pools and hot tubs," said Shelly Biele, Cal-Am Resort sales manager, Gold Canyon. "And if you are looking for entertainment, our annual Concert Series features entertainers such as Jay Leno, Neil Sedaka, the Bellamy Brothers, The Charlie Daniels Band and many others."

And we haven't even mentioned the recreation opportunities — on-site and in the surrounding areas — these parks often offer. From world-famous amusement parks to exquisite hiking trails to world-class fishing spots, these resorts are gateways to top-notch enjoyment.

But in the end, it all comes down to hospitality. If you don't feel at home, you're going to leave and buy/stay elsewhere. That's why the resorts, and residents, often go out of their way to ensure guests have a thoroughly enjoyable time, no matter how long their stay may be.

"Arriving at Desert Gardens is like coming home," said Jackie L. Martin, a site owner at Desert Gardens RV Park in Arizona. "Our neighbors have quickly become lifelong friends. The atmosphere is that of a small town, where everyone is smiling and waving to each other."

Whether planning on spending the upcoming cooler months in the Sunbelt or simply just passing through for a spell, check out the following resorts.

Cal-Am's Superstition Views resort offers casitas with RV ports, pads or garages.



Desert Gardens RV Park

> Desert Gardens is an oasis in the Sonoran Desert. "The park is truly special," said Henry and Louise Beckwith Jones, owners of Lot F 59. "Having made 10 coast-to-coast trips in the 8 years since we retired, we've visited them all. As far as the sites themselves, even the smallest of these sites are larger than most you will find in any other RV resort. With only 266 spaces, it is very different from the megaparks we have visited. We have made good friends and formed friendships with renters. On our first trip to the park, we were visited by the welcome committee and felt this wonderful, respectful, friendly demeanor that dominates the park as a standout from other parks, especially since we had an opportunity to purchase one of these beautiful sites. Nowhere have we found sites as large and luxurious as these for the price, and we have enough privacy space so as not to feel crowded. We love being in the Sonoran Desert, and have a 150-year-old saguaro growing naturally on our site; where else would anyone find that or, better still, own it? The landscaping in the park respects the desert locale and doesn't try to create an artificial tropical oasis. We now can stay as long or short as we wish in the desert, up close and personal with the plants and animals that call the desert home. There simply is no comparison."

In addition, the park features a fitness room with modern equipment, a heated pool and hot tub. There is a well-equipped woodshop that is also used by mentored gourd carvers.



Additional mentored classes and activities are a real plus. A beautiful courtyard and serenity garden with tables and seating are landscaped with flowers, native plants and fountains. The park is noted for the extremely clean, large, tiled bathrooms, showers and a laundry, and the conscientious staff is always available to handle anything that arises. The grounds, buildings and nature trails are kept in tiptop shape by staff along with on-site caring owners showing their pride of ownership.

Merlin and Sharon Studt, owners of Lot F 67, sum it up by saying, "The park is large enough to be able to offer a multitude of enjoyable activities yet small enough so you can actually get to know your neighbors and others who reside here. There's a real sense of family that runs throughout the park because people really feel at home when they stay here at Desert Gardens RV Park." **Desert Gardens RV Park, 520-868-3800,** www.desertgardensrvpark.com



Simply said, "We sell better RV sites for less." We have no small sites. 40' x 50' size start at \$16,600. Next largest, 55' x 60' start at \$22,000. Our largest are 60' x 70' and start at only \$25,000. All have water, sewer, and electric. No other park can compare.

The dues are \$87.50 per month and include everything except electric and individual lot maintenance and insurance. We are a not-for-profit, member owned co-operative, and therefore offer no formal financing, but do have some deferred payment options. Closing costs are only \$175. Call **520-450-2966** or email desertgardens@cgmailbox.com for sales information.

We're located near Florence, AZ, and have 266 sites on 73 acres with all the amenities you'd expect at a price you can afford. There is still a great selection, but lots are selling fast. Visit www. desertgardensrvpark.com to see what we're all about and what's here for you.

*Tax and electric are extra. Email for restrictions and information. Advance reservations required.

Cypress Trail RV Resort

▶ For RVers in search of a coastal Florida location fit for fun in the sun, Cypress Trail RV Resort in Fort Myers is just the ticket. The 472-lot gated RV community is the newest southwestern Florida RV resort, and it offers 35-by-90-foot lots, each including municipally supplied water and sewer, hard-wired Internet and basic cable. Each lot also includes 50/30/20-amp electric service on a 20-by-70-foot concrete pad, with separate irrigation water hookups. But chances are you won't be spending too much time at your site. "Cypress Trail RV Resort is an active community made up of energetic residents who like to have fun," said Amir Harpaz, marketing director for Crossing Creeks. "Plus, we are the only south Florida RV resort with certified nature trails in our own nature preserve," he said. Known simply as "The Preserve," the trail winds for 2¼ miles through beautiful coastal scenery.

For more outdoor activities at Cypress Trail, there is a large pool with two swimming lanes as well as a spa. "Our large swimming pool/spa looks over the sparkling fishing lake," said Harpaz. The lake features a 100-foot pier, which makes for an ideal location to view the stunning sunsets. Residents can try pickleball, tennis, shuffleboard and bocce ball on the maintained sport courts.

More highlights of Cypress Trail are its 12,000-squarefoot clubhouse, where residents will find a dining/ballroom with a large dance floor and access to a catering kitchen; a fitness center; laundry area; card and billiard rooms; and even a dog park where dogs enjoy a large caged area as well as a water feature for frolicking. An activities director is always planning the next community event, from dinner dances to pool parties to block parties to exercise programs.

Thanks to its knowledgeable staff and friendly residents, the park "has been beautifully landscaped [and maintained] with native vegetation," said Harpaz. That means you'll always feel like you're at a tropical resort, whether you're relaxing on your patio or enjoying one of the many community activities.

Cypress Trail RV Resort is located near Jet Blue Park, the spring training home of the Boston Red Sox, and

is also a short drive to Sanibel, Captiva and Pine islands. Cypress Trail RV Resort 239-333-3246 www.cypresstrailrv.com





Crossing Creeks RV Resort & Spa

▶ Located in the scenic North Georgia mountains, Crossing Creeks RV Resort & Spa is an impressive luxury getaway situated on 60 acres surrounded by the picturesque Coosa and Anderson creeks. "Crossing Creeks RV Resort is the newest luxury RV resort to open in north Georgia and is near fabulous waterfalls, great hiking trails and all the beauty that is found in the mountains," said Harpaz, also Crossing Creeks' marketing director. "The resort has been created as a special getaway from the summer heat, and is conveniently accessible from Atlanta, Chattanooga, Asheville and Greenville."

Crossing Creeks offers RVers upscale resort-style accommodations. In fact, "Crossing Creeks RV Resort is the only high-end RV Resort in the North Georgia mountains providing state-of-the-art facilities and amenities," said Harpaz.

Each RV site is equipped with full hookups (20/30/50 amps) and a large concrete pad for RVs up to 45 feet long. Premium creekside lots measure up to 180 feet in length and include an enlarged patio so residents can enjoy the tranquil sounds of the water running by.

At the heart of the resort is Crossing Creeks Village, which includes the welcome center, clubhouse, activities center, bathhouse and laundry, and spa and fitness center. The pool and Jacuzzi are located in "the Village," as is a lovely gazebo and a soothing double-sided waterfall.

Other features include tennis, shuffleboard and pickleball courts, and a pool table and card table. Worn out after a long day exploring the countryside? Relax in the sauna and steam room, or take advantage of one of the massage rooms; chances are you'll need to, after partaking of nearby activities such as golf, bicycle riding, kayaking, whitewater rafting or fishing. The surrounding area is literally teeming with scenic mountain vistas, fabulous waterfalls and great hiking trails.

Crossing Creeks RV Resort & Spa is located two hours north of Atlanta in Blairsville, a historic Blue Ridge North Georgia Mountain Community.

The friendly staff at Crossing Creeks invites visitors to "Come spend a night and stay a lifetime in your new mountain home. Welcome to Extraordinary!" Crossing Creeks RV Resort & Spa, 706-835-1111,

www.crossingcreeksrvresort.com

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Wilder Resorts

▶ Established in 1968, Wilder Corp. is one of the nation's best-known operators of RV resorts and manufactured-home developments. For snowbirds and other avid RVers. Wilder offers 18 world-class resorts (10 in Florida, eight in Texas) with more than 12.000 sites. Each adult lifestyle community features outstanding amenities and planned events located on beautifully appointed facilities, all conveniently located near restaurants, shopping and a wide array of local attractions. "Our family of Wilder RV Resorts offers the perfect way for RVers to enjoy the unique and magical warmth of Florida and Texas," said President Maurice Wilder.

In addition to the fun-loving and friendly senior residents, much of the

reputation of Wilder can be attributed to its hospitable, knowledgeable staff. Each resort has on-site managers who know how to make residents feel welcome.

All Wilder resorts offer warm, sunny weather year-round; close proximity to the Gulf of Mexico; sparkling pools and Jacuzzis; billiards and card rooms; fitness facilities; themed dances and dinners; and planned parties and socials.

But each resort has its own unique, locally driven flavor. In Florida, Fort Myers RV Resort is a great place to enjoy nearby public golf courses and tennis courts, not to mention the gorgeous white-sand beaches of Fort Myers and Sanibel Island. Other popular attractions include the Thomas Edison Home, Estero Bay's bird sanctuary and Cork Screw Swamp.

Or, how about Rice Creek RV Resort, where RVers can enjoy the warm

sunshine in the center of Florida's sun coast, with world-class destinations like Walt Disney World, LEGOLAND and Busch Gardens within an easy drive? On-site amenities include pet areas, a library and a 15,000-square-foot clubhouse.

Coach owners looking for fun in the Lone Star State may want to check out a pair of southern Texas gems that afford convenient access to the best attractions in the Rio Grande Valley and northern Mexico.

Park Place Estates RV Resort in Harlingen, Texas, allows visitors to swing their partners to a live big band in the near-10,000-foot ballroom, or enjoy (seasonal) weekly dances, jams, live music and other entertainment, in addition to weekly happy hour get-togethers.

Winter Ranch RV Resort in Alamo is home to a nine-hole, par-three golf course that is free to park residents. There's also a heated swimming pool and a hot tub to relax in at the end of an active day.

And there are still 14 more resorts to choose from! Wherever your destination, Wilder Resorts asks that RVers stop by one of its top-notch facilities to "Come be a part of our family and find resort-style living at some of the most popular luxury winter resorts in the nation."

Wilder RV Resorts, www.rvresorts.com

Cal-Am Superstition Views

▶ A respected name in the manufactured-home/RV-resort market, Cal-Am Resorts hosts communities in some of the country's most desirable locations, including Arizona, which is the site of Superstition Views in Gold Canyon. "Cal-Am Resorts has several RV resorts in Arizona, and Superstition Views was born out of requests from our residents," said Biele.

Superstition Views is an upscale RV resort and manufac-

tured-home community rolled into one. Located at the base of the breathtaking Superstition Mountains, Superstition Views offers RVers looking to purchase a casita, which is a ground-set fully customizable manufactured home with more than 800 square feet of living space, with an RV-centric bonus, giving you the best of both worlds. "Each site provides full hookups, water, electric, and sewer next to the RV port, pad or garage," said Biele.

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Sundance Lakes RV Resort Port Richey, FL • (727) 862-3565

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Pioneer Creek RV Resort Bowling Green, FL • (863) 375-4343 www.Sundancelakes.rvresorts.com www.Pioneercreek.rvresorts.com

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not have to worry about RV storage or the impersonal nature of a hotel or other rental. Plus, you can make those casitas entirely yours. "Besides the fact that we at Cal-Am Resorts customize the homes to your needs, we do not spec out certain layouts and say, 'This is what you get,'" said Biele. "There are no two homes alike in our community. Each resident has different needs and desires so we let them tell us what they want."

And what they want is a comfortable, residential-type experience without straying too far from the RV lifestyle. That also includes access to the abundant activities/attractions nearby. "Superstition Views is surrounded by gorgeous golf courses, and fishing and boating on the local lakes is only 30 minutes away," said Biele. "For those who would prefer hiking and four-wheeling — it is just outside our gates. We not only have a fitness center, we have a personal trainer, and not only do we have tennis courts but we also have a tennis pro available."

Other amenities and on-site activities include arts and crafts, a billiards room, a church service, educational classes,

a computer lab, a clubhouse and even a card room for playing bridge and other card tournaments.

But again, it's not about what there is to do, but with whom there is to do it. "What really sets us apart is our residents," said Biele. "We have an amazing group of residents who keep this an active community. This is not your typical 55+ community where residents sit on their porch — our residents are biking, triking, hiking, jogging, and golfing throughout the days, and dancing under the stars during our happy hours in the evenings." And Superstition's unique location makes for some pretty spectacular dusk activities. "Some residents are even up on their observation decks watching and enjoying our amazing mountain views and sunsets over the desert."

Biele encourages RVers to consider Superstition. "Stop looking and start living the lifestyle you only dreamed was possible!"

Cal-Am Resorts, Superstition Views, 888-603-3415, www.superstitionviewshomes.com

Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort & Casino

Sometimes, you want to get away from it all ... and sometimes, you want to be right in the thick of things. For times like that, Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort & RV Park in Laughlin, Nevada, is a great way to immerse yourself in all the hubbub of a Las Vegas-style atmosphere, in an environment that's just as glitzy but much less hectic and crowded than the Strip.

Established in 1966 (and billed as Laughlin's first hotel and casino), the Riverside Resort is located on the banks of the Colorado River. The impressive casino offers gamers more than 80,000 square feet of casino floor, boasting more than 1,300 slot machines and 50 live-gaming tables including most card games, roulette and craps. Live keno and bingo are also popular games. An additional venue, Riverside Casino West — a 10,000-squarefoot additional casino with more than 180 slots and video poker machines, a cocktail bar and snack bar — is also open to guests on the property and conveniently located next to the Riverside RV Park.

The reason the resort is featured here is the adjacent multilevel sprawling RV park. "Our 740-space RV park is centrally located in the western region of the United States," said Lloyd Shires, director of hotel, marketing and air program at Riverside. "The entire resort is easily



accessible from New Mexico to California, or Arizona to Wyoming or Colorado to Nevada and beyond! Plus, our amenities make this destination seem like an extravagant getaway, even on a tight budget."

The park features full-hookup sites, 30/50-amp power, a dump station, laundry facilities, showers and, perhaps most importantly, RVers staying at the park can enjoy all the hotel/casino's amenities.

And, will they ever enjoy them, as Riverside Resort & Casino has pulled out all the stops to allow its guests to enjoy all aspects of entertainment, without ever having to leave the facility.

In addition to gambling, the facility offers a 34-lane bowling alley, Don Laughlin's Classic Car Collection (with free admission), a six-screen movie theater, a nightclub, a karaoke/dance club (with weekly country line-dancing), two arcades, two swimming pools and much more.

And visitors certainly won't go hungry; Riverside offers a wide variety of culinary selections, including several fine dining, family-style, fast food and coffee shop locations.

Looking for entertainment? Big-name stars like Terri Clark, Crystal Gayle, The Oak Ridge Boys and Debbie Reynolds, are scheduled for Riverside, as are tribute acts to Neil Diamond, John Denver and Johnny Cash.

A free shuttle to the casino complex is available for guests at the RV park, and there's even fishing/boating access nearby in the Colorado.

"We recently renovated the community park next door to us for the state of Nevada by improving the watercraft launch ramp, adding more boat parking and constructing a Veterans Avenue of Flags Memorial," said Shires, who added, "We are currently in the process of adding more 50-amp hookups in our RV park and are constantly renovating bathrooms and improving landscaping, to just name a few." **Riverside Resort & Casino RV Park, 800-227-3849, www.riversideresort.com** *Everything you need is within reach.*

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Katy Lake RV Resort, Texas

▶ Katy Lake RV Resort may have only opened its doors last November, but it already has the right idea about the RVing lifestyle. "KLRV is 18 acres of tranquil seclusion from the hustle and bustle of Houston," said Joy Stogsdill, resort manager for Via Bayou Inc., which owns Katy Lake. The resort offers more than 200

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orindio.com 800-892-2992 80-394 Avenue 48 • Indio, CA 92201 sites, with a variety of layouts, including large 85- and 65-foot pull-through sites and scenic 45-foot, lakefront back-in sites. All are tended to by what Stogsdill refers to as a "courteous and friendly staff." One of Katy Lake RV Resort's biggest draws is its on-site facilities. "Some of the amenities include beach-entry heated pool, spa, beautiful restrooms and showers, laundry facility, clubhouse with a computer room, exercise area, billiards, games and two indoor TV viewing areas," said Stogsdill. "The back patio includes an outside TV, gas barbecues and a seating area with a view of our 6-acre lake."

That same lake is circled by a ¼-mile paved trail, and also features a 105-foot fishing pier. KLRV is a pet-friendly park with a fenced dog run, a dog wash/dry station and pet-waste stations located

Outdoor Resort Indio

Nestled in the heart of Southern California. Outdoor Resort Indio is a Class A motor coach resort that is 100 percent equity owned. The grounds feature 419 privately owned lots surrounded by lush landscaping, waterfalls, lakes, an 18-hole executive course, café, lounge and sport courts. "Our owners expect a secure, worry-free environment that is professionally managed by a full-time activities director," said Wolfe. "Imagine starting the day with a breakfast at our café. then getting in a game of tennis or pickleball, followed by lunch, a quick round of golf, and topping it off with a catered dinner and dancing the night away ... which is exactly





throughout. Wi-Fi and satellite service come free, and LP-gas is available on-site.

A great choice for snowbirds and year-round travelers alike, Katy Lake is a gated adult park (two-day stay maximum for children) with security cameras, and offers nightly, weekly and monthly rates. "We welcome you to come enjoy the peaceful, easy, laid-back, lake atmosphere at Katy Lake RV Resort, " said Stogsdill. **Katy Lake RV Resort, 281-492-0044,** www.katylakervresort.com



what our active, athletic, owner community enjoys throughout their stay." Additional activities include volleyball, knitting clubs, bingo, free movie night, card tournaments and organized off-site trips.

"Most of our owners were at one time guests (renting) who enjoyed their stay so much they decided to purchase and customize their own site," said Wolfe. "ORI makes it easy to purchase by maintaining its own in-house realtor/broker office. "Our realtors help guide prospective buyers through the process. And owners who don't use their lots the entire season can list them as available for rent with our office, which manages the process, from booking through collection and payout.

"Owners typically 'winter' at their Desert Oasis, enjoying warm sunshine, fine dining and the local attractions," said Wolfe. "Our guests initially rent for the amenities, but end up buying because of the lifelong relationships they develop while at the resort," said Wolfe. Outdoor Resort Indio, 800-892-2992, www.orindio.com

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Mighty Red

Winnebago's Travato 59K beckons to adventureseeking RVers with an active lifestyle By Donya Cartson

Y friend, Jerry, used to sign his emails with "Adventure isn't fun while it's happening." No matter how many times I read that tagline, it would make me chuckle and think back to some crazy experience. Many times, that quote is apropos, but sometimes adventure *is* fun while it's happening. And one day in particular on a recent outing in a 2016 Winnebago Travato 59K was one of them.

We left our off-the-beaten-path campsite for the day in the 21-foot Flame Red motorhome, the latest Class B from Winnebago that is geared toward the active outdoor market. It was equipped with a bicycle rack, which held two mountain bikes, and rooftop kayak racks, to which we'd fastened a stand-up paddleboard (SUP), to seek out a nearby spring-fed glacial-carved lake. Here, in California's Sierra Nevada at a 7,500-foot elevation, we unloaded the SUP and paddled around a serene lake surrounded by granite, tall grasses and trees, while anglers bobbed around in float tubes with fishing rods in hand. In an instant, the sky went from sprinkling to pouring. Folks scrambled for their vehicles, and every one of them had left their RV back at camp because their motorhome was either too large to park in the day-use-only lot or they had unhooked their trailer and used the tow vehicle for transportation. While they huddled in their dinghy/tow vehicles with the heater blasting and drove back to various campsites, we stepped out of the mud into our cozy home. Ah, the advantage of an RV that's highly maneuverable, able to easily take tight mountain roads and doesn't occupy much more parking space than a full-size pickup! We dried off, changed into warm clothes, made soup and hot chocolate while the Jensen radio played, and contentedly waited out the rain.

ABOVE: Let the adventure begin! Bike carrier (\$980) and kayak racks and ladder (\$2,905) manufactured by Fiamma are options on the Travato 59K.

When it cleared up a couple of hours later, we took a ride on our mountain bikes. Then we packed up our toys and headed back up the road to where we were dry-camping, relying on the 100-watt solar panel (\$665 option) to help keep the Travato's batteries charged. In camp, we took the SUP down or tilted it on the racks so as not to cover the solar panel.

The Travato is built on the Ram ProMaster chassis, and our test vehicle had the optional 3.0-liter diesel engine with a six-speed automated manual transmission (also available with the 3.6-liter V-6 gas engine). It doesn't have a PARK mode, so when parking, the transmission is put into NEUTRAL. In the DRIVE mode, the engine automatically shifts, making for not-so-smooth takeoffs (almost as though the engine is losing power) when accelerating from idle and until getting up to speed. In the MANUAL mode, where we could match engine speed with RPM, shifting was smoother. Climbing steep hills, the engine had good pep, and we eventually got used to the shifting pattern in the DRIVE mode.

The cockpit is simply laid out and includes USB and 12-volt DC ports, functional cup holders and a battery-boost switch. A 5-inch LCD color screen displays the radio that features SiriusXM, Bluetooth, GPS navigation and a rearview monitoring system. The windshield is in your face, so to speak, for a superior view. The only issue was that anything on the dash was reflected in the windshield, including the thick silver border on the perimeter of the vents, which was distracting. We cleared the dash of maps, travel brochures and sunglass cases for a better view and took advantage of the many excellent cubbies, including one beneath the steering wheel, to store all our paraphernalia. Plus, there are storage pockets in the doors.

We liked the powered fold-in side mirrors, especially handy in tight situations, and we'd fold those large mirrors in when parked curbside to prevent damage. The clothcovered seats are comfortable and have all the adjustments needed for the headrests and lumbar support, but are not electric, so change doesn't happen quickly.

Inside, the 59K has twin beds that feature a Froli Box Spring Sleep System, which is comprised of individual 5-by-5-inch interlocking springs (34 of them on the longer bed) that are designed for pressure relief and are firmness adjustable. We were impressed with the high level of comfort and, as a side benefit, the raised springs helped BELOW: The attractive galley has good counterspace and everything needed to prep a meal is within easy reach. The pullout cutting board doubles as a dining table. Twin beds are especially comfortable and have adjustable headrests. There's storage under the left-side bed.





ventilate the space under the mattresses. The bed on the passenger side is 6 feet 8 inches long, while the bed on the driver's side loses 6 inches to accommodate the galley; both are 30 inches wide.

Each bed has an adjustable headrest that can be raised 9 inches, great for when reading or viewing the swivel-out 22-inch HDTV mounted above the foot of the passenger-side bed. The system's controls/monitor panel, including the switch for the 2,500-watt Cummins Onan LP-gas generator (\$210 option), is grouped on the wall above the passenger side bed — conveniently located for easy access and viewing — however, a couple of times during our outing, while



From far left: Cockpit is simply and efficiently laid out, plus there are lots of places to stow large and small items. We were impressed with excellent visibility through the large windshield. Interlocking springs make up the Froli Sleep System. The individual 5-by-5-inch springs under the twin-bed mattresses were not too soft and not too hard, but just right. They're also adjustable.





WINNEBAGO TRAVATO 59K

leaning back against the wall, we accidentally turned off the secondary light switches, also located on that wall, and found ourselves in sudden darkness. We then realized that we had also turned off the water pump and LP-gas switches.

Cargo nets against the wall by each bed are large enough to stow a book or glasses (provided they're in a case, so they don't get smashed), and reading lamps and USB charging ports are above each bed. If sleeping apart from your loved one is an issue, the aisle separating the twin beds is just 15 inches wide, close enough that you can hold hands. Under the longer bed is a 54¹/₂-by-11-by-19-inch storage space large enough that we used it to hold (clean) water hoses, an outdoor mat. a couple of Quik-Fold tables, a shovel and an axe. There is no outside storage other than a cubby for a sewer hose.

Up front, the captain's chairs slide, recline and swivel smoothly around to face the living area and individual tables. On the driver's side, the galley's pullout cutting board doubles as a table, while a 14-by-9-inch table behind the passenger seat has a home in its own narrow cabinet. This freestanding cabinet has a hand grip for support when stepping up into the Travato. The whole setup is pretty nifty, giving two people plenty of elbow room and surface area to sit down and enjoy a meal in a seat that keeps your tush and back enveloped in comfort.

A Truma Combi water and comfort heating system operates on LP-gas

WHAT'S HOT 🏠

Comfortable twin beds, good counterspace, space-saving fold-down basin in bathroom

WHAT'S NOT \bigcirc

No spare tire, silver border on vents in cockpit is reflected in windshield and distracting



and 120-volt AC power, warms the motorhome quietly and quickly, and is operated by a digital-control LCD panel. When the weather heats up, the Coleman-Mach roof air conditioner and powered Maxx Fan cool down the interior and pull cooking steam out. Interior height is 6 feet 3 inches and a 6-foot-4-incher said that the soft vinyl covering the ceiling felt nice on his head.

There's a good-sized Corian countertop to the right of the two-burner range for food prep and, with the two pullout mini tables, there was enough surface area to spread out, while keeping utensils, bowls and foodstuff within easy reach. A 4.3cubic-foot refrigerator and 1.1-cubicfoot High Pointe convection oven/ microwave are below the range and deep stainless-steel sink.

Even though the Travato's floorplan is narrow, we didn't feel confined





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Specifications

Chassis

Model	Ram ProMaster
Engine	3.0-liter diesel
SAE Hp	174 @ 3,600 rpm
Torque	295 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	6-speed automated manual
Axle Ratio	4.56:1
Front Tires	225/75R16E
Rear Tires	225/75R16E
Wheelbase	159"
Brakes	4-wheel disc with ABS
Suspension, F/R	MacPherson with stabilizer
	bar/solid axle with leaf springs
Fuel Cap	24 gal
Fuel Economy	23.59 mpg
Warranty	3 years/36,000 miles

Coach

Ext Length	21'
Ext Width	6' 9"
Ext Height	9' 1"
Int Width	6' 2"
Int Height	6' 3"
Construction	Steel van shell,
	fiberglass-batt insulation
Freshwater Cap	25 gal
Black-Water Cap	13 gal
Gray-Water Cap	13 gal
Water Heater Cap	o 2.6 gal
LP-Gas Cap	6 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	14,300 Btu
Refrigerator	4.3 cu-ft
Converter/Charge	r 30 amp
Battery	(2) group 31 chassis;
	(2) group 31 deep-cycle coach
AC Generator	2.5-kW LP-gas
MSRP	\$88,336
MSRP as Tested	\$102,259
Warranty	12 months/15,000 miles

Wet weight

(Water & heater, fuel, LP-gas tanks full; No supplies or passengers) Front Axle 3,860 lbs Rear Axle 4,120 lbs Total 7,980 lbs

Chassis ratings

	•
GAWR, F/F	4,630/5,291 lbs
GVWR/GC	WR 9,350/11,500 lbs
0000	1,370 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
0CCC 0cc	upant and Cargo Carrying Capacity Rating



WINNEBAGO TRAVATO 59K

while preparing meals. A small, flat, plastic cutting board that we'd propped against the blinds slipped behind the cabinet into never-never land, or so we thought. A while later when opening the bottom drawer to get plates, we discovered the cutting board was conveniently in the drawer! Everything blends in stylishly with the high-gloss Marbella Cherry cabinets, and pushbutton latches locked them so they stayed closed during travel, though fingerprints showed up on the glossy finish.

Lights, electric outlets and USB ports are housed on the right side of the galley's cabinet, hidden from view, so either the driver's-side captain's chair has to be moved forward or you can feel your way. There's also a switch here for a light strip that runs horizontally along the shelf above where you step up into the cockpit from inside the motorhome. The overhead shelf is soft-covered but it still hurt when we hit our noggins. We used the shelf as our food pantry since it was in the perfect location while cooking and reaching for snacks. There's also an in-floor storage compartment below the shelf.

The side door slides smoothly, and big, easy-grip handles make it simple to open the door from the outside. We slipped a couple of times when closing the doors from the inside when the vinyl floor was wet; investing in a nonslip mat's a good idea. A sliding side screen door is a \$323 option.

The 59K's wet bath is in the very rear, sectioned off by accordion-style doors that stay together via magnets that seal it well. The bathroom is tight, as expected in a Class B, but there's ample storage with a wardrobe, three deep sliding drawers and a mirrored medicine cabinet. A towel bar is attached to one cargo door and there's a powered roof vent. A European-style fold-down basin is concealed in the wall over the toilet. Pull it open to reveal the basin, swing the faucet out from the wall and you're ready to wash your hands or brush your teeth. Fold it back up, water dumps into the drain in the wall and there's no water to wipe



The wet bath, as viewed from the open cargo doors, has a fold-down sink with faucet that's tucked away in the wall above the toilet.

up around a sink. A snap-in shower curtain is provided to keep water off of the cabinetry while using the handheld sprayer.

Open the cargo doors from the outside and you're peering into the bathroom. To the right is storage for electrical cords and a quick-disconnect sprayer-head wash station. Due to the space required for the generator, there is no room for a spare tire, but Winnebago supplies a tire repair kit that contains a jack, a jack handle, a lug wrench, a puncture kit and an air pump.

If you've opted for the \$980 Fiamma bike carrier, be careful when closing the cargo doors. The carrier, which holds two bikes, overhangs horizontally, and when opening the door, you see them coming at you. However, when closing the right door, the natural instinct is to reach behind you where the rack is out of sight, so each of us got beaned in the back of the head at least once. The high-end rack is a pretty trick system that kept two mountain bikes securely in place. As mentioned earlier, the test motorhome was also outfitted with the optional roof-mounted kayak racks and ladder (\$2,905), also (continued on page 88)



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Ding hy 101

The essential guide to safely towing a vehicle behind your motorhome

hoosing which vehicle to tow behind your motorhome is a big decision. Because, beyond considering what type of vehicle you want to drive when your motorhome is parked, you have to think about how adaptable that vehicle is to towing, and how well-suited your motorhome is to towing it. It seems simple enough at first, but there are a lot of options out there in vehicles and equipment — and choosing the right setup can make the difference between an uneventful journey and one fraught with annoying (and even dangerous) problems.

Dinghy towing is arguably the most popular way to bring a vehicle with you on your travels. Dinghy towing (also known as "flat towing" or "recreational towing") is the process of towing a vehicle with all four wheels on the ground. RVers tend to prefer this method, as it does not require loading a vehicle on a dolly, and there's no concern over where to stow the dolly once you arrive at your destination (See "Hello Dolly" sidebar on page 60). Simply attach the tow bar from the car to the motorhome, connect your electrical and breakaway connections, and you're off.

That is, once you've made the right choices and have sorted everything out. That's the purpose of this article — to help guide you through the process of buying the vehicle that's right for you, and helping you set it up correctly so that you won't be greeted by unpleasant surprises along the way.

Choosing a Vehicle

Beyond choosing a vehicle you'd like to drive, the first step is determining if what you're considering is actually dinghy-towable. The limiting factor, in almost all instances, is the transmission. Whether automatic or manual, not all receive lubrication when the engine is turned off, and can therefore be severely damaged by towing at highway speeds.

To help narrow down your choices, MotorHome has published an annual Guide to Dinghy Towing since the 1984 model year. In addition to pointing out which current-year vehicles can be towed, it lists crucial information such as vehicle weight and speed/distance limits. The former is important because each motorhome has a tow rating, and the weight of a towed vehicle obviously impacts its acceleration and hill-climbing ability. The latter plays a big part in how you travel; if the maximum speed you drive your coach is 65 MPH and you only stop when you need fuel, you don't want a dinghy vehicle that can only be towed at 55 MPH and must have the engine started and run every 200 miles to lubricate the transmission.

In more recent years, the dinghy guide also lists any special procedures required to tow the vehicle you're considering, such as transmission/transfer-case preparation, ignition-key position, fuse removal and other steps. These are required by the manufacturer to ensure that the transmission and

JUST BE CERTAIN, WHEN BUYING A NEW VEHICLE, TO CONDUCT YOUR OWN DUE DILIGENCE.

transfer case (in 4WD vehicles) aren't damaged, and that the battery does not discharge during travel. For example, some vehicles must have the key in the ignition, switched to the ACC (accessory) position so that the steering wheel will remain unlocked during towing. However, this may switch on the ignition, dashboard lighting, etc., as well, so a fuse may need to be removed before towing, or the negative battery cable may have to be disconnected to prevent the battery from going dead. You'll have to be honest with yourself and decide whether or not doing this work every time you tow is worthwhile, or if you'd prefer an easier route. Many vehicles, particularly small, manual-transmission models, require only that the steering column be unlocked and the transmission switched to NEUTRAL no other steps required.

Depending on your budget and personal preferences, you may also consider purchasing a used vehicle instead of something brand-new. There are a few good reasons for this. One, you have the opportunity to thoroughly research the vehicle you're considering and find out how easy/ reliable it is to dinghy-tow. RV forums such as www.rv.net are great places to query other RVers about your potential dinghy choice — you'll find that members are more than happy to share their experiences (good or bad) with you, perhaps even offer another suggestion that you hadn't considered (a small SUV instead of passenger car, for example). Two, it's often easier to find towing accessories such as baseplates (more on those later) for established vehicles than it is for brand-new ones — plus, there will likely be more choices available. Finally, consider that towing a vehicle can be hard on it. Beyond tire wear and tear, dirt and damage are always an issue. Diesel pushers can coat your dinghy in sooty residue, a freak

hailstorm can strike and your coach can kick up rocks that cause damage (though there are some products on the market designed to prevent this). Your dinghy vehicle may also require permanent modifications to the front fascia (such as cutting a lower grille or spoiler) in order to mount a baseplate — something that may be easier for you to stomach on a 10year-old car than a brand-new one.

Of course, there are benefits to choosing a new vehicle as well, not the least of which is that new-car smell and a factory warranty. Just be certain, when buying a new vehicle, to conduct your own due diligence. Ask the dealer to see a copy of the owner's manual and confirm for yourself that the vehicle is, in fact, dinghy-towable. Be extra careful when looking at a manual that may cover several different models; for example, one version of an SUV's 4WD transfer case may be towable, another may not be. Beyond making sure the vehicle is towable from a mechanical standpoint, seeing it spelled out in black and white confirms that the vehicle is approved by the manufacturer for dinghy towing, and therefore should be covered under warranty if anything goes wrong.

Baseplates and Tow Bars

In order to tow a vehicle behind your motorhome, there are some required essentials, namely a baseplate, a tow bar and a braking system.

Obviously, production vehicles are designed to be driven, not towed, so there has to be a way to create solid connection points on the vehicle where a tow bar can be attached. A baseplate is the answer. Think of it like a hitch receiver in reverse; it mounts to the frame under the front of the vehicle, and allows a tow bar to be attached so it can be towed by the motorhome. Depending on the

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Dinghy 101





baseplate manufacturer and the vehicle, this can be a pretty straightforward bolt-on, or may require the entire front fascia of the vehicle to be removed. Companies such as Blue Ox, Demco and Roadmaster offer handy fit lists that will tell you if a baseplate is available for your vehicle, how much time is required to install it and even what modifications may be required. When in doubt, call the baseplate manufacturer for specifics; not all manufacturers use the same mounting procedures. You should also be prepared to make minor modifications. Baseplates are fit to an individual test vehicle, so connection points on subsequent vehicles can be slightly off, which means there might be some installation gymnastics involved. The good news is that baseplate fitment is better today than ever.

The tow bar is your next consideration, and it's matched to the attachment hardware from the manufacturer. While you can still find tow From above left: Specialized, removable components are used with the Roadmaster system when it's time to connect the tow bar, leaving the front of the towed vehicle free of unsightly hardware. Roadmaster's easyto-use release handles facilitate installation and removal of the Sterling tow bar.

bars that attach to the dinghy vehicle and hook to a ball in the motorhome's hitch receiver, the trend is to use tow bars that remain mounted to the motorhome and connect to the dinghy vehicle for towing. The tow bar itself is shaped like an "A" so that



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it can be connected at two points on the vehicle's baseplate. The important considerations for the tow bar are capacity (how much weight the bar is rated for) and how the bar functions. Release mechanisms vary among the suppliers and some are designed to work better on uneven terrain.

Make sure to compare features as well; basic tow bars may be more affordable, but they may be more difficult to attach and may not work when the ground isn't level. You may also consider the materials (steel vs. aluminum) and what accessories (if any) can be mounted to the tow bar.

For example, some companies offer deflectors to protect the front of the dinghy vehicle from being damaged by rocks, including the KarGard II by Blue Ox, the Sentry Deflector by Demco, and the Guardian Rock Shield and Tow Defender by Roadmaster. These products may not make your dingy vehicle impervious to damage, but they can certainly keep it down to a minimum. And, as with the dinghy vehicles themselves, RV forums can be a great resource to determine which bars/accessories are right for you.

Braking Systems

There is often a lot of debate on this subject, with many RVers claiming that a dinghy-braking system simply isn't necessary. However, there are facts that refute this. For one, consider that a dinghy vehicle is essentially a trailer, and trailers weighing 1,500 pounds or more are required to have a braking system. Now, consider that most passenger cars weigh 3,200 to 5,000 pounds, with SUVs and pickups weighing as much as 7,000 pounds plus. You don't have to be an engineer to realize that having several thousand pounds of unbraked weight behind you will increase your stopping distance — and even if it's only by a few feet, that can mean the difference between safely stopping or hitting the

vehicle in front of you. If you're still not convinced, here's a reason that is perhaps more compelling: More and more states, as well as provinces in Canada, require that any towed vehicle have a supplemental braking system.

Though there is a wide variety of dinghy-braking systems available, they can essentially be broken down into two categories: portable and permanent. Portable systems are the most popular because they don't require much time to install or remove, and typically don't require any modifications to the vehicle. Simply place it on the driver's side floor, attach the arm to the brake pedal and plug it in to a 12-volt DC power source (cigarette lighter). The down side of these systems is that they typically operate off of a "dead" pedal (the power brake system isn't energized when the engine is off) and may not provide immediate, proportional braking; that is, when you apply the brakes in the motorhome, there may be a short



Installing a Baseplate

[1, 2] Most baseplate installations require that at least part of the front fascia be removed, especially on vehicles built within the last 20 years. The Suzuki XL-7 and its cousin, the Vitara, were wildly popular dinghy vehicles in their day and are still good choices because they're inexpensive to buy and easy to tow. This 2003 model requires that the entire front fascia be removed, starting with the grille assembly. The technician uses a special plastic tool to gently coax the cover away from the clips that secure it.

[3] Next, the headlights are removed. This isn't always as easy as it sounds because there are often hidden clips behind the bumper mask that make removal a challenge. This is where patience is truly a virtue.

[4] Once the headlights are free, there are the wire connections to contend with. There

are several different designs depending on the vehicle, so again, use patience when attempting to disconnect them to avoid damage.

[5] After removing a few small screws that secure the bumper mask, it's ready to be carefully removed. If the parking lights are incorporated into the bumper mask, be ready to disconnect those wiring harnesses once the mask is free.

[6] The Suzuki is barely recognizable without the distinguishing characteristics of the front fascia.

[7] It was also necessary to remove the front bumper assembly to gain access to the mounting points for the new baseplate.

[8] Next, the bumper brackets are drilled so the baseplate can be mounted.

[9] Since it is difficult to get a nut on the back side of the fastener inside the frame section, kits may include these nuts with a rod spot-welded to it for easy positioning. Once the nut is secure, the rod is simply broken off.

[10] The baseplate can now be bolted into place. Make sure to use a thread locker on the bolts so they can't work themselves loose later.

[11] The new baseplate has been installed; now it's time to reassemble the front fascia.

[12] The baseplate assembly is barely visible behind the grille once reassembly is complete. With the power receptacle installed, it's just a simple matter of attaching the tow bar and plugging in whenever you're ready to tow.



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delay while the brake system applies the brake pedal in the dinghy.

For those who prefer a permanently mounted system, there are a few good choices. Using this type of system requires a bigger commitment in both price and installation considerations, but once installed, it is fast and easy to connect. A permanently mounted system connects directly to the motorhome's air or hydraulic brake system for quick, proportionate braking, and employs some method of energizing the power-brake booster. Roadmaster and SMI manufacturing offer permanently mounted systems with their own functions and claimed benefits, so be sure to research these products thoroughly before making a purchase. After all, once it's installed, you can't easily uninstall it.

Electrical

As we stated earlier, vehicles are intended to be driven. not towed. That means that, unlike on a travel trailer or fifth-wheel, there is no provision for plugging a vehicle into the motorhome's seven-pin connector and having the running lights and turn signals come on in the dinghy vehicle when you activate them in the motorhome (although the dinghy's brakelights will come on if it is equipped with a supplemental braking system). So, you've got three choices: One-way diodes can be used to hardwire into the dinghy vehicle's electrical system; a qualified technician can install independent bulbs in the taillight fixtures of the dinghy vehicle so they can mimic a

From above left: Safety cables are concealed in the tubes of the Sterling tow bar, preventing them from dangling. Wireless lights were used in this installation, so there was no need for a cable connection. Ram for Roadmaster's BrakeMaster system connects to the dinghy vehicle's brake pedal in minutes, and is small enough to be easily stashed when not in use.

trailer connection; or you can use auxiliary lights, similar to what a tow-truck driver uses when he tows your car. Some towing-hardware manufacturers also offer electronic adapters to facilitate this taillight wiring.

Auxiliary lighting can be plugged into the motorhome's electrical connector (typically seven-way) or you can go wireless, which is much more expensive. These tow lights mount temporarily to the vehicle with

Hello Dolly

If your vehicle can't be flat-towed and there are no towing solutions available, another option for front-wheel-drive vehicles is a tow dolly (towing a rear-wheel-drive vehicle facing rearward isn't recommended and can be dangerous). A lot of RVers prefer dolly towing over dinghy towing because it's simply a matter of connecting the dolly, plugging in the electrical, driving the car on and strapping it down — no concerns over dead batteries, and no need for a supplemental braking system. Demco's Kar Kaddy3 (\$3,535) and Kar Kaddy SS (\$4,215) are popular choices, with features like disc surge brakes, automatic steering and a tilt bed frame with a positive automatic re-latch locking mechanism for easy loading. The Kar Kaddy can accept a towed vehicle's front track from 42 inches to 76 inches, has an axle capacity of up to 3,500 pounds, and a total towed vehicle weight rating of 4,700 pounds. The SS (Space Saver) model has the added benefit of being foldable, which reduces its overall length of 133 inches to just 67 inches. When storage at a cramped campsite is an issue, you'll appreciate this feature.

Roadmaster also offers its RoadMaster tow dolly (\$3,889.20), with electric brakes, self-steering wheels and both ramps and axles that can be adjusted to suit a variety of vehicles weighing up to 4,380 pounds. Demco and Roadmaster also offer a variety of tow-dolly accessories as well as economy versions of their tow dollies for the budget-conscious.

If your vehicle can't be flat-towed, a tow dolly, like this one from Demco, may be a viable solution.

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magnets or suction cups. Products like the RVHW32 Wireless RV Tow Light Package from TowMate (www .towmate.com) have their own brakelights, taillights and turn signals and install in minutes — simply plug the transmitter into the coach's seven-pin connector, mount the Tow Light on the rear of the vehicle, then plug the receiver into the dinghy's 12-volt DC power outlet and turn it on. Some RVers may be concerned about mounting a magnet to a painted surface, but there are ways to mitigate this, and the suction cups allow the system to be mounted to the rear window. Like many choices in the RV lifestyle, whichever method you choose is a matter of personal preference.

A permanently installed system is definitely the most convenient, since it eliminates additional hardware and connection points for the lights. However, when hard-wiring or adding bulb fixtures, we can't stress enough the importance of finding an experienced, qualified shop to do this sort of work — the wiring can be guite involved, and there is a lot of room for error if the technician isn't experienced. Don't leave the electrical work in your vehicle up to just anyone — do some research and find out who really knows what they're doing first. Even if you have to travel out of town or out of state, a reputable shop that stands behind its work is worth the extra effort.

Towing Solutions

Maybe you'd like to be practical and tow a car you already have, but that vehicle isn't mechanically suitable for dinghy towing. Or, there's a new vehicle that you would really like to buy, but the manufacturer says it can't be towed without damaging the transmission. Do you have options?

Yes and no. Remco Industries offers lube-pump kits that will circulate the transmission fluid while towing, preventing damage. Remco's website (www.remcoindustries. com) offers handy tools that will let you know in just a few minutes if the vehicle you're considering is towable or not, and which products will be required. There's even a list of "recommended vehicles" for towing, which is great if you're still shopping for a dinghy vehicle.

The bad news: If your vehicle isn't on Remco's list, it probably can't be towed on anything but a dolly or a trailer. Even if you could fit a lube pump, you may need a baseplate custom-made (depending on the year and model of the vehicle) — which would likely make the whole project more trouble than it's worth.

Another option may be to use a driveshaft disconnect, which

prevents the transmission from turning, thereby preventing damage. The driveshaft-disconnect system previously offered by Remco is now sold through Superior Driveline (www.remcodsc.com/driveShaft.php). The coupling (mechanical clutch) is installed into the rear portion of the vehicle's driveshaft, near the rear axle. When disconnected, the rear axle is free to turn without turning the driveshaft or transmission. The coupling has a control cable attached, which extends to a location under. or on the side of, the driver's seat. This control cable is pulled out to disengage for tow mode and pushed in to engage drive mode.

Staying Safe

As with towing a trailer behind a tow vehicle, dinghy towing is safe and trouble-free if you follow these simple tips:

• Follow the vehicle manufacturer's instructions exactly. Rather than look through the owner's manual each time, create your own checklist of what to do, and in what order. Include installing the brake system (if applicable) and performing a common safety check on that list. Don't forget the keys!

• Check tire pressure. Remember, inflating the tires to the tire manufacturer's stated maximum pressure on the sidewall will reduce rolling resistance and may help improve mileage. By contrast, underinflation will increase drag, accelerate tire wear and may result in tire failure while towing. Confirm that you are ready to tow. First, check that the dinghy transmission is set properly. After hitching up and going through the required procedure, pull ahead slowly to make sure the emergency brake is off and that the wheels are moving freely. You will know right away if the tires are not moving.

Get a tire-pressuremonitoring system.

Tire-pressuremonitoring systems (TPMS) have made areat advances in recent years, and many systems allow users to monitor the tire positions on both the motorhome and the dinghy vehicle in real time. When you've got as many as eight tires on the motorhome, and four more on the dinghy vehicle, a good TPMS can be worth its weight in gold, and go a long way toward making your trip worry-free.

• Use a rearview camera. Most motorhomes have a rearview-camera system, but some of them only turn on in reverse. Manually activate the rear vision, if possible, to keep tabs on the dinghy vehicle. If you get a flat tire, or something else goes wrong, you'll be glad you did.

on't back up.

Backing up with a dinghy in tow can cause damage to the tow bar and/or tow vehicle. Our advice is that vou become proficient at connecting/disconnecting the dinghy vehicle so you can move it independent of the motorhome when needed. Even more so than when driving just the coach, plan ahead and consider your anticipated route, such as maneuvering through a fuel stop with a dinghy tagging along, so you don't need to back up somewhere along the line. M

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<u>Dinghy 101</u>

The Right Stuff

A guide to tow bars and dinghy-braking systems designed to make towing convenient and

trouble-free By Chris Hemer and Bob Livingston

Tow Bars

Blue Ox

The two heavy hitters in Blue Ox's tow-bar arsenal are the Avail and Aventa LX. both of which are Class IV tow bars rated to tow up to 10,000 pounds, which pretty much covers every production vehicle that's likely to be towed as a dinghy. Finished in premium metallic paint, the Avail provides an improved turning radius for maneuvering around tight corners, while its longer legs keep the towed vehicle safely away from the motorhome. The Avail features patented, nonbinding latches that release easily under any conditions, according to the company. The Aventa LX is unique in that it features a ball-and-socket design that reduces wear, and Signature Series easy-release locking handles that make connecting/disconnecting a cinch. even on uneven surfaces. Plus, Blue Ox's exclusive triple-lug connection is said to minimize towing forces on the car. MSRP: Avail, \$995; Aventa LX, \$895-\$945.

Moving down a notch in capacity as well as weight is the aluminum Class III Aladdin tow bar, weighing in at 37 pounds and rated to tow up to 7,500 pounds. Like other tow bars in the Blue Ox family, the Aladdin offers a self-aligning, three-axis Blue Ox Aladdin

swivel design, Signature Series easyrelease locking handles and rubber boots that protect against road grime. MSRP: \$995.

The Alpha tow bar is rated to tow 6,500 pounds and features a selfaligning three-axis swivel design, Signature Series easy-release locking handles and offset triple lugs just like its upper-crust cousins, but in a lower weight rating. Made of good-old-fashioned steel, the Alpha weighs 41 pounds and includes 7,500-pound-rated safety cables. MSRP: \$745-\$995.

The virtually maintenance-free Class III Acclaim tow bar is rated for up to 5,000 pounds, and offers Signature Series easy-release locking handles for hassle-free disconnect. But unlike the other bars in the Blue Ox family, this easy-folding, self-aligning and self-storing bar mounts to the vehicle's baseplate. It automatically locks into towing position and detaches with just two pins. MSRP: \$645.

When you only tow occasionally, the odds are pretty good that you're only looking for a basic tow bar,

The Avail Class IV tow bar from Blue Ox provides an improved turning radius for easier cornering. and the Class III Adventurer fills the bill. It allows you to safely tow 5,000 pounds, yet weighs only 33 pounds. The adjustable legs expand up to 48 inches wide and fold easily for storage. MSRP: \$295-\$1,095.

All Blue Ox tow bars are backed by a 3-year warranty. Blue Ox, 402-385-3051,

www.blueox.com



Demco

When used with an appropriately rated hitch receiver, the cleverly named Excali-Bar II offers the highest tow-capacity rating of any steel RV tow bar on the market at 10,500 pounds, yet still weighs only 46 pounds. Featuring independent arms and a nonbinding easy-trigger release for fast hookup, the vertical bolt design allows the user to maneuver the tow bar one leg at a time, thereby eliminating the need to step over the bar when connecting/ disconnecting it. An adjustable towing angle, self-supporting arms and a standard 1 1/2-inch rise/drop receiver tube are just a few of the benefits included with this premium tow bar. MSRP: \$827.

The 7,500-pound-rated Dominator tow bar offers the same features as the Excali-Bar II, but incorporates steel and aluminum components into its modular design. By providing heavy-duty stress components, without welds on the main portion of the tow bar, Demco has created a strong, durable bar that weighs just 30 pounds. MSRP: \$1,108.

Unless you're pulling something like a full-size SUV or truck, the Commander will take charge of

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<u> Dinghy 101</u>

your towing needs with a 6,000pound tow rating. Incorporating steel components into its modular design, the Commander utilizes some of the same design elements of the Dominator tow bar, and the hallmark features of the Victory Series line, including independent arms, easy-trigger release, adjustable towing angle and a rise or drop male receiver. MSRP: \$670.

All Demco tow bars are backed by a limited lifetime warranty. Demco Manufacturing Co., 402-385-3051, www.demco-products.com

Roadmaster

Roadmaster's tow-bar lineup is divided into two categories: Classic and All-Terrain. The 6,000-poundrated Falcon 2 and vehicle-mounted StowMaster Classic tow bars offer features such as one-person quickconnect and disconnect at the dinghy vehicle, independently telescoping adjustable arms, self-lubricating nylon bushings, Autowlok locking mechanism. solid stainless-steel inner arms and a powder-coat finish for maximum durability. In addition, Roadmaster claims that these tow bars have the largest hookup radius in the industry, which means it's not necessary to line the car up perfectly - close is good enough. MSRP: Falcon 2. \$624: StowMaster. \$549.

The Tracker, meanwhile, is "the safest, strongest, easiest, most durable, trouble-free, 5,000-poundrated, A-frame tow bar manufactured," according to Roadmaster. This basic, car-mounted tow bar easily folds for storage with no tools, and the sealed tow-bar arms keep dirt and moisture out. Featuring a lustrous black powdercoat finish, the Tracker is designed for all 2-inch hitch receivers. MSRP: \$242.

First introduced in 2003, Roadmaster's All-Terrain tow bars offer all the features of its Classic tow bars, but the All-Terrain designation means these bars have specific design elements that make them easier to use when the road gets rough. The 6,000-poundrated Falcon is the best-selling tow bar in the world, according to Roadmaster, while the Sterling is billed as the world's strongest aluminum tow bar, using steel and stainless steel at every critical point for superior strength and structural integrity. The Sterling weighs just 35 pounds and comes with safety cables and a power cord, both of which are routed through a center channel for safety and a clean, uncluttered appearance. The BlackHawk2 is a beefed-up version of the Falcon, meaning it has all the same features but can tow up to 10,000 pounds. MSRP: Falcon All-Terrain, \$848; Sterling All-Terrain, \$1,068; BlackHawk 2 All-Terrain, \$1,020. Roadmaster offers a 2-year warranty when registered within 30 days. Roadmaster Inc., 360-896-0407, www.roadmasterinc.com

Brake Systems

Blue Ox

The Patriot is a portable, proportional braking system with some pretty cool features. You can monitor all brake functions or even manually apply the dinghy's brakes from the comfort of the motorhome's driver's seat using a remote control that continuously communicates with the braking system. A built-in battery ensures power is always there, and an electric cylinder means there are no air pumps, storage tanks or hoses. The Patriot self-calibrates with the push of a button and weighs just 15 pounds. MSRP: \$1,395.

Falcona

Roadmaster

Falcon 2

If you have a diesel pusher with air brakes, then you might be interested in the BrakeSafe. Compatible with ABS systems, without tapping into your towed car's braking system, BrakeSafe employs a push actuator mounted in the towed vehicle and uses air pressure from your motorhome's brakes to affect a smooth, quick stop. MSRP: \$895. **Blue 0x, 402-385-3051,** www.blueox.com







BrakeBuddy (Hopkins Manufacturing)

The Digital Classic is perhaps BrakeBuddy's most well-known braking system. Completely portable and weighing in at a feathery 11 pounds, the Digital Classic will reduce stopping distance by up to 50 percent, according to the company. Now featuring an LCD digital display for improved readability, the fully adjustable system is self-contained and can be installed in just minutes with no connection to the motorhome. The Digital Classic is backed by a 3-year warranty, and an extended 2-year warranty is available. MSRP: \$1.149.

The Vantage Select is unique in that it allows the user to choose between full and proportional braking using the wireless remote from the comfort of the motorhome. The remote also notifies the user of braking mode, a breakaway situation and offers diagnostic information. The Vantage Select is AA-battery powered (DC power plug included) and features automatic start-up at the push of a button. MSRP: \$1,499.

You could say that the Stealth is outta sight ... literally. Designed for permanent installation, the towed vehicle main unit can be mounted under the dashboard or in the trunk of the towed vehicle, and "on-thefly" sensitivity adjustment can be performed from the driver's seat in the motorhome. An interesting feature, though you may not need it, is that the Stealth controller can apply the brakes to either a dinghy vehicle or a trailer, and the company maintains that no other product offers this option. MSRP: \$1,099.

Hopkins Manufacturing Corp., 800-470-2287, www.brakebuddy.com

Roadmaster

The name pretty much says it all: Even Brake is a portable, proportional braking system. Constant, self-diagnostic testing monitors system status, and any change is transmitted to the monitor in the motorhome cockpit. Power Save low-battery protection will warn you of a low battery in the towed vehicle with LED and LCD



alerts, providing ample time to charge the battery. And, if the battery's voltage drops too low, the system goes into sleep mode while maintaining emergency braking power. Even Brake also offers "terrain sensing logic," so it automatically adjusts itself to uphill or downhill grades and rough terrain. Other features include automatic brake protection, onboard memory and a high-capacity air compressor. MSRP: \$1,537.

The 9700 is also a portable system, but instead of proportional braking, it offers selectable light, medium or heavy braking — or can be set up for breakaway only. The 9700 activates only when the motorhome's brake lights activate, so there are no falsebraking worries. MSRP: \$1,209.

Roadmaster Even Brake 🕶



Looking for something more permanent? The BrakeMaster is Roadmaster's "direct" proportional braking system, recommended if you don't frequently change motorhomes or towed vehicles. BrakeMaster connects directly to the motorhome's air or hydraulic brake system for reliable, proportional braking. Once installed, it's easy to connect (or disconnect) from the towed vehicle in less than a minute without any tools, adjustments or settings. Simply attach the ram to the brake-pedal clamp, secure to the floor or seat adapter, quick-connect the air hose, and you're ready to roll. The BrakeMaster weighs just 3.75 pounds and is only 17 inches long, so it stores almost anywhere. MSRP: \$573-\$1,234.

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LEISUREVANS.COM Leisure Travel Vans, Circle 136 on Reader Service Card

<u> Dinghy 101</u>



Roadmaster InvisiBrake

at all — at least, that's the thinking behind the InvisiBrake. Once installed, there's nothing to push, pull, set, adjust, activate or deactivate — and it's so small it can usually be mounted almost anywhere in the dinghy's interior or trunk. InvisiBrake is a fully automatic supplemental braking system that uses the electrical connections already in place on the towed vehicle (the towed vehicle's electrical harness) to brake at the same time as the coach. In other words, the same electrical signal that activates the towed vehicle's brakelights also activates Invisi-Brake. Plus, InvisiBrake connects directly to the towed vehicle's battery and trickle charges it during towing so it won't discharge. Invisi-Brake works on virtually any towed vehicle with vacuum-powered brakes, and comes with a two-stage monitor that displays braking activity, and an audible alert warns you if the brakes have been on too long. MSRP: \$1,081. Roadmaster Inc., 360-896-0407,

www.roadmasterinc.com



RViBrake

The RVibrake2 system is unique not only in the way it looks, but the way it works. Unlike most other portable systems, which are large and square, the RVibrake2 is lightweight and low-profile. And, instead of pushing against the driver's seat or a seat bracket, the RVIbrake2 housing pushes against the floor pan (where the seat is mounted) so there is significantly less deflection during braking. Setup takes less than 30 seconds, according to RVi — simply attach the brake-pedal clevis to the brake pedal, slide the unit against the floor pan or stop plate and plug in the 12-volt DC power cord. Then, push the green Auto Position button on the RVibrake2 control panel and the actuator pushes on the brake pedal, automatically positioning the housing against the floor pan. RVibrake2 creates proportional braking, and the wireless monitor allows you to make adjustments to the system's settings while traveling. As a side benefit, the RVibrake2 is compatible with the company's proprietary TPMS system. MSRP: \$1,150 RViBrake, 800-815-2159, www.rvibrake.com

SMI Air Force One -



SMI Manufacturing

Air Force One uses a pilot signal from the coach's air-brake system to deliver 100 percent, direct proportional braking. The system is composed of three main components: the Operating Unit, the Actuator and the Coach Air Assembly. The Air Force One Operating Unit mounts under



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<u>Dinghy 101</u>

The portable Delta Force braking system from SMI Manufacturing offers dual-signal, proportional braking and a host of proprietary features.

the hood of the towed vehicle. completely out of sight. It houses the vacuum generator for the dinghy vehicle's power assist and also the reserve air supply for the breakaway circuit. The brake actuator is also very small and mounts on the brake arm of the towed vehicle and secures to the firewall with just one self-tapping screw. Once installed, the entire system is invisible and always ready for towing with no setup or takedown. Air Force One fits all makes and models, and each system comes complete with everything necessary for the installation on the towed vehicle. MSRP: \$1.249.95

The Stay-In-Play DUO combines the power of air pressure and the gentleness of vacuum to provide the most powerful self-contained supplemental brake ever, according to the company. DUO uses the power and speed of air pressure to activate the towed vehicle brake pedal while creating vacuum for the power-brake system. DUO requires both deceleration and coach brake lights to apply the towed vehicle brakes instantly — there is no complicated gain or sensitivity to achieve the proportionate balance of brake effort. DUO's small operating unit is installed under the hood so you never know it is there, and the system does not have to be taken in and out for normal operation of the towed vehicle. In fact, there is no physical connection to the motorhome at all. MSRP: \$1,099.95

SMI claims that its Delta Force is the first and only dualsignal, proportional portable braking system. Designed for fast but secure mounting, the Delta Force features a ball-and-socket actuator, which makes it easy to work with irregular floorboards and offset transmission tunnels when mounting to the brake pedal. And, instead of wedging against the driver's seat. Delta Force uses a cable tether secured to the floorboard with just one selftapping screw. There's no need to fuss with the brake-pedal clamp either, because SMI's Set-It-Once design requires only that you adjust the clamp during your initial installation. Delta Force comes with an intuitive user interface, wireless CoachLink and a breakaway system. MSRP: \$1.199.95 SMI Manufacturing Inc. 800-893-3763, smibrake.com 🖾


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Noodle Kneeler

As an aging RVer, I found that tasks such as checking tire pressure and doing other needful services close to the ground has become more difficult, especially when getting back up from a kneeling position. I built a helpful device out of a scrap-wood frame, poolnoodle handles and a couple of cushions. Both the base and uprights are 18 inches. To keep tools within handy reach, I attached a plastic container to the side with screws.

Bob Frauenzimmer | San Clemente, California



Get Benched

We wanted more space in the dining area of our Forest River Lexington Class C motorhome, so we totally dismantled the booth dinette, leaving only the table. Then we built two benches with seat lids across the side wall and covered the benches with fabric. This new arrangement has created extra space to store linens, pots and pans, and more. When we want to sit at the table, we use two freestanding chairs. We are totally pleased with the outcome of our project. **Paulette and Dick Shenk | Spanish Fort, Alabama**

Weight Up

When flat-towing a dinghy vehicle, it's important your motorhome has a mud flap that works. Some of the loose-bristle or brush-type flaps seem to reach a horizontal position when the motorhome is traveling at highway speeds. My solution was to attach a long piece of 1¼-inch galvanized pipe hung with some light chain to the flap to help keep it in place.

Roger Youngman | Fresno, California 🖾





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.

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Lighting Up

Overhead and reading LED fixtures from marine supplier, Alpenglow, illuminate dark areas with minimal modifications

By Bob Livingston

Cost: **\$119-149** Time: **30 min** Difficulty: **3/10** ighting up the interior of a motorhome has become a science of late, namely because of the plethora of LED fixtures that have flooded the market. Until LEDs became costeffective — and provided greater intensity

— the choice was simple; you either used incandescent or fluorescent, the latter embraced mostly by those who frequented primitive locations. Alpenglow, a company that made its mark building quality overhead and bulkhead reading lights for the marine trade, has recently branched out into the RV field with two interesting lighting options. One is a surface-mounted fixture in two sizes and the other designed to appeal to readers.

The overhead lights take their cues from the marine industry and are framed in hand-rubbed wood offered in teak, cherry oak and mahogany. Built into the frame is a curved prismatic lens that is designed to handle rugged conditions and will not yellow over time, according to the manufacturer. The lens is sealed into the wood frame, which means it won't be dislodged while the motorhome is on the road; screws go through the wood for mounting, making the install solid.

There are two models; the Tuscany measures 10 by 6 by 2 inches and the Catalina is 7 by 7 inches but only 1 inch thick. We mounted the larger light under the overhead cabinets in the galley because this area was inherently dark due to poor lighting fixtures from the factory. The transformation here was dramatic with plenty of diffused lighting covering the entire galley counter. The switch allows the user to rock between high and low outputs or 600 and 300 lumens, respectively. Power consumption on high is .5 amps and .25 amps on low.

The Catalina was installed above a work desk, tucked into a cubbyhole in the bedroom. Again the area was dark and the 400-lumen output of the new fixture made a big difference. Even the low, 200-lumen setting improved the lighting in the area. Both fixtures can be ordered with a built-in red nightlight with high and low outputs — and controlled by a separate rocker switch.

Alpenglow also offers a Caribbean Reading Light that definitely has marine styling and function. We installed that one above the bed where the 3 7/8-inch-diameter articulating shade (up and down and side to side) showers the area with enough light for two people to read. It's on the big side so placement is important to keep from hitting your head when sitting up in bed. A rheostat allows the light to be adjusted from dim to bright, which is key to its operation, in our opinion.

All the lights are rated at 2,700 Kelvin and have a warm glow, rather than more harsh daylight LEDs. Installation is quick and simple requiring connection of only two wires, which were exposed when we removed the old overhead fixtures; it took a little more effort to fish wires to the reading light. Polarity is clearly labeled on the back of each fixture.

Opting for the night vision adds \$15 to the \$129 and \$119 price tags for the Tuscany and Catalina fixtures, respectively. The Caribbean Reading Light sells for \$119 or \$149 with the dimmable feature. These fixtures are obviously not cheap, but they are very high quality and will likely outlast the motorhome.

Alpenglow, www.alpenglowlights.com



 Installation requires connection of 12-volt DC positive and negative wires.
 Don't rely on color coding; check polarity of power leads before butt connecting wires.
 Caribbean Reading Light has metal on/ off rocker switch and rheostat to adjust intensity of the light, a feature which gives users better control for reading in bed.





RVibrake2

- One-Touch Auto Positioning
- 60 second installation
- Thin and light design
- Required in 49 States and all Canada
- Compatible with RVibrake Tire Pressure Sensors





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Tire Turmoil

Needing assistance resolving a tire-failure claim, two readers turned to Hot Line. They wrote:



When we bought a used 2007 Four Winds Hurricane, we also purchased a tire and wheel service contract. In October 2014 we had tire problems on the road and have tried for several months to get our reimbursement from the service-contract provider, Safe-Guard. According to the company, we did not get prior authorization for the work; we say we followed the correct steps. We hope Hot Line will be able to give us some assistance in settling this matter.

Charles and Wanda Gilman | Ava, Missouri

Difficulties with tire failures and their associated warranties are among the more common reader complaints directed to Hot Line. One thing that is fairly standard in such disputes is the requirement for obtaining prior authorization before making any repairs.

We contacted Safe-Guard on the Gilmans' behalf and received the following response:

Thank you for forwarding Charles Gilman's complaint. According to his Tire and Wheel Agreement, tires of the covered vehicle are eligible for repair or replacement when damaged as the result of a covered road hazard. Prior to initiating a covered repair, a call to the Administrator is required for a claim tracking number. In addition, the Administrator will not accept claims not filed within 30 days of the date the damage occurs.

Safe-Guard's records indicate that Gilman contacted our office Feb. 17, 2015, seeking to open a claim for two tires that had been replaced Oct. 30, 2014. According to the repair facility, it did contact Safe-Guard at the time of repair and again on Nov. 5, 2014. The repair facility also advised that only one of the two tires replaced actually suffered a blowout; the other was replaced at the customer's direction.

Safe-Guard's records indicate no contact from the repair facility; however, as a matter of customer service and in a gesture of goodwill, Safe-Guard has agreed to accept Gilman's claim for the tire damaged by the covered road hazard as if it had been properly filed. A check for \$505.29 has been mailed to Gilman. **Kenyetta Massiah, Legal and Compliance Safe-Guard Products International LLC Atlanta, Georgia**

Expedition: Reimbursement

Experiencing post-purchase problems with their motorhome, two readers asked Hot Line for help. They wrote:

66 We own a 2013 Fleetwood Expedition 38B that has had numerous issues, including a fuel-pump failure on the AC generator. We expressed our dissatisfaction to the dealer, Fleetwood, Cummins and Freightliner, and asked for a new replacement vehicle as well as out-of-pocket costs, fuel and lost wages for repairs. All parties told us they do not cover incidental costs. The dealer said it would sell us a new model, but we would have to take a loss on trade-in for our rig. Any help Hot Line can offer would be appreciated. Luanne and Walter Bungard Atlanta, Michigan

RV manufacturers seldom, if ever, take their rigs back or reimburse incidental costs. What they will do, under the terms and conditions of their warranty, is repair the unit and return it to proper working order. In reviewing the paperwork the Bungards sent to Hot Line, it looks as though most of their repairs had already been made under warranty. Work not covered included the replacement of two tires, the driver's side window, the turn-signal assembly, the generator's fuel pump and a broken bolt on the generator. The cost, according to the Bungards, was \$704.09.

Hot Line sent a letter to Cummins Power Generation/Onan to see if it could help the Bungards with the cost for the generator repairs. Soon after, the Bungards sent the following update:

66 We have been contacted by Cummins Power Generation regarding the generator repairs. The company will reimburse us \$49.46 for the labor to replace the fuel pump on the generator, but will not reimburse us for replacing the generator bolt — that would need to be addressed by Freightliner or Fleetwood. Thank you for your help. Any reimbursement at all is appreciated. **The Bungards M**

Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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





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By Ken Freund

Gas or Diesel for Full-timing?

We are considering full-timing when I retire and I would appreciate some advice. Having owned two gas-powered motorhomes, I am able to do a lot of the service myself. How do operating costs compare between gas and diesel models? We do not plan to travel all the time, but we would like to be comfortable for 10-plus years. Also, I have been happy with our Norcold refrigerator with an icemaker. Outside of the boondocking/power issue, is there any advantage to a residential refrigerator?

Donald Miller | Leesburg, Florida

This is a subject that could have whole books devoted to it, so I can only touch upon it here. If you intend to sell your home and live in your coach, you'll likely want a lot of space and carrying capacity, plus the capability of towing a dinghy. There are some heavy-duty gas chassis that can probably fill the bill. However, for ultimate long-haul prowess it's hard to beat a turbodiesel-pusher motorhome. If you plan to drive a lot, their superior fuel economy compared to gas models can help offset some of the higher initial cost over time. There are also excellent used coaches for sale, which reduces the purchase cost substantially if that is a major issue.

Diesels have larger, heavier and more expensive components than gas models, and require some specialized tools and equipment to do major repairs. However,



if you are a skilled do-it-yourselfer, it is possible to do many maintenance chores and minor repairs with mostly the same tools you have been using. Diesels tend to go a long time without requiring repairs, but when they do need them, they're expensive!

To determine some of the costs of operation, start by learning the oil capacities for the diesel and gas engines typically offered in motorhomes. Check the oil-change intervals, and research the cost of a gas-engine oil filter and diesel oil and fuel filters, the air filters and change intervals, and so on. Project these figures out over many miles of service and you can start to get an idea how the two compare for long-term routine maintenance costs.

If you spend most of your time in RV parks with shorepower, you'll be happy with a residential refrigerator. They typically cost less and get cold faster thanks to their compressor-type cooling unit. If you boondock, you'll need a robust solar-power system to keep the batteries charged to power the inverter, unless you're OK with running the generator. If you don't have the capability of charging the batteries properly when in a primitive environment, stick with the RV refrigerator.

Ghost Slideout

Adventurer 35U motorhome on a Workhorse chassis. The curbside slide mysteriously moves out about 8 inches every night. It doesn't matter if it is parked or I am driving down the road. While parked, the coach batteries are turned off, but of course the slides are powered from the engine battery. I always run the slide all the way out before retracting it. The switch clicks as tight as new and I have no idea where to look. Do you have any ideas?

Joe Russell | Sapulpa, Oklahoma

This coach has a pair of hydraulic slideouts and the curbside rear slide is an HWH 310 single-cylinder installation. The HWH hydraulic pump provides fluid power to operate that room and the solenoid valves on that pump control the slide. It's likely that the retract valve is leaking internally, allowing the room to creep out. The hydraulic cylinder is double-acting and there's the possibility that the rod-seal could be leaking or bypassing internally. This could also allow the room to creep farther than would be typical of a failed solenoid valve. Any RV repair shop that works on HWH systems should be able to tackle this.

Towing a New Beetle

This is in regard to the question by Vicki Cosier and your response in the August issue. Yes, the older Bugs can be towed four down. However, it is also possible to tow a new Beetle four down. Remco, the towing experts, says virtually any front-wheel-drive vehicle with a manual transmission can safely be towed four down. I have towed a 2013 VW Beetle for more than 100,000 miles with no problems. By inserting the key into the ignition, turning it on, and off, and leaving the key in the ignition, you unlock the steering wheel and are not drawing any power. Put the

RV MARKETPLACE









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



COACH & POWERTRAIN

gearshift in NEUTRAL, the parking brake off and you are good to go. Jim D. | Via email

Remco is one of the leading authorities on flat towing, and many people tow vehicles like the Beetle without drivetrain modifications and don't experience mechanical breakdowns. The problem is that VW does not approve any of its cars for towing four down. Therefore, if you run into a drivetrain problem and the dealer sees towing equipment on the vehicle, it might decline repairs under warranty. That is one of the reasons MotorHome does not list vehicles that may be towable, but are not approved for it, in the annual dinghy towing quides.

Skid Rollers

Can you help me find hitch-bar skid rollers for my Class A diesel? I have tried to contact Paktron Industries in Northridge, California — the only supplier I could find for the items — without any success. The company has a website and contact number that it will not respond to. I have not been able to find any other supplier that makes them. **Mike Churchill | Oregon City, Oregon**

For readers who are unfamiliar with the term, these small "skid roller" wheels are affixed under the rear of an RV and are designed to keep the bumper and other parts, including the hitch receiver, from dragging or scraping if you encounter a driveway entry that is too high or an angle that is too steep. I tried calling Paktron Industries and was unsuccessful, so I drove over there to have a look. The building is now occupied by another company and they don't know what happened to Paktron.

Fortunately there are other sources. Camping World (www.camp ingworld.com) stocks a number of skid wheels that fit different types of RVs. And another source is www.etrailer .com. Some may require welding during installation.

Towing a 2003 Jeep Liberty

I am planning to tow a 2003 Jeep Liberty 4x4 to the Lower 48 from Alaska. I want to rent a tow dolly. When I told this to U-Haul, it refused to rent me a dolly and wanted me to pay another \$300 for a trailer. I need some kind of documentation proving it can be dolly-towed. I am having a heck of a time finding the owner's manual online (as I lost mine). Can you help? Jessica McCullough | Soldotna, Alaska

Not only can it be dolly-towed, the 2003 Liberty with 4WD is towable on all four wheels with the transfer case in NEUTRAL and the transmission in PARK. You can download our 2003 Dinghy Towing Guide, which shows this, from our website (www.motor home.com/download-dinghy-guides). Jeep owner's manuals are available online at www.jeep.com/en/owners/ manuals. However, the oldest ones are for 2004 models. You might be able to find a 2003 manual on eBay or you can order one for \$30 from TechAuthority, https://www.techauthority.com.

Motorhome Steps Inoperative

We have a 2006 Georgie Boy motorhome. Last year I had to put a new motor on the stairs mechanism. Yesterday, the stairs stopped working again. I checked the battery and fuses and was told they have more than one fuse. Where is the fuse located, if there are two? I need help and suggestions. Sandy Keller | Bradenton, Florida

I don't have a wiring diagram of your coach, but manufacturers usually don't put two fuses in one circuit like this. Motorhome power steps have interlocks that keep them from extending while driving. If the fuse is good, it's more likely that circuit is causing the problem. Check for power at the mechanism, and also a good ground connection. Often steps are damaged by bumping curbs and other obstacles, and get jammed, or electrical connections get corroded. Start by running a temporary jumper wire from the battery to the step motor to be sure it's still working and proceed with your troubleshooting from there.

LED Source

This is regarding one of your letters about LED bulb replacement. I was looking for the automotive side of the RV to know what the replacement bulb would be for a No. 67 bulb with 4 C.P. or a No. 1156 bulb with 20 C.P. Please let me know if they have an automotive-type equivalency chart to LED bulbs.

Dave Rumohr

Harrison Township, Michigan

For automotive bulbs, try www .superbrightleds.com/car-bulbcross-reference. You can find an equivalency chart at www.dilligot.com/ chart-equivalence-led-light,us,8,39 .cfm. Camping World also offers bulb replacements for RV interior fixtures.

Flat-towing a Toyota Tundra

I have a two-wheel-drive 2003 Toyota Tundra with an automatic transmission. Can I flat-tow it? Kenneth Davis | Via email

Your truck is not flat-towable as is. The owner's manual should show you the towing limitations; towing long distances will damage the transmission. Check with Remco for towing solutions (800-228-2481, www.remco industries.com).

One Drip at a Time!

I own a 1994 Class A Winnebago 34-foot Vectra with a GM 454 TBI engine with 27,300 miles on it. Last year I found a small coolant drip on the parking pad. A couple times, after a week or so, there were more drips. The reservoir level fluctuates normally between cold and hot levels. The only drip I could find was from the vent hole in the flex plate cover and, with the cover removed, between the oil pan and flywheel. There is no visible evidence of a leak from the intake or cylinder head gaskets and the oil level is normal.

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Is there a frost plug or other exit point on the back of the engine above the pan and between the flex plate/ transmission? Is it possible to have a cracked block without it having been frozen or overheated? Is there some way to fix whatever it is without pulling the engine or transmission out? **Doug Warnecke | Harwood, North Dakota**

My initial reply to Warnecke was A that it is unlikely, but possible, that the block or a head has a tiny crack, even if it wasn't frozen. However, the more likely possibilities are that a core plug is rusting through or otherwise leaking. With a 20-year-old engine I'd suspect rust, particularly based on the photo sent showing so much rust in the area. There are several holes on the back of the block that have press-in or threaded plugs. I've also seen blocks with porosity in the metal, which results in a leak from a water passage. I had one of these and we drilled the block and welded it closed. Screw-in or press-in plugs can be replaced fairly

easily. In any of these cases, the transmission has to come out to see and access the back of the block.

I recommended putting a coolant pressure tester on it with a few extra PSI to see if it can trigger a leak. Fluorescent coolant dye and a black light can be used to help spot the source. I'm not a fan of stop-leak products, because they tend to clog heater cores and radiator tubes, etc. However, if finding it requires transmission removal for access, and you understand the risks and are trying to postpone the need for a fairly expensive repair, you might try that first.

I heard from Warnecke again: "After visiting several truck repair facilities, I found a good shop in Fargo, North Dakota — Wallwork Truck Center. Prior to removing the transmission they noted antifreeze traces along the side of the oil pan and located a missing screw-in drain plug on the left-side bottom of the engine block. They poked around a bit and sure enough it was rusted over on the inside of the block; enough that it didn't leak except under higher pressure. They confirmed it by pressurizing the radiator. So, \$194 later I had a new \$1.22 steel plug! It would appear that whoever drained the block in the past removed the plugs and forgot to reinstall the last one, or it had fallen out somewhere. Thank you, Ken, for your quidance, education and experience. Invaluable to us conclusion jumpers!"

Basement Heat

We are new motorhome owners who own a 1999 Newmar Dutch Star and we are in the over-55 category. We canceled a recent trip because of the weather; we were concerned that having a morning shower might become a problem. We are in Alberta, Canada, and the temperature was just below freezing at night. I was worried that the basement piping might freeze and split lines. I do not think my coach has a heated basement. Is there a viable option to heating a basement? I am not comfortable placing an electric heater in the basement due to the potential fire hazard. Are there other options? Shawn Luker | Via email

Although it's good to err on the side of caution, if the weather only dipped slightly below freezing for a short time, the natural insulation provided by the basement enclosure would likely have protected the plumbing from freezing. Some of the things you can do include insulating the basement compartments or adding insulation to the water lines using products available at home supply

stores, and adding heating ducts to direct some warm air into the spaces. You will also need to provide vents for the air to exit the confined spaces.

Visit your Newmar dealer, or any knowledgeable motorhome service center, and have a technician examine your coach and tell you how much insulation exists in the basement and plumbing areas. A Newmar factory tech rep could also (continued on page 88)



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(continued from page 52) made by Fiamma. You just need to remember that this is still a van, so walking on the roof is not advised, and Winnebago places a sticker on the roof with a warning to that effect.

The 59K's electric awning got a lot of use, and not just to shade us from the sun. During a couple of evenings with light rain, it gave us a perfect place to stay dry while enjoying our dinner and looking out over a meadow. We listened to music via the exterior speakers while the porch light shed just the right amount of light. Note that LED lighting for the awning is not available on the 59K with the roof-mounted kayak racks.

After five days RVing in the easyto-handle Travato, we discovered that there was no way to be inconspicuous in the Flame Red 59K. It was an attention-getter that turned the heads of many ... including a black bear. We spent just one night at an RV park, and as the bear ambled uninterested past a row of RVs, he paused by the Travato. Or maybe it was just our imagination.

While the tendency is to seek outof-the-way places, owners need to exercise caution when traveling rough roads: The dump valves, generator enclosure and exhaust hang low and could be easily damaged if there's not adequate clearance. In fact, a question we were asked frequently was if the Travato was four-wheel-drive because it looks like it should be.

Whether people were tent camping or in the smallest or most ginormous RV, they wanted to know where we were going and where we had been. After being invited in to look around, the most frequent comment was "Nice setup you've got!" The 59K beckons to adventure-seekers who want to bring along their toys while having all the creature comforts. And it was set up for towing for those who want to bring along more toys. Looking for adventure and want to be less flashy? Other color options include Granite and Bright Silver.

Winnebago Touring Coach

641-585-3535, www.winnebagoind.com

COACH & POWERTRAIN

(continued from page 85) supply that data over the phone.

Cruise Control and Speedometer Quit

I have a 2000 Coachmen Santara with a Ford 6.8-liter V-10. When traveling out west, the speedometer, odometer and cruise control stopped working. Also, around 65 mph, the engine bucks, stopping me from going any faster. I went to Ford and they lifted the rear wheels off the ground and said the computer is reading the speed and that I should go to an RV repair shop. I went there and they told me it's a Ford problem. Where do I go next? John Randazzo | Dallas, Georgia

The cruise control, speedometer and odometer rely on the signal coming from the vehicle speed sensor (VSS), which is located on the upper portion of the rear-axle differential housing on the driver's side. If the powertrain computer is getting speed signals, it indicates that the VSS is working. However, the signal may not be getting to the speedometer and dash cluster. This will require some wire tracing and troubleshooting. Since your coach is out of warranty, it doesn't matter if you go to an authorized Ford dealer or an independent shop. Look for one that does a lot of chassis and electrical work, or an auto-electric specialist. Bucking and speed limitation are probably related to the speedometer malfunction as the transmission needs a speed signal to operate properly. Get the speedometer problem fixed before chasing the drivability problems, as they likely will go away when the speedometer is working again. 🛯

Have a Tech Question?

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Heavy Metal

Meet a Calgary-based master tinkerer who makes travel dreams come true one heavy-duty rig at a time

By Alan Rider

uch like Santa's toy factory, Gregg Shields' Calgary, Alberta, Canada, workshop turns out products that put smiles on the faces of kids. In this case though, we're talking about big honkin' toys for grown-up girls and boys.

Raised on a farm outside Edmonton, my friend, Gregg, developed a love of tinkering at an early age. He was the kind of youngster who took things apart just to have the satisfaction of putting them back together again.

Today, Gregg and his family live on 3 acres outside Calgary, amid snowcovered farm fields that stretch to the horizon. After building and selling two successful computer-networking companies, however, he's finally returned to his mechanical roots with an operation he calls RV Haulers (877-631-0060, http://rvhaulers.ca).

In a concrete shop building on the edge of town, Gregg and his small team produce some of the most headturning motorhomes you're ever likely to see. Transmogrified from heavy-duty highway tractors, his RV Haulers combine the best qualities of both motorhomes and tow vehicles into one flexible — and very capable — package.

Meticulous by nature, Gregg starts this conversion process by combing the used-truck market to find "cream puffs" with as much as 500,000 miles of life left. He then personally inspects every truck, looking for both well-known issues and often-overlooked problems. He's also developed

Smart Hauler ⊛

Master tinkerer Gregg Shields turns heavy-duty trucks into motorhomes that make it possible to carry a smart car and still tow a large trailer.

a feel for what his clients want, including features like easy-to-drive automatic transmissions and models with roomier cabs.

Once he gets his latest prize back to the shop, the real work — or, for him, fun — begins. At the very least, Gregg ensures the truck is painstakingly pored over top to bottom, replacing questionable parts and performing routine inspections and maintenance including new fluids and filters. The truck is also "singled," a process that removes one of the stock rear axles to improve fuel economy and reduce maintenance costs.

After all that heavy lifting is done, the process of turning these trucks into vehicles that can be legally registered as motorhomes is relatively straightforward. Adding a few simple extras like a shorepower hookup, an inverter, a small built-in refrigerator and microwave, and a cassette toilet is usually enough to qualify. While virtually all his builds get these same upgrades, however, at the end of the day every truck he personally delivers to its new owners is unique.

That's because the range of available modifications is almost limitless, from rear decks to carry motorcycles or even a smart car to adding a second row of seats and a DVD video system in the truck's sleeper to keep kids back there (or adults, for that matter) entertained as you roll down the road. Built-in bunks with restraint harnesses also make a great place for a little siesta while your partner takes their turn at the wheel.

There are other practical benefits too — like a tighter turning radius than many pickups and being able to effortlessly tow the biggest trailers around (no commercial driver's license required). Not to mention decent MPG numbers and being able to cover as much as 3,000 miles between fill-ups.

But at the end of the day, the fact is that driving a heavy-duty rig is just plain fun. Even the biggest downside is relatively easy to live with: namely that Gregg's RV Haulers will be an instant conversation starter wherever you go.

Ultimately though, Gregg understands quite clearly what he's really building: a way for his customers to finally realize their long-dreamed-of travel adventures. The kind that can only be found out there on The Road Ahead.

"Transmogrified from heavy-duty highway tractors, his RV Haulers combine the best qualities of both motorhomes and tow vehicles ... "





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