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MARCH 2011

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MAINTENANCE**

**PARK HOPPING IN
THE FLORIDA KEYS**

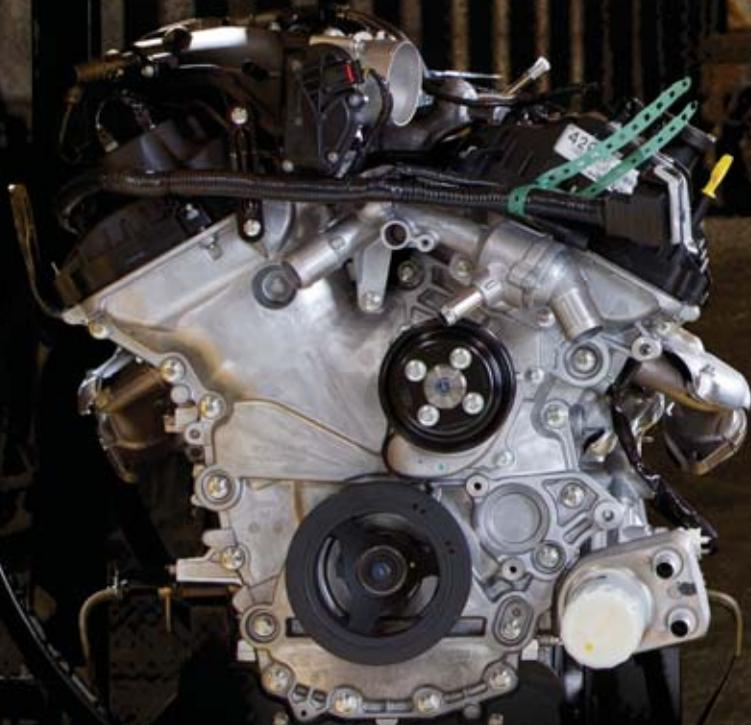
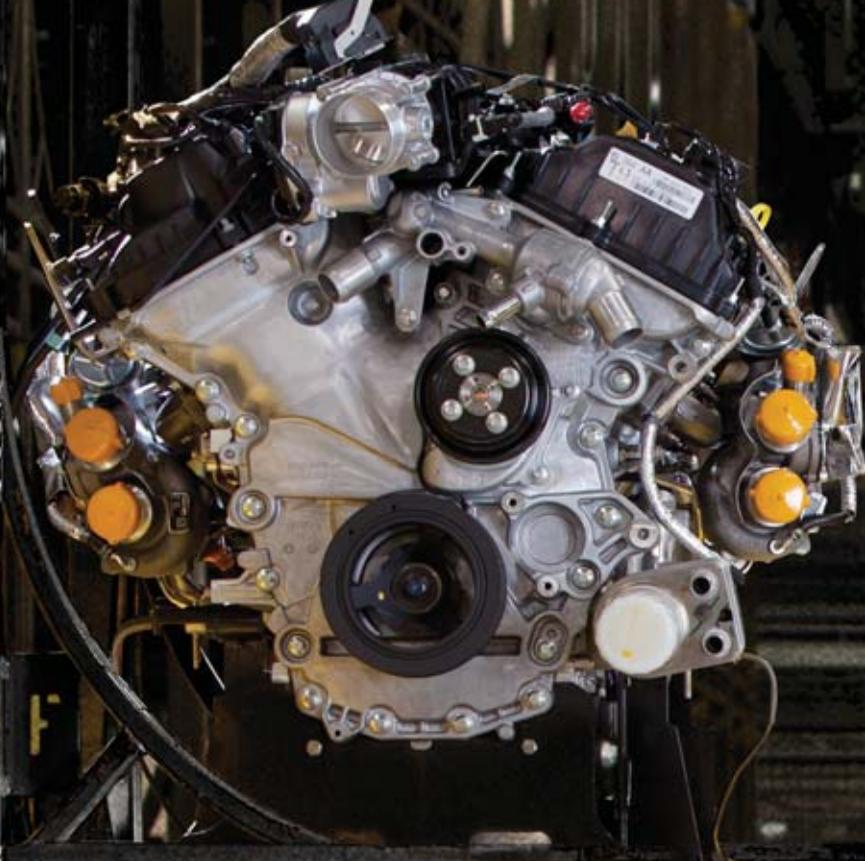
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User Guide

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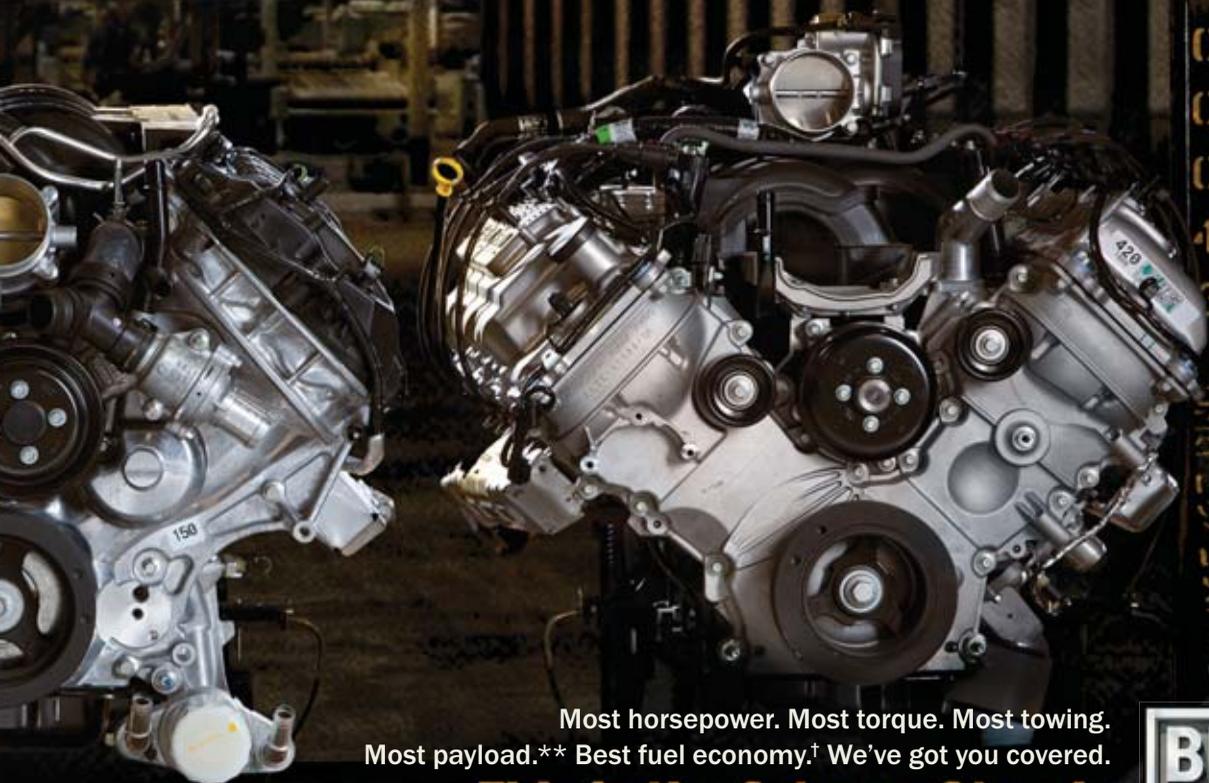


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RVers hike among the wildflowers near California’s Borrego Palm Canyon Campground. See story on page 22.

Photo by Donna Ikenberry

www.trailerlife.com

DRIVER'S SEAT

by **Kristopher Bunker**



MARCHING ON

The fact that the RV industry continues to thrive is a true testament to its staying power. Impersonal hotel rooms don't allow for you to bring along all the essentials, and airline travel is becoming more complicated, cumbersome and expensive with new check-in regulations and hikes in baggage fees looming. However, taking your RV filled with all the comforts of home remains the most attractive — and practical — method of seeing the countryside and visiting family and friends.

So it should come as no surprise that vehicle manufacturers are continually striving to make the overall RVing experience better than ever.

While lightweight, eco-friendly materials continue to be the norm for RV manufacturing, some improved livability features are beginning to take hold as well. Thoughtful designs including full-service outdoor kitchens, expanded exterior storage and rear hatches all highlight some of the more innovative floorplans that have emerged this model year.

And perhaps the most exciting news is that, despite the overall improvements in amenities, quality and ease of use, new RV buyers aren't faced with skyrocketing prices for overly elaborate products. Instead, manufacturers are doing their best to keep costs down, while still improving the overall bang for your buck.

To learn more about the latest developments in new RV models, check out "2011 Showstoppers" on page 40.

But the improvements aren't confined to RV manufacturers. Recognizing the long-term cost (and safety) effects that misaligned trailer axles can impose, Rieco-Titan has developed an aftermarket version of its Correct Track, which was previously only viable to those with access to a proficient welding shop. After installing the new Correct Track II, RVers can enjoy peace of mind (and a fuller wallet) knowing their trailer axles are aligned properly, which lessens tire wear and improves overall safety. Turn to page 55 to read more.

And there's still one more group who should heed the call to improving product life and durability: the RVers themselves. Yes, we, too, have a responsibility to keep our noble steeds in tip-top shape, for our safety and for others. Now that spring is upon us, and we're itching to hit the road again, it's a great time to inspect one of the most important components of an RV. Failing to maintain the roof over our heads can have disastrous consequences, from unsightly appearances to expensive damage from a leak. So, turn to page 45 for some helpful hints on RV roof maintenance — with some added tips on keeping your trailer's awning in good working condition.

Now that we're all on the same page and continuing to look for ways to improve the RV experience, let's be sure to have a safe and happy travel season. 

TRAILER LIFE

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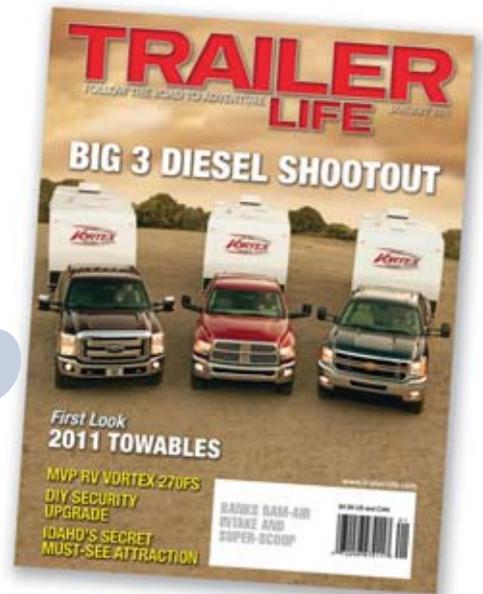
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TRAILER LIFE March 2011 **5**

from our **Readers**

I grew up in Greenville and have been amazed at the transformation of the little town next door.



BIG THREE SHOOTOUT

Your January article, "Diesel Shootout," is good but doesn't push the trucks to their limit. I'd like to see you max the trucks out at 20,000 pounds and tackle a grade similar to I-70 west of Denver, Colorado; then we'll see which one pulls a heavy load under extreme conditions the best. My experience with a fleet as well as towing an RV would lean toward the inline-six engine. Typically the V-8 has quick snap, but I find it to be lacking on a heavy long haul.

Norm States, Brooksville, Florida

LIKE RIDING A BIKE

We enjoyed reading Bruce Leonard's *The Outsider* column in your January issue. There's a terrific 13-mile bicycle/walking trail that begins in nearby Travelers Rest, South Carolina, and ends in downtown Greenville. RVers can park their rigs at a Super Walmart about a half-mile from the beginning of the trail. You can even rent a bike from a vendor in Travelers Rest. I grew up in Greenville and have been amazed at the transformation of the little town next door. Thanks for a great magazine!

Kathy Wheale & Bob Cathey, Greenville, South Carolina

HOT IN HERE

I found the *RV Action Line* complaint about the air conditioning on the Heartland Fiver interesting (January issue). At the fall 2007

To contribute to this column, write to 2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001, or e-mail info@trailerlife.com.

RV show in Portland, Oregon, I ordered a new 2008 Big Horn 3055RL, requesting an optional second air conditioner. The sales person talked me out of it, saying the trailer was built so well only one was needed. We were then near Phoenix in July of 2009 when it was 117° F. The one air conditioner was virtually worthless. Other than that, we have no complaints with this trailer.

Alan J. Wedding, Paulden, Arizona

CABIN BY THE STREAM

I always enjoy reading my issues of *Trailer Life*. Bill Graves' "The Cabin by the Stream" hit me close to home, as I lived in the townsite of Caliente and was well familiar with Mr. L'Amour's cabin. I thought you'd want to know that a flood of the Caliente

Canyon in 1983 completely washed away the cabin and several other historical residences located there. The picture was a jog down memory lane for me.

Don Hill, Via e-mail

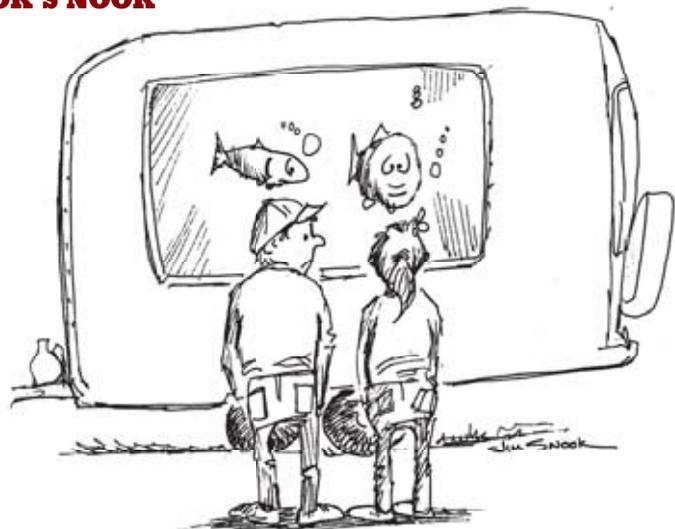
CAMPGROUNDS NEAR WILLIAMSBURG

I was disappointed in your RV park suggestions in "A Colonial Christmas" (December 2010). In fall 2006, we made our usual RV trip to Williamsburg with our 2007 32-foot BHS Keystone Hornet.

We now camp at least twice yearly at the well-kept, concrete-padded, full hook-up American Heritage RV Park (888-530-2267, www.americanheritagervpark.com). We highly recommend this RV park.

Claude Alley, Bowie, Maryland

SNOOK'S NOOK



"Looks like somebody left the water on ... again."

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User Guide

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AROUND

NEWS • EVENTS • SERVICES • PARKS & RV TRENDS

THE BEND

Edited by **Marleen Canniff**



THE EAGLE HAS EXPANDED

Designed for today's lighter trucks, the Eagle Super Lite Half Ton is the newest addition to Jayco's line of Eagle travel trailers and fifth-wheels. At just less than 30 feet long and a 7-foot 11-inch interior at its highest point, this fifth-wheel boasts a top-level certification through the use of sustainable materials, environmentally friendly production methods, energy-efficient components and reduction of waste. Standard amenities include a full-body fiberglass exterior, 15-inch Goodyear radial tires, suite-style closet slide in bedroom, deep kitchen sinks, a 26-inch LCD HDTV with 180-degree viewing angle and other quality features. msrp is \$30,550. **To learn more**, call (800) 785-2926 or visit www.jayco.com.

2011: THE YEAR OF FORESTS



The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2011 as the International Year of Forests to bolster efforts to promote sustainable management, conservation and development of forests worldwide. This year, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) — in partnership with its sister federal land management agencies, as well as state, private and other partner organizations —

will host and coordinate many activities to celebrate the International Year of Forests. Public events include Earth Day, Arbor Day, National Get Outdoors Day and National Public Lands Day. As part of the yearlong effort, the Forest Service is seeking volunteers for work that includes maintaining and hosting campgrounds.

For more information about volunteering, visit www.fs.fed.us/fsjobs/jobs_volunteers.shtml.

WICKLIFFE MOUNDS

Archeologists call western Kentucky the "Vacant Quarter" because the Mississippians, whose villages dotted the river banks there from 1100 to 1350, disappeared sometime before 1400. French explorers traveling the Mississippi in the late 1600s saw no one from the Illinois to the Arkansas. Although it's not known what caused the disappearance, remains of this once-vast culture was discovered in 1930 at Wickliffe Mounds State Historic Site in Kentucky, just off of U.S. Highway 51.

The site, once home to about 300, was purchased by relic collector Fain King in 1932. He directed excavations over the next seven years, which destroyed half the mounds, but four remain and are open to the public. Exhibits explain that ceremonial Mound A was probably the village's center of economic, political and religious activity. Mound B was home to a chief. Mound C, the cemetery, provides information about burial customs, life expectancy and more, and hundreds of artifacts from Mound D interpret the lifestyle of these "peaceful farmers, hunters and fishermen." Today Wickliffe Mounds belongs to the Commonwealth of Kentucky.

RV parking is available, and Columbus-Belmont State Park (about 20 miles south) offers a fine campground with hookups. **For more information about Wickliffe Mounds and about Kentucky's state parks**, call (270) 335-3681 — for camping call (800) 255-7275 — or visit www.parks.ky.gov. — *Pamela Selbert*



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For more information, call (269) 467-6321 or visit www.vikingrv.com.

APPS TO HELP RVERS SAVE MONEY

With more Americans aware of how much they're spending and where they are spending it, Pedata RV Center has released its suggested list of the top three smart phone applications to help RVers save money on gas:

1. **WHERE:** This application combines GPS and GasBuddy to get RV travelers gas prices from the closest gas stations. This free application is made by uLocate Communications.
2. **FuelGage:** This application is made by Joseph Kueser and costs only 99 cents. It tracks mileage and offers quick comparisons of performance. It can track multiple vehicles and tally trip totals. It's particularly useful for splitting gas costs.
3. **NetRouter:** This application saves fuel by creating optimal routes.

VOTE FOR YOUR FAVORITE CAMPGROUND

To celebrate its 75th anniversary and release of the 2011 *Woodall's North American Campground Directory* commemorative edition, Woodall's Publications is searching for North America's 100 preferred campgrounds and RV parks through its "Woodall's Vote for Your Favorite Campground Sweepstakes."

Campers who vote will be entered into the sweepstakes for a chance to win a seven-night cruise for two in the Hawaiian Islands, including airfare to Honolulu. The owner of the campground or RV park with the most votes will also receive the trip to Hawaii. The sweepstakes ends on September 15, 2011, and the top 100 campgrounds and RV parks will be revealed in November at the National Association of RV Parks and Campgrounds (ARVC) annual trade show in Savannah, Georgia. Entries for the sweepstakes will be accepted at campgrounds and RV parks by texting the park's personalized cell-phone code, or by voting at www.woodalls.com/myfavoritecampground.



NEWSWIRE

After seven decades of mostly uninterrupted growth, U.S. gasoline demand has declined four years in a row and will not reach the 2006 level again, even when the economy fully recovers, experts say. It is predicted that by 2030, Americans will burn at least 20 percent less gasoline than today — even as millions more cars clog the roads ... **The U.S. Department of Transportation** proposed a new safety regulation to help eliminate blind zones behind vehicles that can hide the presence of pedestrians. The proposal, issued by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), would expand the required field of view for all passenger cars, pickups, minivans, buses and low-speed vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating of up to 10,000 pounds so that drivers can see directly behind the vehicle when the vehicle's transmission is in reverse.



To meet the requirements of the proposed rule, 10 percent of new vehicles must comply by September 2012, 40 percent by September 2013 and 100

percent by September 2014 ... **A new website dedicated to golfers and RVers**, www.GolfandRV.com, focuses on helping its users plan golf and RVing vacations. It features RV resorts and golf courses that are in close proximity, and users can browse a directory to plan their vacations at resorts and parks in the United States and Canada ... **About 25 percent of pet owners** have taken a vacation with their animals in the last two years, according to results of an Associated Press-Petside.com poll conducted last fall by Roper Public Affairs and Corporate Communications. Seventy-five percent of the owners found the trip to be more enjoyable than stressful. Among pet owners, those with dogs (31 percent) were more likely than those with cats (19 percent) to bring pets along on the trip. Kampgrounds of America reported that based on registration forms, 55 to 60 percent of its campers travel with pets. That's up from about 45 percent eight years ago, according to a KOA spokesman ... Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TrailerLifeMagazine.



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AROUND

THE BEND



PHOTO BY GLENN GROSSMAN

GEORGIA'S CHERRY BLOSSOMS

If you thought the cherry blossoms in Washington, D.C., were unmatched, then you need to check out the Cherry Blossom Festival in Macon, Georgia, from March 18-27. Deemed the Cherry Blossom Capital of the World for its 300,000 Yoshino blooming cherry trees, Macon is the spring travel destination for thousands of RVers. This annual 10-day festival attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors each year with features such as parades, concerts, fireworks, amusement rides, dances, arts and crafts and much more.

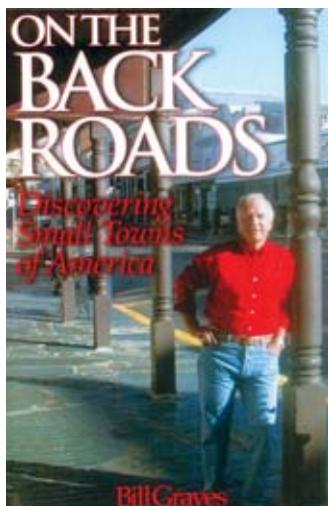
To learn more, call (478) 751-7429 or visit www.cherryblossom.com.

FREQUENT FUELER POINTS

Pilot Flying J has launched Frequent Fueler Advantage, an enhanced loyalty program where RV customers can earn rewards at more than 550 participating locations.



RV cardholders will receive instant discounts on fuel, LP-gas purchases and dumping fees. Also, RV cardholders will soon receive discounts at the truck diesel islands in addition to the specified RV fueling lanes. All you have to do to start earning points is visit the cash register at any Pilot or Flying J location to pick up your new loyalty card, then register it immediately at an in-store kiosk or online at www.frequentfueleradvantage.com.



ON THE BACK ROADS

Retired and free to roam in his RV, former naval officer and the man behind *America's Outback*, Bill Graves (aka the RV author), logs 4,000 off-the-beaten-path miles through America's Great West in his book, "On the Back Roads: Discovering Small Towns of America." This free-spirited travel writer journeys with his dog to some of the most obscure and intriguing small towns. Along the way he meets the locals, each with a story to tell. Gene from Mina, Nevada, works three jobs at age 73 in this one-sidewalk town. John explains that it's a city ordinance to own a gun in his town of Chiloquin, Oregon. Madge, a woman who married a man from a Western novel, tells how the silk hat replaced the beaver hat in Pinedale, Wyoming. And Afton from Hurricane, Utah, hunts ants for a living. These are the people who make up America, and Graves shares their stories and many other quirky anecdotes while revealing hidden facts and bits of history about each town that may have otherwise been left unknown. "On the Back Roads" is a treat for all RVers and anyone who believes the journey is what's important.

To order your copy, call (402) 330-7493 or visit www.addicusbooks.com. 📖

LUCKY ST. PATRICK'S DAY RV DESTINATIONS

You don't have to be Irish to celebrate St. Patrick's Day — you just have to be lucky enough to have a parade, green beverages, Irish music, food and a nearby RV campground. As luck would have it, we found terrific RV St. Patty's Day destinations in each section of the United States.

North: New London, Wisconsin — The festivities begin when leprechauns change the town's name to New Dublin for the week, and the parade, corned beef and cabbage, Irish music and dancing keep the party going. Campground: Yogi Bear Jellystone Park Camp-Resort, www.campjellystone.com.

South: Savannah, Georgia — Yum ... green grits for breakfast, a parade and city fountains running green mark this event. Campground: Red Gate CG & RV Resort, www.redgatecampground.com.

East: Boston, Massachusetts — Bean Town first threw this Irish party in 1737, and it's been improving every since. Campground: Canoe River Campground, www.canoeriver.com.

West: San Francisco, California — The parade follows the trolley tracks through the city, drawing millions of people. Campground: San Francisco RV Resort, www.sanfranciscorvresort.com.

Midwest: Chicago, Illinois — The Windy City not only puts on two great parades, the Chicago River is even dyed green for the occasion. Campground: Sand Creek Campground, www.sandcreekcampground.com.



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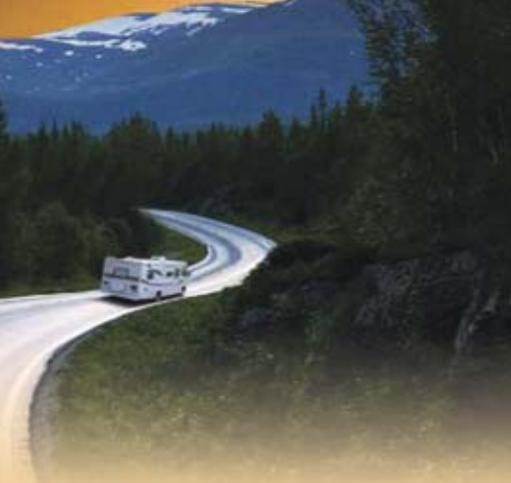
- 15 to 22 miles per gallon
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- Comfortable to drive in
- Comfortable to live in
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- Separate eating & sleeping areas
- Sleeps up to 4
- Up to king-size bed
- 4 year/48,000 mile motorhome warranty



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RV ACTION LINE

Views from the Road

Al Luehmann and his wife, Mary, are committed RVers from the North Star State of Minnesota. When they're away from home, Al and Mary enjoy our country's beautiful landscape in their 2007 Itasca Horizon motorhome, spending the winter months in Casa Grande, Arizona.

Al describes his time on the road as "a way of life after you retire. I have a whole new set of friends from around the country - we've become a family."

Even when traveling, he enjoys the comforts of home, including live TV. Al chose DISH Network to bring TV to his RV because of the unique service benefits.

"The ability to deactivate it whenever we aren't using the motorhome is a terrific feature. Plus, the rate was better than the competition, and we can get high definition free. I would highly recommend DISH Network service."

And what does he watch most when on the road? "Sports - the (Minnesota) Vikings and Wild, and my wife is a Jimmie Johnson (NASCAR) fan."

So what's next for Al and Mary? "Nova Scotia - beautiful country - and Yosemite."

Happy travels.



Al and Mary traveling the country



STUBBORN STAPLE

Feeling the pinch after a camper manufacturer refused to offer any assistance for what it saw as a "pre-existing" condition, a couple turned to *RV Action Line* for help:

We have been trying to get compensation for what it cost us for the extra labor to have an air-conditioning unit installed on our Adventurer Camper. During installation, the technician discovered that a staple had shorted out the wire. He said it may likely have been punched through the wire during the manufacturing process. This led to an additional expense of \$287.50.

When we attempted to get reimbursed, Adventurer denied the claim based on the fact that the unit is out of warranty. We feel this is not a warranty issue, but a defect in the manufacturing process.

Of course we were not going to be aware of the problem until we decided to have an A/C installed. We had never "used" the pre-wiring until having the A/C installed years later.

We feel Adventurer Camper should at least pay the \$287.50 as a goodwill gesture.

Carrie Rechel, Fallon, Nevada

It seemed as though the Rechels had a case here, until we heard from Adventurer, who told us the camper is 7 years old. Uh oh. This basically means the "pre-existing" condition likely happened years ago. Though there are warranties that cover an RV that far out, Rechel never mentioned if she purchased an extended warranty.

We forwarded Rechel's letter to Adventure LP. The manufacturer's response is one we've seen many times, and can be summed up in just a few words: Read and thoroughly understand your vehicle's warranty policy.

Thank you for your recent inquiry into Adventure LP's warranty policy on behalf of Darrel and Carrie Rechel.

Enclosed, please find a copy of the Adventure Warranty. It is clear and concise, and the owner's interpretation of defect versus warranty may be a matter of semantics: Defects and workmanship fall under the guidelines of "warranty." As stated, the warranty is for "repairing or replacing any part or parts therein deemed to be defective upon manufacturer's examination for three years from the original purchase from an authorized dealer." The original in-service date was June 9, 2004.

In an effort to protect our customers' investments, we are very liberal with our warranty; however, there are multiple reasons for denying this claim. First, even if the camper were still under warranty, no pre-authorization was obtained; second, that authorization would have had a provision for the work to be performed by a service center/dealer authorized by Adventure LP; and third, the Rechels neglected to include in their letter that the camper is six model years old, so the warranty expired more than three years ago.

Additionally, the case is based on something that "may have" happened. Potentially, manufacturers could receive blind claims such as this with that assertion on an ongoing basis.

The Adventure LP warranty meets or exceeds industry standards. I believe we are certainly within industry guidelines of our review and determination to deny this claim.

Jeff Gaskell, Operations Manager, Adventurer LP. 📧

After exhausting all other resources without success, please forward information (typewritten only) with copies of appropriate bills and correspondence to *RV Action Line*, 2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001. Please include a self-addressed, stamped envelope. No phone calls.

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THE OUTSIDER ❖

by **Bruce Leonard Jr.**



FINE COUNTRY

“THE SIGNS ON THE FREEWAY EASILY DELIVERED ME TO THE RESORT, AND WHEN I SAW THE PROPERTY ARRAYED BEFORE ME I SAID ‘WOW’ OUT LOUD.”

Neck-deep inside the warm, soothing pulses of one of the two spas that bookend the pool at Pechanga RV Resort, I felt the big-city stresses melt away, then wondered why it had taken me so long to visit this fantastic resort in Temecula, California.

Located off Interstate 15, between Los Angeles and San Diego, Pechanga Resort & Casino pops up on my TV regularly, the excitement of the property and the prospect of riches captured in commercials on the faces of extremely attractive people. I knew the property existed but had never met anyone who had experienced the resort. The next time Pechanga blipped into my consciousness, however, I decided to fill up the rig and go.

The signs on the freeway easily delivered me to the resort, and when I saw the property arrayed before me I said “Wow” out loud. I had been to some casinos, Indian and otherwise, that underwhelmed or downright disappointed, yet Pechanga Resort & Casino is at the opposite end of the spectrum — a first-rate operation throughout. I can see it completely eliminating the need for Los Angelinos or San Diegans to go to Las Vegas.

After my balmy dip, I walked the few hundred yards from the RV park to the main facility. As I entered the casino door, the word “Wow” again emanated from my lips. The largest gaming floor in California — more than 200,000 square feet — lay before me like an endless array of possibilities. No Vegas casino has more than the 3,000 slot machines that entice Pechanga’s patrons. More than 130 table games tempt those who prefer their gambling to involve human interaction. Nine restaurants deliver a stunning variety of cuisine, and, unlike in Vegas, I didn’t feel I needed to win big before I could afford to buy a meal. I wandered around, admiring the layout and the décor, until it was time to take my seat at a poker table to play in a Hold’em tournament.



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THE OUTSIDER

I've spent many hours — possibly too many — in dozens of poker rooms, and have won and lost in oodles of tournaments. The 54-table poker room at Pechanga, when I factor in the friendliness of the dealers and the efficient manner in which the tournaments are run, rates at the very top. And I make this claim after having been wiped out that night. I spent an hour and a half milking my chips, hoping for a playable hand but not so much as finding suited connectors, let alone a pair. My luck was better in the buffet, however, where I dined on one, then another, of the best slices of turkey breast I've ever eaten. Then I walked back to the RV park.

To say that Pechanga RV Resort is well-run is an understatement. The staff was so friendly and the facilities so immaculate that I wondered whether I was on Candid Camera or, to update the reference, wondered if I was being Punked. RVers, of course, differ in their camping preferences, but unless travelers insist on settling their rigs lakeside among pine trees, most everyone will appreciate the quality displayed throughout Pechanga RV Resort.

Especially golfers. Across from my site sat two gorgeous Class A motorhomes with golf bags at the ready. I asked the gentlemen if they had played the course on property, Journey at Pechanga, the 10th hole of which lay just on the other side of their rigs. They smiled, and one of them asked, "You haven't?" When I answered no, he said, "Boy, are you in for a treat."

But my fellow RVer was wrong: Journey at Pechanga is not a treat but an 18-course gourmet meal, replete with an appetizing practice facility, delicious scenery, fortifying elevation changes, mouthwatering design elements and greens so sublime that it seems that every hole ends with dessert.

The key to playing Journey is to secure an early tee time, because afternoon winds can drastically change the complexion of a round. The opening hole is an impressive par 5 that introduces players to the preponderance of enormous oaks that seem to force strategic decisions about alignment on nearly every hole. And the fifth hole,

which demands a tee shot over water and a risk-reward decision regarding how much of the creek to flirt with, ranks among my favorite holes on any course. Golfers should be advised that, when the wind blows, the course plays significantly tougher than the yardage and the slope might signify: I played with a 10 handicapper who claimed at the end of the round that he lost four balls; he was a nice guy but his counting skills were lacking, since I saw him lose eight.

A mere five-minute drive from Pechanga RV Resort sits another quality course that is far more affordable than Pechanga, though not nearly so immaculate the day I played it. Redhawk, also in Temecula, a town known for its fine wines and wineries, features the single most beautiful hole I played that week: Number eight, named Ray's Creek, is redolent of Augusta National, with a profusion of yellow flowers adorning the tee box, a carry across water and a stone bridge to the right of the green — all helping to create a gorgeous and great hole. Two of the other par threes on Redhawk are also excellent, though I'm certain that the green on the fourth hole should be redesigned.

And while on the subject of redesign: The only hole I did not like at CrossCreek, also in Temecula, was the 18th, which is a shame, since I loved this course so much that I returned to play it the next day. Holes seven through 11 showcase CrossCreek's charms and challenges so well that golfers who complain about canted fairways and extreme elevation changes should sell their clubs on eBay or recalibrate their worldviews. That CrossCreek costs range from \$39-\$55, including cart, renders this course fantastic.

Although I did not visit a single winery, my visit to Temecula proved to be intoxicating. 🍷

CrossCreek Golf Club, (800) 506-3402, www.crosscreekgolfclub.com.

Pechanga Resort & Casino, (866) 991-7277, www.journeyatpechanga.com.

Pechanga RV Resort, (866) 997-8386, www.pechangarv.com.

Redhawk Golf Club, (800) 451-4295, www.redhawkgolfcourse.com.

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THIS LAND

POINT REYES NATIONAL SEASHORE

by **Len Cousineau**

In 1579, the explorer Sir Francis Drake landed along a rugged section of coastline on the continent's western edge. Drake found Coast Miwok Indians living in the region, gathering berries and acorns and hunting for game and fish. The area was granted the name La Punta de Los Reyes by the Spanish explorer Don Sebastian Vizcaino in 1603. This wild, windswept terrain, defined by the 10-mile peninsula that juts into the Pacific Ocean, officially became known as Point Reyes National Seashore in 1962.

Only about an hour's drive north of San Francisco, this rich compilation of wildlife and coastal wilderness may as well be on another planet, so different is it from Fisherman's Wharf. Yet Point Reyes deals in extremes: Visitors can relax in the unpopulated tranquility of the beach that is buffeted by crashing waves one day, then have trouble hearing their own thoughts or opening the doors of their RVs, because the wind blows so fiercely and so often at the seashore. Winds have been clocked here at 130 mph and average about 43 mph. Yet Point Reyes is also the second foggiest place on the continent, trailing only Nantucket Island in Massachusetts.

Although this multifaceted seashore features only walk-in campsites, travelers who do not spend the night will have no trouble filling a day's visit. From January through March, visitors who make their way approximately 21 miles from the Bear Valley Visitor Center to Point Reyes Lighthouse will likely see gray whales heading south, often in large numbers. Near the lighthouse, visitors can watch from the Sea Lion Overlook as sea lions and harbor seals haul themselves out of the cold water. Among the grassland and scrub of Tomales Point, tule elk roam, and visitors are likely to encounter numerous black-tailed deer feeding in early evenings in the pastures. Approximately 45 percent of the bird species known to exist in North America have been observed at the seashore, more than 480 species and counting. And wildflowers bloom from March through May.

Yet Point Reyes' topography and earthquake history may fascinate visitors as much as its fauna and flora do. 🚗

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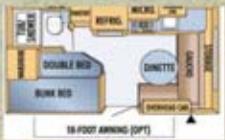
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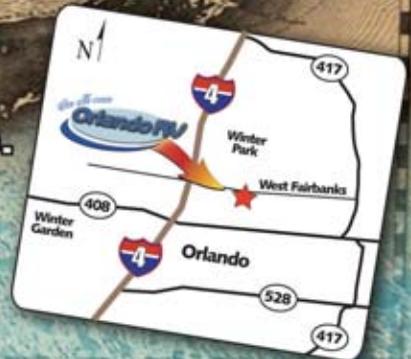
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AWESOME ANZA-BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK



PHOTOS BY DONNA IKENBERRY

VIBRANT WILDFLOWERS BLOOM IN CONTRAST TO A HARSH LANDSCAPE

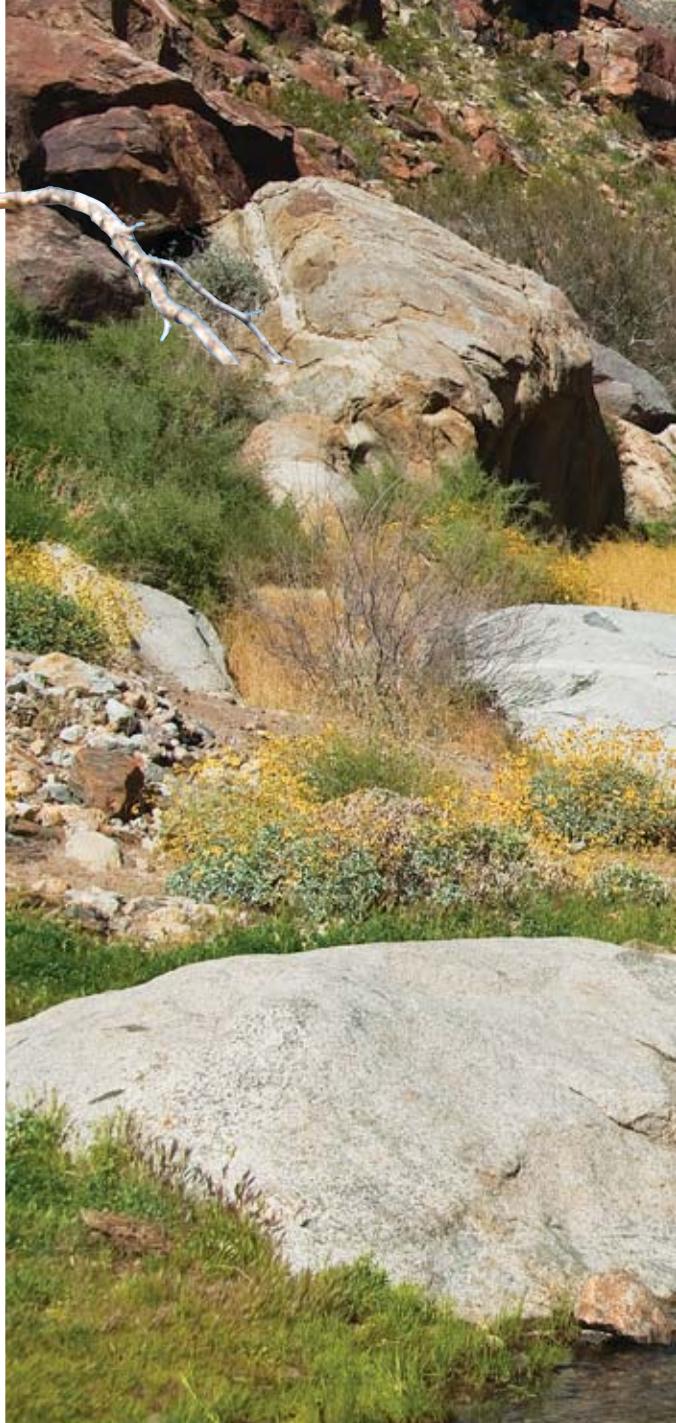
by Donna Ikenberry

California's Anza-Borrego is a must-see anytime you're in the area — anytime, that is, except for summer, when temperatures frequently reach triple digits. Yet visits to this desert state park in the late winter/early spring are ideal, when the wildflowers are in bloom.

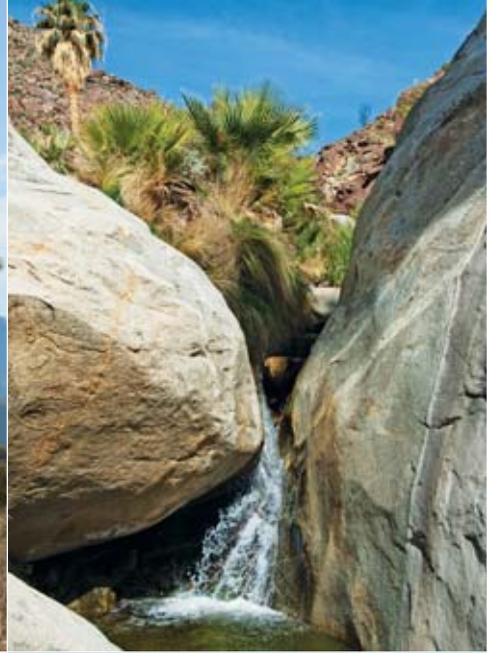
My husband Mike and I made a recent visit to Anza-Borrego, and we were in awe of the beautiful colors from the blooms. Joining others who were searching for the same flowers, we arrived on a Sunday and got one of the last campsites available. Fortunately, things quieted down on Monday and Tuesday, as we drove the park roads and hiked its trails in search of barrel cactus, California primrose, monkey flowers and other beauties.

Anza-Borrego attracts a crowd during wildflower season,

Top: Fishhook cactus blossoms. **Top right:** Borrego Palm Canyon is a hiker's paradise with palm trees, flowers, a stream and other desert gems. **Right:** Lesser goldfinches find water on a leaky spigot. Desert blister beetles on brittlebush are a common scene in this state park. Beautiful desert lilies somehow manage to survive through the arid and harsh environment.







Mornings are spectacular in Borrego Palm Canyon Campground, with waterfalls, desert plants and vast views of the terrain — all close by.

but being that it is California's largest state park, visitors can still find plenty of room for spreading out and enjoying some solitude. Encompassing 600,000 acres, the park is a land of deep, palm-filled canyons, endless panoramas, badlands and soaring crags. And in the spring, there are the wildflowers, a potpourri of color and variety.

There's no charge for entering the park, but you must pay a day-use fee upon exploring the realms of Borrego Palm Canyon and the Vern Whitaker Horse Camp. The park boasts of developed campgrounds with drinking water, toilets, showers and picnic tables; some sites even sport a shade ramada. All of the developed campgrounds charge a camping fee. If you want to camp in the backcountry, you can for no charge. Anza-Borrego remains one of the few places in the country where open camping is permitted. If you choose to camp in the backcountry, be sure to stay 100 feet away from any water source, bring a metal container to hold your fire (no wood-gathering is permitted), park on the side of the road so others may pass, and do not trample vegetation or drive over geological formations. Of course, you must also pack out what you pack in.

The visitor center is a good resource to learn more about this vast park. Volunteer naturalists give talks, most of which

last about 40 minutes and are held outdoors or inside an air-conditioned classroom, depending on the temperature. Unique programs provide information on the park's plants, wildlife, fossils, geology and much more. Nature walks often begin at the visitor center. The walks are easy (about a half mile) and last about 45 minutes. Campground campers can attend free evening programs. Campfire programs are held primarily on weekends at Borrego Palm Canyon and Bow Willow campgrounds.

Some of the park's many roads to explore are paved, but about 500 miles of road are not. We traveled both paved and unpaved roads, happening upon carpets of wildflowers, ocotillo with red flowers blazing, roadrunners racing and black-tailed jackrabbits bounding across the desert. We hoped to see Peninsular Bighorn Sheep, to no avail. An endangered mammal and the park's namesake (borrego), we searched for them on rocky slopes above the desert floor.

One morning we made the side trip out to Font's Point. Here we watched the golden rays of light embracing the Borrego Badlands. We felt the magic of the park; the silence of solitude, the sweet whisper of a gentle breeze, the squeaking of wings as a lone raven flapped by. We were a mere 75 miles east of San

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Diego, but a world away from rush-hour traffic and the millions of inhabitants who ply the nearby land.

As we traveled the scattered segments of the park, hopscotching through both private and state lands, we found isolated pockets where hardy souls live year-round. Although the land has been inhabited for more than 4,500 years, relatively few choose to make the desert their year-round home.

While not the most popular place to live, each year more than one million visitors are drawn to the park — one of the richest living museums in the country. The landscape in the area today is much different than that of 4,500 years ago, when the first inhabitants arrived. Then it was lush, well-wooded, well-watered and probably teeming with animal life. The first Spanish explorers, however, found a drier climate, much like that of today, when Pedro Fages first surveyed the new kingdom, Alta California, in 1772.

As in many parts of the West, gold seekers made their claim with thousands of immigrants traveling the Southern Emigrant Trail in search of enough gold nuggets to last a lifetime. Soon after, the Butterfield Overland Stageline carved a piece of history, one that would extend to San Francisco. Later still, cattlemen and prospectors tried to master a land too rugged and savage to control.

Today's visitors can enter the park from several directions, but the best place to begin is at the visitor center, located less than two miles west of Borrego Springs on Palm Canyon Drive. The center is open daily from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., October through May, and on weekends from June through September, but contact the park for possible changes.

In addition to wildflowers, Mike and I searched for a variety of bird and plant life. There are 225 species of birds, 60 reptiles and amphibians, and more than 60 different mammals in the park. Plant

life is varied as well. In addition, Borrego Canyon harbors one of the 25 native groves of California fan palms found in the park. The largest palm in North America, these palms require a continual supply of water and are found in desert oases from Death Valley to Baja California. The oases attract a variety of birds, reptiles and mammals, making them a pleasant spot for human visitors as well.

Another must is a stop at Carrizo Badlands Overlook, located at the south end of the park, just a few yards off paved Highway S-2. From here a carpet of yellow and purple wildflowers painted the foreground, while the badlands held untold secrets of the saber-toothed cats, mastodons, zebras and camels who roamed the region more than a million years ago.

In addition to driving quiet roads, we hiked many trails during our stay. Ask if we had a favorite, and I'd have to say no. We enjoyed them all, mostly because they were so very different. We hiked up

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the Borrego Palm Canyon Nature Trail on a hot spring day. Along the way we found Gambel's Quail, house wrens, and at the end of the trail we found a native palm grove with shade, small waterfalls and cascades and plenty of water for cooling off. We also hiked around Coyote Canyon and found wildflowers, as well as White-lined Sphinx caterpillars, and the friendliest of lark sparrows and Costa's hummingbirds, too. One day we visited Blair Valley, where we hiked the Morteros Trail. We also found Indian grinding holes in the boulders along the easy trail and discovered a pictograph-covered boulder, where we marveled at ancient artwork.

We visited Elephant Tree Discovery Trail on the hottest of our days at Anza-Borrego, but it was worth enduring the heat to see the rare elephant tree as well as wildflowers galore and some interesting insects called blister beetles. What fun we had sitting and watching the beetles collect pollen and mate.

The Tamarisk Grove area offers up two lovely trails. The first trail lead us to Yaqui Well. The well was dry and is suppose to remain so, but the walk there was laden with wildflowers as well as flowering Century plants. Near the dry well we also saw a pair of nesting Phainopeplas. The second hike is on Cactus Loop Trail, which offered many varieties of flowering cacti, most of which were blooming and in full glory.

Visitors often ask the park employees about when the wildflowers will be bloom, but that is a difficult question to answer. A distinctive blend of sun, wind, water and temperature sets the stage for the springtime bloom. Winter rains in small doses are needed. Too little rain means poor seed germination; too much rain and the seeds may rot or wash away. Temperature is critical as well. Warm days are good. Hot days means parched and scorched seeds and seedlings. Desert winds matter, too. No one really knows the prime time

for wildflowers from year to year, as each wildflower season is unique, but typically you'll see them start to bloom from late February through March.

Visit Anza-Borrego when the wildflowers are in bloom and you'll find the park as awesome as we did. 🚗

For the latest in wildflower news, call the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park Wildflower Hotline at (760) 767-4684. You can also check out the Web at www.parks.ca.gov and click on Anza-Borrego Desert State Park.

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SISTERS ON THE FLY

**WOMEN DRAWN TO THE DREAM OF FUN, FISHING
AND RVs – WITH EMPOWERING RESULTS**

by **Becky Blanton**

It's a lot of credit to give a fish, but Becky Clarke and her sister Maurrie Sussman say the 8-pound brown trout that flopped its way into the sisters' drift boat from a cold Montana river in the summer of 1999 deserves it. They say catching that fish is why they are who they are today — the founders and matriarchs of "Sisters on the Fly," a group of women who like to camp, fish, enjoy the wilderness and caravan around the country with their vintage trailers.

From humble beginnings, the group was founded when the sisters caught that trout and then shared a celebratory glass of wine afterwards. "From that moment on, we decided to share that feeling, that whole experience with our friends," Sussman said.

"And so Sisters on the Fly was born," said Sussman, sister No. 1. Each time a woman joins the club she is issued a certificate and a number. Clarke is sister No. 2. The lower the number the longer the woman has been in touch with her inner cowgirl, as SOTF — as members call it — is all about finding that sometimes forgotten child inside.

"It's like Girl Scouts for grownups, only with martinis," Irene Rawlings (sister No. 1,322) explained. Rawlings, who recently wrote a book about the sisters, called "Sisters on the Fly," spent several months meeting and interviewing more than 150 women who make up more than 1,700 sisters. The book was published in May 2010 and has since become a bestseller. She's not surprised. Women are drawn to the dream.

"They're amazing women," Rawlings said. "They totally devote themselves to their inner cowgirl. These outings are not only empowering, but they're one of the few groups where women can go and be a girl again, and then go back home and be the civil engineer or the federal judge or whatever they are in their daily lives." Rawlings isn't exaggerating about the Girl Scout mindset, or about getting in touch with your inner cowgirl.

Learning how to host a potluck, paddle a kayak or sit by a campfire smoking cigars and discussing politics will all earn you a merit badge.

Joining the SOTF and getting your own unique membership number to paint on your trailer opens the doorway to sisterhood. But learning how to hitch up your own RV, fix a flat tire, build a campfire, saddle or ride a horse, catch and

Top: (left to right) Amy Nicely, Mary Miller, Christine Cox, Sharon Barton, Patti Kofp, Leora Hunsacker and Vicky Kimling, standing in front of Christine's trailer. Left to right: Eclectic memorabilia, boots and other vintage cowgirl necessities decorate every inch of some trailers, while others select specific themes. Making comfortable and decorative cushions for your dinette is easy and fun to do — and wire and wicker baskets are great for storage. Becky Clarke (Sister No. 2) stands outside Twisted Sister, a trailer she restored from top to bottom. It took six months to sand and finish the outside.



PHOTO BY ALISON TURNER



PHOTOS BY HEIDI PAUL/DAVID FOXHAVEN

release a mountain trout or find the Big Dipper on your own and bond with more than a thousand other women are what's empowering.

Membership in the SOTF does three things. First, it gives women an excuse to paint cowboy scenes on their RVs and wear cowgirl gear. Second, it provides numerous opportunities to park by a stream, and revel in fly-fishing, fresh air and fun times with other women, and third — perhaps most importantly — it empowers women in the most important ways. Men compete, but women bond. And nowhere do they bond more passionately and loyally than at an SOTF rally.

Tucked away among the fly rods, the carefully tied flies, the cowboy kitsch and mornings around a campfire are extra special things — that essence Rawlings and Sussman call sisterhood. Mingled among the wood smoke and the smell of bacon frying and coffee perking is the fragrance of family. It's a subtle scent — one of women discovering themselves and empowering themselves in the wilderness.

"It's not about catching all the fish in the river," Sussman said. "It's about the entire experience, the woods, the river, the women, the eagles. We have experienced women teaching women who have never driven a truck how to hook up their trailer and tow it down a dirt road, or back it into a camping spot. It's a lot different than having your husband or brother or boyfriend or son teach you."

"It's about having 1,400 sisters, one big family willing to do for each other like family does," Rawlings said. This may mean teaching a skill, or it may simply mean being there as another member goes through cancer treatments or family difficulties. The bonds last far beyond the wilderness. Many members continue their social connections away from camp. "I know one sister's son was headed to college and his car broke down," Rawlings explained. "She got online and found a sister she'd never met who helped him get his car fixed and gave him a place to stay until it was." Sisterhood is multifaceted like that.

Cassandra Rose-Barnett worried about being able to handle the tough cowgirl image, but not for long.

"My husband travels with the railroad," she said. "I go with him sometimes. One of those times I saw a magazine article in a Laundromat with a story about the sisters. I held onto the article for years because I liked the pictures. Then I turned 50, and I found the article again and said 'What am I waiting for?'"

Rose-Barnett called the group and said, "I don't fish, I don't know how to drive a truck and I don't have a trailer. I don't know if I'd fit in or not. They told me that was okay. We do more than fish, and you'll fit right in." They were right. She did.

So she found a trailer on craigslist, painted a pink stripe on it, went with an all-pink interior motif, strung pink panties on a

Top to bottom: Zola Liner (Sister No. 682) reaches for food during the opening potluck at the California SOTF unofficial meet up in Kernville, California. Joyce LaDuke's (Sister No. 425) cruiser parked next to her trailer. Janet Castagnola (Sister No. 511) in the doorway of her trailer. Trompe l'oeil wagon wheels, logs, whiskey barrels and a trotting horse give a glimpse into the love Karen LeGlue (Sister No. 459) has for all things Western.



PHOTOS BY ALISON TURNER

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clothesline across the back, loaded up a pink bicycle, a pink sewing machine and pink chairs, and she became sister No. 1,138. She hasn't regretted a day since. She's also learned the group goes antiquing, does crafts and even does raft trips and things she's learned to love. "I'm having the time of my life," she laughed. "I don't know why I waited so long to join."

In the 1970s and '80s, empowering women was all about the workplace — making them wage earners and bosses. But empowerment means more than financial and political strength. It means increasing the spiritual, social or emotional lives and the strength of individuals and communities. SOTF does that, all under the guise of "having fun," and that's why it works.

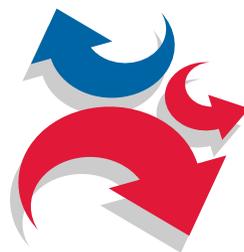
"Of course it's empowering," Sussman said. "People learn best when they're having fun, and we have a lot of fun."

Empowerment almost always involves the empowered person developing confidence in her own capacities. And that's what Sussman and Clarke envisioned when they decided to "share the adventures of sisterhood." There's no better place to learn what you can do than on a trout stream. Although fishing is not required, nor is a trailer or having any camping skills, it's hard not to get caught up in the outdoor adventure. Even if you have absolutely no experience in the wilderness, there's a sister who can teach you what you need to know — from dumping your holding tanks if your trailer has them, to earning the most coveted "Nymph" badge (for running naked in the woods). Women who prefer to keep their clothes on can earn the "Cowgirl Couture" and, of course, "The Hostess with the Mostest" badges. It's all in good fun, but the underlying message is, "You can do anything you want to do."

The sisters have only four rules, members said: "No men. No dogs. No kids. Be nice."

The member sisters aren't the only women finding strength in women-only RV and camping groups. The Silver Sisters, a smaller, more recently formed group of women who all own Airstream trailers, also gather annually or semi-annually to celebrate being women with an

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Denise Saldana-Beste (Sister No. 761) stands in front of her 1958 Chinook, Shantilly Lace. When she bought it, her brother-in-law called it a shanty and the name stuck.

RVing bond. These women teach each other how to tow their trailers and empty their holding tanks, hitch up their rigs and even how to swap out LP-gas cylinders and fix flat tires. Like Sussman,

Silver Sister founder Kristiana Spaulding says a hands-on approach with another woman teaching you how to back up a 32-foot Airstream, or how to attach a black-water hose, or jump-start a dead

battery is a lot less stressful than learning from your husband or partner, no matter how much you love them!

“It’s less stressful and more empowering,” she said.

RVing Women, one of the earliest and longest running groups for women who RV, recognized that women RVers wanted to learn how to use their rigs, how to be independent and to connect with other women back in 1990. Demand was so great from women that RVing Women outgrew its office in a fifth-wheel and moved into a permanent location in Apache Junction, Arizona.

Years ago women may have found self-esteem in the boardroom, but now they’re finding it in campgrounds, and no one sees the trend slowing down. And why would it?

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FLORIDA KEY HOPPING

THE REAL FLORIDA IS AWAY FROM THE CROWDS — WHERE AN RVER CAN GET A LITTLE R & R

by Leslie Fisher



PHOTOS BY LESLIE FISHER

As the sun dipped below the watery horizon, the wispy clouds blanketing the blue sky turned a fiery shade of orange. I heard the sound of cameras clicking behind me as our neighbors at Bahia Honda State Park closed in on our campsite, which had the best view of the most amazing sunset I had ever seen. This was the Florida Keys I'd come for — beautiful, natural and relaxing.

There is another version, full of crowds, kitschy gift shops and endless entertainment, but with 10 state parks dotting this chain of islands, it's easy to get away from it all and enjoy what the parks system likes to call "The Real Florida."

We'd been in the Sunshine State for just over a month, spending time along the Forgotten Coast and in St. Augustine. But my husband, Gabriel, who spent part of his childhood in Florida, had always wanted to see the Keys, so we pointed our Winnebago View south and began down Interstate 95. We did some boondocking along the way and spent a couple of treacherous days in Everglades National Park, with no hookups and lots of alligators. After all that "roughing it," I was ready for some R & R.

The portion of the Keys island chain, connected by the Overseas Highway (U.S. 1), extends about 125 miles off the

southeastern tip of Florida and is comprised of five major areas — Key Largo, Islamorada, Marathon, Big Pine Key and Key West. It takes just more than three hours to drive from Miami International Airport to Key West; but, in this part of the country, it's all about slowing down, so we eased off the pedal and spent several days traveling down the Overseas Highway, stopping and staying a while at a couple of state parks along the way.

Of the state parks, four offer RV sites with hookups — and at \$36/night, they are some of the most affordable accommodations in the Keys. However, you have to plan ahead, as the parks fill up quickly. Reservations can be made up to 11 months in advance through ReserveAmerica (800-326-3521, www.reserveamerica.com).

The northernmost of the four is John Pennekamp Coral Reef State Park, located in Key Largo (305-451-1202). It is the nation's first underwater preserve, created in 1960 to help preserve the only contiguous living coral barrier reef in the continental United States. The park offers scuba diving and snorkeling trips to the reefs — or visitors can enjoy a glass-bottom boat tour aboard a 65-foot, high-speed catamaran. (Tickets are \$24 for adults and children older than 12.) Rental boats are available at the marina. Power boats, kayaks, canoes





Clockwise from top: After hiking the nature trail at Curry Hammock State Park, Gabriel Fisher enjoys a secluded ocean view. Kayaks, available for rent at Curry Hammock, give visitors an opportunity to explore the park's shallow waters and mangrove creek. Pathways offer easy access to the beach for visitors at Curry Hammock State Park.

and paddle boats are also available. The campground, which is closed until April for upgrades, has 47 full-facility sites, which can accommodate RVs up to 45 feet.

Less than an hour south of Pennekamp is Long Key State Park (305-664-4815). It includes 60 campsites with water/electric overlooking the Atlantic Ocean and can also accommodate RVs up to 45 feet. (The campground will be closing soon for an undetermined amount of time for improvements.) Popular activities include hiking the two nature trails, paddling the lagoons, flats fishing and bird-watching. The park also offers easy access to Islamorada — known for its world-class sport fishing. There, you will also find four day parks, three of which have no admission fee: Indian Key Historic State Park, Lignumvitae Key Botanical State Park, and San Pedro Underwater Archaeological Preserve State Park. And Windley Key Fossil Reef Geological State Park is just \$2.50/person.

Next up is Curry Hammock State Park,

located just one mile north of the city of Marathon in the Middle Keys (305-289-2690). This small, scenic park boasts a 1,600-foot beach and 28 water/electric sites, which can accommodate RVs up to 70 feet.

Visitors to the park may also enjoy bicycling on the Overseas Heritage Trail, or kayaking along the shoreline and through the mangrove creek. Single kayaks are available for about \$17 for two hours; doubles, \$21.50.

Lastly, Bahia Honda State Park lies less than an hour from Key West on Big Pine Key (305-872-2353). This 500-acre park features the largest natural sand beach in the Keys, a marina, and three hiking trails — one that takes visitors to the top of the Old Bahia Honda Bridge for a panoramic view. Daily snorkeling trips to Looe Key National Marine sanctuary are available for \$29.95. The park includes 80 water/electric sites that can accommodate RVs up to 40 feet and a few additional spots that can accommodate smaller trailers and pop-ups no longer than 14 feet.

We didn't do much planning ahead during our time in Florida, and we paid for it in the Keys. We were lucky enough to score two consecutive nights at Curry Hammock and a third night at Bahia Honda.

At Curry Hammock, we relaxed on the sandy beach, waded in the shallow waters and hiked a 1.5-mile nature trail, which meanders through a hardwood hammock.

As part of the South Florida Birding Trail and host of the annual Florida Keys Birding and Wildlife Festival, Curry Hammock also offers excellent opportunities for bird-watching. While watching the sunrise on our last morning in the park, we spotted a Great White Heron in search of its breakfast.

Soon after, my husband set off in search of his own catch, aboard the Marathon Lady, a family-owned and operated, 73-foot party boat (305-743-5580, www.fishfloridakeys.com/marathonlady).

There are, of course, tons of options when it comes to fishing in the Florida Keys, with charters and boat rentals aplenty. Party-boat fishing, however, is one of the more affordable options, since you share the cost with other anglers. Gabriel got to enjoy four hours of fishing for just \$45, while also making some new friends. The Marathon Lady Dock is right off the Overseas Highway and has a large parking lot with free parking for its customers — including those who come by RV. For a little extra, the crew cleaned his catch, and the Fish Tales Market and Eatery next door cooked it up.

With our bellies full, we drove the 30 minutes to Bahia Honda. But soon after sunset, we were off again — this time in search of the illusive No Name Pub (305-872-9115, www.nonamepub.com) on No Name Key, which came recommended by a campground host at Curry Hammock.

This local favorite opened as a general store and bait and tackle shop in 1931. A few years later an eatery was added and, for a period of time, the multifaceted facility also included a brothel. Today, it serves as a bar and restaurant, famous for its pizza, and hard-to-find locale, though our GPS had no problem finding it.

Once inside, it took a moment for our eyes to adjust to the dim lighting,

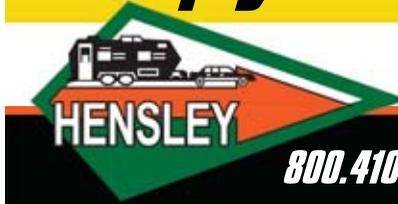
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FLORIDA KEY HOPPING

and when they did we saw thousands of dollar bills stapled to the walls and hanging from the ceiling like bats in a cave. After sampling some pizza, we signed and stapled a dollar to the wall, as many had done before us.

The next morning, we checked out Bahia Honda's famous beaches before setting off for Key West. Bahia Honda is the closest state park (with camping facilities) to Key West, but with the Lower Keys Shuttle running from morning until night, you can easily spend a few hours or the whole day checking out the sights and sounds. Fare is just \$3 each way. You can also unhitch and drive the 36 miles (though parking can be limited), but don't plan on taking your RV along with you. There is an ordinance that prohibits vehicles more than 20 feet long from parking on city streets. Violators will be slapped with a hefty fine.

Once in Key West, there is no shortage of things to do. Party with the Parrot Heads, shop 'til you drop, stand on the

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southernmost point in the continental United States, or enjoy any number of water sports. Some of the popular attractions include the Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory (305-296-2988, www.keywestbutterfly.com), the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum (305-294-1136, www.hemingwayhome.com) and Mallory Square, home of the nightly Sunset Celebration (305-292-7700, www.sunsetcelebration.org).

There's also a day park, Fort Zachary Taylor Historic State Park, which claims to have the best beach in Key West and offers opportunities for hiking, fishing and scuba diving (305-292-6713). Admission is \$6 per vehicle (plus a Monroe County surcharge of 50 cents per person) and is less for those who come by foot or bike.

It took only a few days in the Florida Keys for us to realize that we wanted to stay longer, and on our way back north, we applied for positions as campground hosts. (We'd heard that there was an

unexpected opening at Curry Hammock.) At this point, we had been on the road for seven months — starting in California — and until then had not tried to stay in any one place for more than three weeks. But the beauty of the Keys, and particularly, of the parks, had captivated us. We weren't the only ones who appreciate the area, though; the list of hopeful park volunteers runs long. After spending a few more days at a private RV park on Big Pine Key, we journeyed back to the mainland with a new appreciation for the conservationists who'd created the state parks so that we might enjoy the natural beauty of the Florida Keys for years to come. 📧

Florida Keys Tourism Council, (800) 352-5397, www.fl-keys.com.

Florida State Parks, (850) 245-2157, www.floridastateparks.org.

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American RV Sales & Service
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www.coatesrv.com

Hilltop Trailer Sales
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2011 SHOWSTOPPERS

INNOVATIVE AMENITIES AND FLOORPLANS
HIGHLIGHT THE NEW-MODEL YEAR

by Bob Ashley



PHOTOS BY SHAWN SPENCE

We're always on the lookout for the hottest new RVs. The "Trending Toward 2011" feature in the January issue highlighted many of the most popular new design and manufacturing elements we had seen for the 2011 year to date. As our search for the best of 2011 continues, we've uncovered even more RV models that are sure to have potential buyers ready to pounce.

Borrowing ideas from European RV manufacturers and North American boat builders who specialize in small spaces in economical ways is nothing new for some U.S. towable RV manufacturers.

But that trend came into focus even more sharply during the early-winter National RV Trade Show in Louisville, Kentucky, in one of the show's more popular exhibits: the diminutive 2011 Element travel trailer from 3-year-old EverGreen Recreational Vehicles. The 24-foot, eye-catching Element also emphasizes a "green" component with the use of lightweight composite materials throughout.

"The Element's styling is obviously a dramatic shift from

what you see in a conventional RV," said Dan Rodabaugh, EverGreen's director of engineering, whose background is in boat building and architecture.

The general aesthetic trend evidenced by the Element and other new travel trailers and fifth-wheels for 2011 is to make exteriors more aerodynamic and the RVs themselves more lightweight for easier towing.

Interior-wise, there is also a push to "soften" décors by doing away with 90-degree angles in favor of radius walls and countertops.

"From a design standpoint, that is very difficult to do," Rodabaugh said.

Difficult or not, many manufacturers have moved the focus away from traditional exterior design elements. "It's not a rectangle like you're used to seeing," said Matt Buckman, national sales manager for Gulf Stream's Kingsport division. "The lines are much cleaner."

That's not to say that RV manufacturers have abandoned building conventional RVs, tens of thousands of which ply American highways.

It's just that the RV industry — much like the automotive industry — is constantly evolving.

It took **Airstream** more than a year and a half to develop the new outdoor-themed Airstream Eddie Bauer travel trailer. This 25-footer, with an msrp of \$73,700, is equipped with a rear hatch to load kayaks, canoes, bikes and other sports gear. “We tried to include materials that were outdoor friendly, that are a little easier to clean up, a little more durable,” said Damien Huang, Eddie Bauer senior vice president of outdoor gear/active lifestyle. Co-branded apparel and products will be launched in the spring, he said. The Eddie Bauer Airstream has oversized Michelin tires and is built with greater ground clearance than Airstream’s traditional “silver bullet” travel trailers.

Airstream, (877) 596-6111, www.airstream.com.



Bridgeview Manufacturing, a predominately recreational park trailer manufacturer in Elkhart, Indiana, has introduced an extensive lineup of Harbor View travel trailers that are equipped for people with disabilities. The company expects the trailers to be popular with families that have children with physical challenges. The steel-reinforced wood-and-aluminum Harbor View mobility trailers are available in nine 26- to 36-foot floorplans, each with wheelchair lifts, 36-inch hallways and large bathrooms with showers. msrp: \$40,000.

Bridgeview Manufacturing, (877) 775-4591, www.bridgeview.com.



CrossRoads RV clearly had the aging Baby Boomer in mind when it created the new Rushmore fifth-wheel series with easier access to features such as pass-through storage and an under-awning tool and utility panel. The high-profile Rushmore is available in five 34- to 38-foot floorplans with up to four slideouts, three of which have a rollaway island kitchen. Standard features include high-gloss fiberglass side walls, Corian countertops, slam-latch luggage doors, leather sofas and recliners, surround-sound home-theater systems, under-bed storage with gas struts, extra-large linen closets and 40-inch HDTVs in the living room. Base msrp: \$45,000

CrossRoads RV, (888) 226-7496, www.crossroadsrv.com.



Dutchmen has re-emerged into the toy-hauler market for 2011 with the Rubicon wood-and-aluminum travel-trailer series. The 8-foot 6-inch-wide Rubicon is available in five 19- to 31-foot floorplans. Equipped for off-road play and dry camping, the wide-body Rubicon features 86 gallons of fresh-water in enclosed tanks, an onboard 30-gallon fuel station, a dove-tail cargo floor and a bottom-hinged ramp door. Interior amenities include maple shaker-style cabinets, custom furniture, halogen lighting and large windows. Base msrp: \$16,000.

Dutchmen Manufacturing, (574) 537-0600, www.dutchmen.com.



Using a new manufacturing technique, **EverGreen Recreational Vehicles** has introduced the highly distinctive Element travel trailer, available in four 24-foot floorplans. Totally wood-free, the Element is constructed with aluminum-and-composite side-wall panels that are fused to a color-tinted one-piece exoskeleton on the outer perimeter made of fiberglass reinforced polyester (FRP). On the inside, marine influences are apparent. With a dry weight of about 3,300 pounds, the Element can be towed by minivans and midsize SUVs. msrp: \$38,995.

Evergreen RV, (574) 825-4298, www.goevergreen.com.



FTCA/Coleman Folding Trailers has introduced the Evolution SV3 on-road version of its mid-priced Evolution off-road folding camping trailer. In the process, the Evolution SV3 has become Coleman's least expensive unit with an inside shower and toilet. The 12-foot Evolution SV3, with a base msrp of \$11,200, is one of four floorplans in the series. "It's more of a street version," said Alan Reeping, vice president of sales for the manufacturer. "It doesn't have the beefy suspension, and it's lower to the ground, so it's better with conventional and crossover tow vehicles."

FTCA, (814) 445-9661, www.colemantrailers.com.



Gulf Stream's Kingsport towable division has introduced the SKY wide-body travel trailer in six 24- to 34-foot floorplans. The laminated-fiberglass SKY, almost 8 feet 4 inches wide with 7-foot 6-inch interior ceilings, is designed with a radius profile and equipped with solar-glazed windows, pass-through heated exterior storage with slam-latch baggage doors, solid-wood cabinet frames, crown molding, ducted air conditioning, scissor jacks, dual scare lights and aluminum wheels. The more affordable wood-and-aluminum SKY XT is available in the same floorplans, but with fewer amenities. SKY base msrp: \$22,650; SKY XT base msrp: \$19,100.

**Gulf Stream, (800) 289-8787,
www.gulfstreamrv.com.**



Living' Lite has introduced the Camplite hard-side all-aluminum truck camper. Model 8.5 Camplite features all aluminum construction, from the framing to the skin to the roof. Highlights inside include a queen bed and optional removable dinette for alfresco dining options. A wet bath, refrigerator and electric water heater are all standard, while an LP-gas package is offered as an option. msrp for the 8.5 Camplite starts at \$14,559.

**Living' Lite RV, (574) 862-2228,
www.livinlite.com.**



MVP RV has debuted an all-new Destiny luxury fifth-wheel series. "Destiny was developed with a clear direction — affordable luxury," said Kevin Coleman, Destiny national sales and product manager. Destiny comes standard with solid hardwood upper and lower cabinets and stiles, fluorescent lights throughout, king beds with pillow-top mattresses oversized front wardrobe, solar reflective windows, slam-latch baggage doors and high-gloss gelcoat fiberglass exterior with more than 200 square feet of storage. Destiny is available in 35- and 36-foot floorplans, both with double-entry side-aisle baths. Base msrp: \$49,952.

**MVP RV, (951) 848-4288,
www.mvprv.com.**



Two-year-old **Prime Time Manufacturing** introduced the 2011 Crusader, its first fifth-wheel. "For a little fifth-wheel, there is a lot of storage and a very residential feel," said Jeff Rank, Prime Time president and co-founder. Available in six 29- to 36-foot floorplans, the 34-foot 298BHD floorplan features a fully equipped exterior kitchen with a stone facade. The Crusader features an aerodynamic front cap that affords an 88-degree turning radius, which is said to allow towing by shortbed pickups without the need for a slider hitch. Standard features include solid-surface countertops, large pantries, cherry-glazed cabinets, crown molding and wardrobe slide-outs. msrps range from \$27,000 to \$45,000. **Prime Time Manufacturing, (574) 862-3001, www.primetimerv.com.**



Riverside RV has rolled out the retro-styled White-water 130 for 2011. With design cues evocative of the diminutive trailers of years ago, the compact 14-foot 6-inch trailer is easy to handle at a lightweight 1,640 pounds dry. A powdercoated frame, 9½-gallon freshwater tank, convertible bed and two-burner stove are some of the highlights, but perhaps the biggest news is the trailer is said to be garageable in a standard garage thanks to its drop-floor construction. msrp begins at \$14,774. **Riverside RV, (260) 499-4578, www.riversidervs.net.**



Yellowstone RV, launched this past October as a stand-alone spinoff from Gulf Stream, is offering the new RidgeLine full-profile fifth-wheel. The fiberglass-and-aluminum Ridgeline is available in five 37- to 40-foot floorplans, with up to five slideouts, and is equipped with a fiberglass front cap, side-swinging slam-lock baggage doors, hardwood cabinets stiles with raised-panel cabinet doors, full-extension drawer guides, cedar-lined closets, hardwood crown molding, china toilets, dual leather-touch chairs and a J-sofa. Base msrp: \$51,000. **Gulf Stream, (800) 289-8787, www.gulfstreamrv.com.**



ROOF AND AWNING CARE

HOW TO MAKE THESE IMPORTANT ITEMS LAST

by Ken Freund

For many RVers, the first time they even think of roof and awning maintenance is when there's a problem. Perhaps water is seen dripping inside the RV, or signs of mildew pop up on the awning. That's actually too late, because expensive damage has likely already been done by then. All RVers should inspect the roof and awning regularly and properly maintain them using the following advice.

ROOF CARE

A small leak can lead to big problems quickly. Slight seepage that you may not know about, over an extended period, can cause wood rot in vital framing along with separation and delamination in ceilings, sidewalls and floors.

We spoke with Gregg Fore, president of Dicor Corporation — a major manufacturer of RV roofing products — for some advice on how to get the most from your RV's roof. Fore said that to avoid problems, the roof should be cleaned and inspected several times a year and any developing problems corrected.

If you park under trees with large bird populations, under fruit trees, trees that drip sap or anywhere harsh environmental fallout settles on your roof, you may need to clean the roof more often. Also, any time the RV has made contact with a tree branch or other overhead object, that area should be inspected immediately.

Before going topside to conduct an inspection, wear work clothing, knee pads and grippy rubber-soled footwear. Check your shoes for embedded pebbles and such that can damage the roof. And safety first! If you are not physically strong and/or fit enough to climb onto the roof and work safely, hire a qualified shop to do it. A wet roof can also be very slippery; use extreme caution. Rubber-covered roofs have an under-



PHOTO BY E. DON SMITH



Properly maintaining your RV's roof is vital in extending its service life. Left: This roof has been neglected for years, and it's only a matter of time before leaks, tears and increased bulges may occur. Right: A clean, well-maintained roof is a long-lasting roof.

lying material, usually plywood or lauan sheathing that should be able to support the weight of an average-size person, but check first with your RV's manufacturer to be certain. However, metal roofs may get dented by walking on them, and with any roof that feels soft or flexible, lay a length of smooth-surface plywood or some boards length-

wise to walk on, spanning the roof's rafters to distribute weight evenly over several supports.

RUBBER ROOFS

So-called rubber roofs are made from ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM) or thermoplastic olefin (TPO). Most owners find these roofs, some of

which have been in use for more than two decades, to be long-lasting and relatively trouble free. They're designed to meet the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) 20-year accelerated aging test, and many have a 10-year or longer warranty. So before you begin repairs be sure to read the paperwork, including the fine print.

Weathering and oxidation occur on any roofing surface, and airborne contaminants will discolor the surface. After awhile they may develop a chalky substance on the surface which is considered normal, and even after a decade, normal chalking only uses up about 10 percent of the membrane's thickness. Cleaning gets rid of any dirt and chalky buildup, which also reduces the white stains that run down the sides of the RV with rain and dew. Follow the maintenance instructions provided in the owner's manual and use a manufacturer-recommended rubber roof cleaner.

Dicor has a Rubber Roof Cleaner RP-RC160C concentrate for the whole roof, or RP-RC320S cleaner in a spray bottle for smaller areas. In a pinch, use mild laundry soap or borax mixed in a bucket with several gallons of hot water. Avoid harsh abrasives or petroleum-based cleaners, because they may permanently damage the roof and may void the warranty. Hose off the roof to remove loose dirt and debris, and then use a medium-bristle brush with a long handle along with the sudsy water to scrub the roof. Rinse thoroughly to avoid leaving residue which will run down the side walls. For stains, RP-RC160C can be used in its concentrated form. For really stubborn stains, Dicor suggests using a cloth dampened with mineral spirits, but cautions against using mineral spirits in a large area or allowing it to soak into the membrane.

Fore also noted that while roof treatments aren't mandatory, a product such as Dicor's Roof Guard helps slow deterioration from sun and weather. Most manufacturers also approve 303 Aerospace Protectant to resist stains and make future cleaning easier.

REPAIRING A RUBBER ROOF

Carefully note any areas of deterioration or damage. Most leaks occur around the



PHOTO BY BRUCE HAMPSON



Eternabond RoofSeal can be used to combat small tears, gouges and punctures.

seams and edges, where holes are cut through the roof for vents, air conditioners, antennas, etc. Usually the sealant used around these openings begins to crack or peel, which causes the leaks. The edges where the rubber roof meets the front and rear end caps are also susceptible to cracking and leaks. Sometimes a tree branch will gouge the roof and peel or slice it open. If the roof is dirty or covered with leaves or other debris, you may have to clean it before you inspect it. However, if there's a tear or other leak, clean it with a damp rag and avoid getting water on the roof in that area.

Bubbles are caused by flaws in adhesive application and are not considered a problem unless they grow larger or contain water. Some folks puncture the bubble and squeeze roof sealant in through the small hole, then press it down and seal the opening. However, if the bubble is small, it's best to leave it alone.

Never use RTV silicone on the roof. Instead, use products designed for RV roofs, such as Eternabond RoofSeal on rectangular openings, and use lap sealant on round openings. Some of the caulking products include Geocel ProFlexRV, Dyco C-10 Flow Seal Caulk, and Dicor lap sealant to seal along the roof's edges, around vents and screw heads. They're compatible with EPDM and TPO, and adhere to aluminum, wood, vinyl, galvanized metal and fiberglass.

OTHER ROOFING MATERIALS

Many RVs have metal roofs, usually made of aluminum, and many others have fiberglass roofs or a combination of materials. As with a rubber roof, regular cleaning and inspection as described above are all that's generally needed. Avoid abrasive cleaners and strong solvents or detergents.

Aluminum and fiberglass roofs often use an alkyd fiber impregnated coating to seal around openings and seams. Before any repairs are attempted, make sure the surface is cleaned and any old loose, flaking sealants or deteriorated coatings are removed. Use a heat gun on low to soften old roof sealants and a putty knife to scrape, and then wipe the surface with a solvent-soaked rag afterward.

Thin elastomeric sealants work best on small cracks and seams, while alkyd fibers should only be used on large holes, gaps, etc. These materials can be reapplied with a paintbrush or putty knife. There are a variety of emergency patch kits for roof tears or punctures. Use only repair materials designed for RV roofs and follow the instructions. Aluminum that has been damaged must be replaced. Eternabond RoofSeal is popular, as is Emergen-C Roof Repair Kit, which comes with a 3-inch by 4-foot strip of patch material along with sealer. It's a good idea to carry a kit in case of a mishap on the road.

After cleaning and repair, a fiberglass or painted aluminum roof can be sealed with a regular RV or automotive wax. However, it's not recommended for bare aluminum, which has a special coating. By cleaning and inspecting the roof regularly, you can catch problems before they become serious, and avoid up to thousands of dollars in potential damage while extending the life and maintaining the value of your RV.



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AWNING CARE

RV awnings can deliver years of trouble-free use if you do a little cleaning and maintenance and protect them from wind damage. Awnings are made from vinyl or acrylic fabric and some have an aluminum or vinyl guard to protect the fabric when they're rolled up. Whenever you open an awning after it's been stored for a while, inspect the fabric for signs of mildew, stains or damage. Check with your RV dealer or awning manufacturer for materials to repair or patch awning fabric. Pinhole leaks can often be mended with vinyl liquid patch.

To prevent dirt from imbedding into the awning, hose the fabric off monthly. In most environments, a thorough cleaning will be needed every two to three years. Follow the instructions of the awning and cleaning-product manufacturer and avoid oil-based or abrasive cleaners. Normal cleaning can be done using mild soap in a bucket of warm water, and a soft brush on a pole. A number of cleaners are made for



PHOTOS BY GARY WESCOTT

Ignoring your trailer's awning can lead to cracks and tears. Use a good fabric guard or cleaner to ensure longer awning life. Check for faulty hardware before heading out.

difficult stains or mildew on awning fabrics. Scrub stubborn stains with a soft brush before rinsing. Clean both sides of

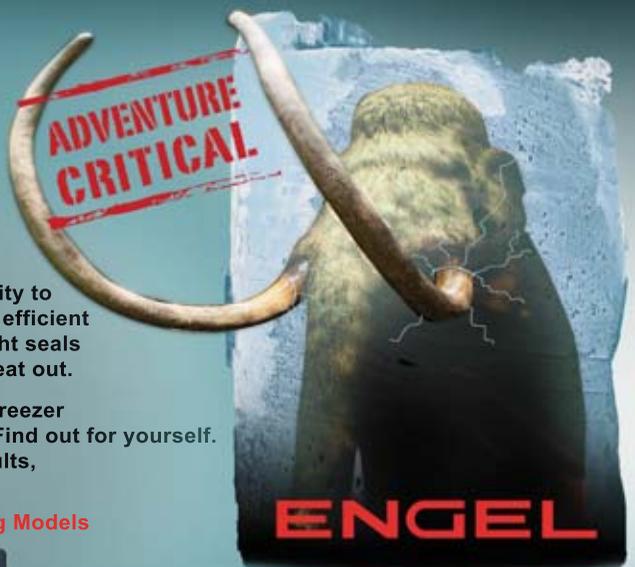
the awning and rinse thoroughly. To avoid stowing an awning when the fabric is wet, allow enough time for it to dry completely

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before storing. If you have to stow an awning when it's wet, unroll it as soon as possible and allow it to dry completely before rolling it up. Slide-topper awnings are treated the same as regular awnings.

Treating fabrics helps resist soiling, impedes mildew formation and protects against the sun. There are a number of products sold by awning manufacturers, and others such as 303 High Tech Fabric Guard, designed to provide sun-blocking and weather protection. Apply these after the awning is clean and dry.

Wash metal awning components with the same cleaner used on the RV. When an awning is open, always check for faulty hardware and secure mounting points to the side of the RV, and inspect the pivot-arms for enlarged holes or damage. Check for a bent roller tube, which is noticeable when the awning is rolled out, and make sure the latches and roll-up mechanism works. Lube all moving parts with silicone spray. Finally, repair any problems you may encounter

before using the awning.

Properly inspecting and maintaining your roof and awning will allow them to keep you covered for years to come. 📞

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TOWING STRAIGHT



PHOTOS BY KEVIN LIVINGSTON

CORRECT TRACK KIT FROM RIECO-TITAN ALLOWS TRAILER AND FIFTH-WHEEL CHASSIS AXLES TO BE ALIGNED, IMPROVING TIRE WEAR AND SAFETY

by Kevin Livingston

One of the most common downsides of towing is the relatively low life span of the tires. Whether pulling a travel trailer or fifth-wheel, premature tire wear — as well as unexpected tire failure — is a serious safety concern, not to mention the extra cost associated with frequent replacements.

To help better understand early tire wear with trailers, you first need to know the symptoms that cause the problems. There are basically two major causes for premature wear and failure that can lead to costly collateral damage. Number one is grossly unbalanced lateral trailer weight. This condition is symptomatic of positioning too many heavy items on one side of the trailer, which may include a large slideout. Concentrating heavier objects on one side of a trailer essentially forces the suspension system out of alignment by pre-loading only half of the springs and axles.

The second problem comes directly from the point of origin. Sadly, many trailer chassis simply aren't built using high enough standards. Straight out of manufacturing, the axles aren't square to one another or to the ball and king pin, creating the misalignment — and there's no provision for alignment. The end results of these conditions are increased friction

in the wheel bearings and tire regions, ultimately escalating blowout probability and bearing wear — and let's not forget about the potential fuel economy loss.

Rieco-Titan has a solution for the aforementioned scenarios, called the Correct Track (now in its second iteration), appropriately labeled, Correct Track II. The system consists of axle spring hangers that use special cams to align the axles (and wheels) in relation to the coupler and kingpin. The original kit, which is more appropriate for installation during chassis manufacturing stage, requires that the hangers be welded by proficient metal fabricators, but the Correct Track II can be bolted in place using hanger plates, making it very practical for aftermarket installations. There is no need for cutting, welding or fabricating. The kit is designed to reduce the chances of a blowout, while promoting improved tread wear. Testing has shown that tires run cooler, tread life is improved and catastrophic blowouts occur much less frequently.

Even without the need for welding, installation of the Correct Track II system is not recommended for just any average Joe. To begin installing the alignment correction kit, it's first necessary to establish a level trailer from front to back using only the front jack(s), and to measure from the center of the kingpin or coupler back to a spot on the axle that never



Once the trailer is level from front to back, a plumb bob is used to mark the ground, establishing a reference point for taking measurements.



The distance from the center of the kingpin or coupler and center of the axle is measured, recorded and used in making final alignment.



The recommended Rieco-Titan Never Fail bushings are driven into the spring eye using the $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch bolts and a hammer.



Once the new hanger plate is in position — making sure it's as straight up and down as possible — a drill bit is used to mark the location of the new top hole before drilling through.

changes, such as the U-bolt plate. It's sometimes easiest to do this using a plumb line and marking the ground first, then taking your measurement back. Don't forget to write down the numbers.

At this point it's imperative to carefully chock one side of the trailer's tires, followed by securing all four corners of the trailer's frame. Next, remove the tires from the side opposing the chocked wheels and place a floor jack under the first axle you'll be working on. To maximize the performance of the new Correct Track II, it's recommended that you also purchase the Rieco-Titan Never Fail bushings, which should be installed during this step in the build up. The easiest way to replace the bushings is to take one of the new long $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch bolts with a Never Fail piece seated against the bolt head and slide the remainder of the bolt into the original bushing and driving it through the

hanger until it bottoms out. Doing this should push out the old bushing and install the new one simultaneously.

With the bushing where it should be, place two of the new hanger plates with both horizontal and vertical slots over the factory spring hanger using the center (non-slotted) bolt and hole to sandwich it. Tighten the bolt once the plates are positioned as straight up and down as possible. Use a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch drill bit to mark the location of the new top bolt hole through the vertical slot. This is done by placing the drill bit as high up as possible in the slot, avoiding contact with any surrounding holes. Begin drilling just enough to make a small centered dimple and stop. At this point you need to determine whether or not you can get a level and straight hole all the way through both sides of the spring hanger. If you aren't 100-percent positive that you can do this, then you should mark the inside

portion of the spring hanger with the drill before removing the new hanger plates for final drilling. Continue drilling out the marked holes with the new hanger plates out of the way. You might want to consider pre-drilling these holes with a smaller bit first so you don't burn up the $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch bit. Repeat these steps for all the new hanger plates on both sides of the trailer.

All the new hanger plates install exactly the same — with the only difference being the center plate, which contains one vertical slot. All the corresponding nuts and bolts are then tightened, making sure the applicable hanger-plate spacers are in place. Once the hangers are secure, jack up the spring eye back into position with the new hanger's horizontal slot. Install the octagonal cam adjusters using the long $\frac{3}{16}$ -inch bolts to hold it all together. From here you can move on to the center equalizer hanger,



Before completely tightening, the cam bolts are rotated to bring the axles into alignment. Each turn of the cam adjusters moves the axle ¼-inch.



Center hanger plates are installed on the spring equalizer. These plates have only one vertical slot and are not fitted with cam adjusters.

followed by the remaining spring eye, repeating the process. Before completely tightening the cam bolts, rotate the cams, aligning the axle, based on prior measurements. Each turn of the cam adjusters is equal to ¼-inch in either direction.

To take full advantage of the kit, I found it best to set the trailer back on the ground under full weight and then re-measure. If any changes are required the trailer will need to have the pressure lifted off the cam-adjuster bolts and the cam position moved until the axles are square to the coupler or kingpin.

Does it really work? In short, yes! The test trailer's axle measurements were more than an inch off from one side to the other before the install and are now down to a mere ⅛-inch difference. This is a huge improvement — and a testimony to the crudeness of some trailer chassis. There is much less drag on the tires and bearings once the alignment is made. You can use the shoe test to quickly check if your axles are aligned properly before deciding on purchasing this kit: At about the center hub

level, stick your shoe between the tires as far as it will go, then do it on the opposite side. You'll likely be surprised at the difference.

As for the Correct Track II components, everything for the installation is included and well fabricated using high-quality metal and hardware throughout. However, the spacer blocks may not work precisely with all sizes of factory spring hangers. These spacer blocks are designed for the longer spring hangers, and used to prevent the lower ends of the brackets from bending as the bolts are tightened. The test trailer was fitted with shorter spring hangers, so the spacer blocks were left out. For these brackets, it's best to snug the lower bolt (with the new bushing) before tightening the upper bolt. That way the bracket is kept from collapsing.

The complete kit retails for \$259 and takes about four hours of labor for the installation. 🛠️

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PHOTOS BY CHUCK CAMPBELL

WINNEBAGO VIEW PROFILE 24G

**SMOOTH PERFORMANCE, DIESEL FUEL ECONOMY
AND TWIN SLIDES HIGHLIGHT THIS SLEEK NEW CLASS C**

by **Chuck & Teresa Campbell**

Always on the lookout for RVs of all types that may interest our readers, we instantly took notice of a new compact Class C motorhome that drives much like your average tow vehicle. Winnebago's new Euro-styled View Profile 24G built on a Mercedes-Benz (MB) Sprinter chassis features all the comforts of home, in a package that may have many trailerists changing their tune.

The View Profile 24G floorplan might be considered traditional in a motorhome of greater length, but is unique in a smaller coach of only 24 feet.

Behind the front cab is a stylish, modern curbside galley, and opposing streetside convertible sofa sleeper seg-

ment with slideout. Combined, these two elements create what could be considered a modest but feature-rich lounge area. Mid-coach streetside is a fully enclosed — though diminutive — bathroom with shower stall, washbasin and china toilet, while the aft slideout compartment houses a queen bed.

Architectural elements employed on the View Profile are much like those used on Winnebago's larger motorhomes, such as steel and aluminum substructures that secure internal cabinets and appliances. Similarly, metal framework above and below the main floor deck is secured with interlocking joints for optimum strength and durability.

Wall segments are comprised of exterior gelcoat fiberglass, high-density interior block-foam insulation and aluminum

support pieces, laminated together using Winnebago's proprietary "Thermo-Panel" process. Topping things off is a crowned, one-piece fiberglass roof.

Our test coach was appointed with many upscale standard amenities seldom found in a vehicle of this size, including a 26-inch LCD TV, convertible sofa with inflatable bed and a microwave convection oven. With these and much more, the base price for the 24G with Mercedes-Benz turbodiesel chassis amounts to \$101,769.

But we're not done there. The unit also came replete with a load of available options that hiked the final price tag to \$118,842. Significant among these were a 3.6-kW LP-gas AC generator (\$3,073), special aluminum wheels (\$2,135) and an electric patio awning (\$945).



aerodynamic profile and frugal, fuel-sipping turbodiesel, we logged very respectable mileage figures of 18.6 miles per gallon. With this in mind, users can expect a generous average travel range of more than 460 miles per tank if one doesn't get pedal-happy.

Heading out of Santa Barbara, and up the steep and winding San Marcos Pass, the unit labored along smoothly and confidently. As the ground rose beneath us, the unit's "Tip Shift" gear lever came in handy and allowed the driver to manually up- or downshift the automatic tranny as needed.

We piloted the Winnebago up this challenging highway without losing too much momentum in the curves, and only had to pull over on a couple of occasions to let faster traffic go by. As we approached the summit with its 7-percent incline, we were still able to maintain a respectable 55 mph at 2,600 rpm in fourth gear.

Descending into the Santa Inez Valley on the other side of the pass, we downshifted to third and allowed the unit's modest holdback capability to slow our descent (without having to use the front/rear disc brakes) to 58 mph at 3,800 rpm in third gear. The transmission is fully capable of selecting a sufficient gear on its own; however, we preferred to choose what we thought was an appropriate gear by again using the handy Tip Shift feature.

Navigating a variety of different highways and byways throughout the test was an enjoyable and confidence-inspiring experience due to the coach's agility and positive highway feedback. No matter how narrow or winding a road or campground lane turned out to be, we were able to thread our way through with usually room to spare. Even several U-turns were made with ease, thanks to the unit's tight 54-foot turning diameter.

LIVING SMALL

Livability is surprisingly cozy in the Sprinter-based unit. This is due in large part to its two slideouts. A forward slide streetside contains a convertible Ultraleather sofa/sleeper (\$623) that also subs as a dinette. The other slide is situated to the rear, and features a 60 x 75-inch queen bed. Though this unit is

RESPECTABLE ROAD TRIPPER

Easing into the Winnebago's comfy and adjustable Ultraleather captain's chairs in the Spartan, but nevertheless well-sorted-out cab with 6.5-inch LCD radio/rear camera touch screen, we pointed the aerodynamically crafted unit northward toward California's central coast. Driver visibility forward was excellent due to its slanted nose, and initial steering feedback indicated this would be a very easy vehicle to drive. We were also duly impressed with the coach's external full-body Silvermist paint scheme (\$6,006) that garnered admiration from many throughout our trip.

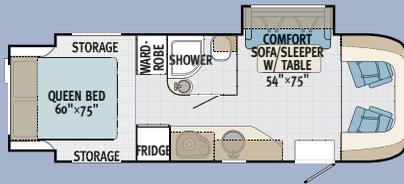
Acceleration of the unit with its 188-hp, turbodiesel V-6 engine is smooth and relatively quiet, though not of the head-snapping variety. Once up to free-

way speeds, the experience is more like driving a family/multipurpose van than a motorhome.

Though the coach is no ball of fire off the line, it more than makes up for itself when it hits highway cruising speeds. In fact, the unit's average freeway performance was usually so fluid and seamless that drivers needed to pay close attention to the speedometer to stay within the legal speed limit.

Handling and maneuverability for the most part is commendable, though the unit tends to move and shudder a bit when passed by larger commercial rigs or hit by strong wind gusts. The cab is quiet under most driving conditions, though it does get pretty noisy when tires encounter rough highway surfaces.

Due in part to the Winnie's sculpted,



SPECIFICATIONS

PERFORMANCE

FUEL ECONOMY, MPG: 18.6 mpg

ACCELERATION: 0-60 MPH: 22.1 sec

40-60 MPH: 12.9 sec

CHASSIS

MODEL: Mercedes-Benz Sprinter

ENGINE: 3.0-liter Mercedes-Benz V-6 turbodiesel

HP: 188 hp @ 3,800 rpm

TORQUE: 325 lb-ft @ 1,400-2,400 rpm

TRANSMISSION: 5-spd automatic

AXLE RATIO: 4.18:1

TIRES: LT215/85R16

WHEELBASE: 173"

BRAKES, F/R: Hydraulic disc w/ABS

SUSPENSION, F/R: Independent w/mono-leaf spring and stabilizer/leaf spring w/stabilizer bar

FUEL CAP: 26 gal

WARRANTY: 3 yr/36,000 miles

COACH

EXT LENGTH: 24' 9"

EXT WIDTH: 7' 6"

EXT HEIGHT: 10' 6"

INT WIDTH: 7' 3"

INT HEIGHT: 6' 5"

CONSTRUCTION: Aluminum/steel framing, fiberglass skin and roof, polystyrene block foam insulation

FRESHWATER CAP: 35 gal

BLACK-WATER CAP: 32 gal

GRAY-WATER CAP: 32 gal

WATER-HEATER CAP: 6 gal

LP-GAS CAP: 13 gal

AIR CONDITIONER: 13,500 btu

FURNACE: 20,000 btu

REFRIGERATOR: 8 cu-ft

INVERTER/CHARGER: 300 watt/30 amp

BATTERY: (1) 12-volt chassis,

(2) 12-volt coach

AC GENERATOR : 3.6 kW

MSRP: \$101,769

MSRP AS TESTED: \$118,842

WARRANTY: 1 yr/15,000 mi

WET WEIGHT

(WATER & HEATER, FUEL, LP-GAS FULL; NO SUPPLIES OR PASSENGERS)

FRONT AXLE: 3,360 lb

REAR AXLE: 6,540 lb

TOTAL: 9,900 lb

CHASSIS RATINGS

GROSS AXLE WEIGHT RATING, F/R:

4,410/7,720 lb

GROSS VEHICLE WEIGHT RATING:

11,030 lb

GROSS COMBINATION WEIGHT

RATING: 15,250 lb

REALISTIC OCCUPANT & CARGO

CARRYING CAPACITY (FULL WATER, LP-GAS, NO PASSENGERS): 1,130 lb



beneath the countertop.

The compact lounge area is quite suitable for either kicking back and watching the curbside wall-mounted 26-inch LCD TV, or hosting a visitor or two. Adding further flexibility to the area, the cab's captain's seats can be swiveled around so they face rearward.

Several nights were spent in the View's rear slideout bedroom, and sleeping on its segmented memory foam queen mattress. For the most part, we both enjoyed restful slumber.

One slight hurdle we had to accept was a narrow, 4-inch aisle space at the foot of the bed. This impediment required us to enter the small rear room extension by crawling over the top of the mattress. Once in the room however, there were at least 12 inches on either side of the bed that provided minimal dressing areas, plus room to make up the sleeper the next morning. You have to accept compromises in a unit this size to reap the overall benefits of its versatility.

The View Profile 24G comes with its own enclosed bathroom facility located mid-coach, between the lounge and rear bedroom. Though its dimensions are compact, the room offers the necessary elements for cleaning up, including a washbasin and curtained shower stall with 76 inches of headspace. Even in this tight configuration, the compartment provides an appreciated 15 inches of foot space in front of the china toilet.

Loading the Winnie prior to our test

obviously laid out for two adults, the sofa can be converted as needed to a 54 x 75-inch inflatable bed for an extra guest or a couple of kids.

Interior décor reflects a modern, streamlined treatment using dark Mocha Cherry wood cabinetry, complemented by brushed-nickel fixtures and hardware. The company's Platinum fabric/upholstery collection graces the coach's interior, using lighter shades of beige and tan, while floor covering in higher-traffic galley and mid-coach bathroom segments is light, easily cleanable vinyl. Similarly hued carpet graces bedroom and forward cockpit areas.

After arriving at our campground, we easily backed into a space and set up for the evening. Once the unit was leveled and hooked up to shorepower, our next order of business was to put together a quick dinner in the forward lounge/galley area.

The galley is a veritable study in

making the best of a limited space. Though the slate gray, faux marble laminate countertop offers a modest usable surface area, Winnebago engineers have maximized its use potential by installing hinged, smoked safety-glass covers for the round 9-inch diameter stainless-steel sink and two-burner stove top.

With lids folded down, we had a reasonable amount of counter surface to put together our evening meal. With the combination of LP-gas stove top and overhead convection microwave oven in play, there wasn't too much we couldn't render edible on a smaller scale.

Across the aisle in the forward slideout, we set up a compact dinette facility using the sofa and an included portable 30 x 19-inch tabletop. This arrangement is dining space on a reduced scale, but nevertheless gets the job done effectively. When dinner was finished, the tabletop stowed away neatly in a cupboard



trip took some calculated planning due to the compactness of its floorplan and limited storage options. Outside, there is one main rear compartment of approximately 13 cubic feet in area, plus a very small recess curbside. Despite these limitations, we managed to stuff a pair of full-size folding chairs into the rear cargo space along with several bundles of firewood, as we weren't driving out of state. Additionally, we wiggled in a small toolbox, leveling blocks and a couple of floor mats before we hit full.

Interior options for stashing things are a mixed bag of small cupboards, drawers and overhead cabinets strategically spread throughout the coach. One sizeable location that we used for a variety of items was a 21 x 48 x 28-inch hall closet that accepted clothing on hangers, as well as smaller containers below. With all this at hand, we managed to squirrel away enough travel essentials and food items to last us for more than just a few days.

Winnebago's take on how to best utilize the nimble Mercedes-Benz Sprinter chassis as a motorhome platform has resulted in a bravura performance, despite constraints in overall size and available horsepower. With decent fuel economy, a traditional but tight floorplan less than 24 feet and a dedicated queen bed to boot, the 2011 View Profile 24G is a good choice for efficient travel. 🚐

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JEEP TRAILERS

NEW POP-UPS DESIGNED FOR OFF-PAVEMENT CAPABILITIES

by **Ken Freund**

Jeep is introducing an exciting pair of compact camping trailers directly aimed at off-road enthusiasts. Designed to match the trail-worthy capabilities of its 4 × 4 models, the new Jeep Trail and Extreme Trail campers incorporate Wrangler styling cues, including taillights, fender flares, hood tie-downs, and rear bumper (Trail Edition only).

Both versions feature extensive use of lightweight tubular-aluminum construction (no wood or fiberboard materials). Underneath, a unique torsion bar trailing-arm suspension allows maneuverability and on-trail articulation.

The trailers use Rubicon 17-inch aluminum wheels with the same bolt pattern as

current Jeep vehicles, so spares can be swapped.

Spacious living quarters have 76 inches of headroom and can sleep up to four people. A comfortable multi-use sofa folds out into a bed, while a queen-size bed provides maximum comfort for two adults. A stowable center table offers occupants a place for dining, reading or board games, and a built-in cabinet provides space for gear. Power for electronics and other amenities is provided by a 120-volt AC power inverter. Enclosing the home-on-the-range are window screens and privacy shades. All-aluminum exterior construction delivers a clean look and contributes to the camper's light weight.



TRAIL EDITION CAMPER

Trail Edition Campers are designed for casual RVers looking to hit the trails with the family. They're fitted with 32-inch BF Goodrich Mud Terrain tires, which provide 12 inches of ground clearance. They weigh 850 pounds, and are just north of 4 feet tall when towing. Rugged diamond-plate aluminum armor is strategically placed to protect bodywork, and a diamond-plate aluminum top is capable of supporting 450 pounds of gear. msrp is \$9,995.

EXTREME TRAIL EDITION CAMPER

An all-new Jeep Extreme Trail Edition camper is also available, designed to deliver maximum off-road capability. Starting underneath, the Extreme Trail Edition is built on a heavier-duty frame and a full-underbody skid plate. Larger 35-inch BF Goodrich Mud Terrain tires provide more ground clearance and a beefier look. They hunker below black diamond-plated aluminum fenders that are mounted higher on the Extreme Trail Edition camper to accommodate up to 37-inch tires. Trail Edition campers weigh 1,050



pounds and stand 4 feet 4 inches tall during travel. msrp is \$11,995.

Available accessories for either model include a 6 x 6-foot exterior awning with screen enclosure (\$650) that expands the camper's covered space for all-weather enjoyment. There's also an available pintle hitch (\$735) that can rotate 360 degrees for maximum off-road maneuvering and articulation.

Both campers will be available in Bright Silver Metallic and Black; Flame Red; Mango Tango Pearl and Natural Green Metallic. Both models may be ordered at Jeep dealers and should be available by August. 🚗

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PERFORMANCE CORNER



by Ken Freund



ATS ATOMIZER POWER MODULE

ATS Diesel Performance has introduced the Atomizer Power Module, which is a plug-and-play tuner for Dodge Ram and GM Duramax diesel trucks. It controls fuel-rail pressure for improved power, performance and fuel economy through better spray atomization, for the smallest possible fuel droplet size to get the most from combustion. This module is designed to safely control fuel-rail pressure electronically, has a compact size and an optional fuel-pressure gauge for monitoring and comes in a complete ready-to-install kit for power gains of 70 or more rear-wheel horsepower.

ATS reports that the Atomizer not only increases power and economy, but also lowers exhaust-gas temperatures, has on-the-fly adjustability and is simple to install. It's also able to stack with other modifications and electronics for even better output, and has been dyno-tested during development and is pending CARB certification.

The Atomizer was programmed to provide a smooth fuel-rail pressure ramping profile which is based on engine load. This allows the truck's engine to avoid constant excessive fuel pressures while maintaining factory-like drivability.

ATS designs, manufactures and sells more than 600 diesel performance products and has products for GM Duramax, Dodge Cummins and Ford Power Stroke trucks. **ATS Diesel Performance**, (800) 949-6002, www.atsdiesel.com.

NEW MOTOR OILS

Many 2011 gas engines require different oil than their equivalent 2010 models, and using an incorrect oil could void the engine's warranty coverage. All General Motors vehicles require the latest-generation motor oil, which is designed for higher fuel-efficiency and less wear. The new oils are called GF-5, SN and Dexos1, which replace GF-4 and SM motor oils. GF-5 is the designation used by

the International Lubricant Standardization and Approval Committee (ILSAC), while SN is the latest designation from the American Petroleum Institute (API). According to the API, all oils with the SN designation also meet GF-5 standards.

These new oils allow longer oil-change intervals, due to chemistry changes that have been made to meet the new standard and work in conjunction with oil-life-monitoring systems, which calculate intervals based on data from driving conditions and other parameters. Ford is now specifying oil-change intervals up to 10,000 miles using the new oils, while GM depends on driving conditions and its oil-monitoring system. Some oils already on the market include Pennzoil Platinum and Quaker State Ultimate Durability synthetics, which fully comply with the standards. Dexos1 is a proprietary GM oil that meets slightly different standards. Consult the owner's manual before changing oil.

The following are the API designations for gas engines you're likely to find.

SM: Up until late 2010, offered oxidation and deposit resistance, wear protection and low-temperature performance.

SL: For 2004 and older automotive engines.

SJ: For 2001 and older automotive engines.

SH, SG, and SF: Each of these is obsolete.

DODGE RAM RECALL

Dodge announced a recall of certain Ram diesel trucks from the 2009 and 2010 model years with hydroboost braking. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), 76,122 vehicles may be equipped with a power-steering reservoir cap with excessive vent pressure levels that may result in brake pedals that are slow to return. The problem also affects the trucks' brake lights, which may stay on. Repairs, beginning in February 2011, involve replacing the power-steering reservoir cap, free of charge. Contact your dealer or call **(800) 853-1403** and reference recall #K33. Or contact **NHTSA at (888) 327-4236** about recall campaign #10V616000. 📞



Advice from our **Tech Team**

DYING DIESEL

I tow a 28-foot Cedar Creek fifth-wheel trailer with a 2004 Ford F-250 Power Stroke automatic 4 × 4 pickup, currently with 53,000 miles. For the past 1½ years this truck has had episodes of almost dying out, yet the engine never actually stalls. The truck starts choking down with sometimes a fluttering noise (kind of like an 18-wheeler decelerating) coming from the engine compartment. Pressing or stomping on the accelerator doesn't help. This lasts 10-20 seconds, and then the truck reverts back to normal acceleration. This sometimes happens two or three times a week, and sometimes it goes a month or so without the problem occurring. I have let the Ford dealership perform all scheduled maintenance, oil changes, etc., on time.

Speed doesn't matter. It has occurred when taking off after stopping as well as while driving 50 or 70 mph. Load doesn't seem to matter. However, most of the time it occurs while driving without pulling a load. Warmth of engine doesn't matter; it has occurred shortly after starting the truck as well as after the truck warms up.

I have taken the truck to the Ford service department several times. Ford said that unless it is acting up when I bring it in or unless the check-engine light comes on that they can't identify the problem. Of course, the truck is always running OK when I take it in and the light has never come on. Ford updated my computer last fall but the light still doesn't come on when this problem occurs. Can you suggest a possible cause to this problem?

Leon Baldwin, Lake Jackson, Texas

Power Stroke diesels of your general vintage are famous for this exact kind of seemingly random problem. Initially, I thought this was a fuel-delivery problem.



“Since a diesel engine doesn't rely on spark ignition, whenever one encounters a problem with stalling or losing power, it's usually related to fuel delivery.”

Since a diesel engine doesn't rely on spark ignition, whenever one encounters a problem with stalling or losing power, it's usually related to fuel delivery. If the problem was caused by an electrical control malfunction, the check-engine light would probably go on and store a trouble code. You didn't mention anything about chang-

ing fuel filters or checking for moisture or contaminants in the fuel, so I suggest starting there. If not, there might be an injection problem, as these engines are known for injector problems, and that can be expensive!

After my response, Baldwin followed up with a note saying Gulf Coast Ford finally found his problem, stating: “Ran diesel diagnosis and retrieved codes for EGR and EBP (exhaust back pressure) sensors. Ran pinpoints and found EBP out of spec. Replace sensor and connector. Retest OK; test drive OK. EGR passed test at this time.

“This was two days ago and the truck seems to drive OK now. I don't know why they couldn't find a bad part the other times that I took it in.” — Ken Freund



To send your questions to *RV Clinic*, write to 2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001; or e-mail jjohnston@affinitygroup.com or kfreund@affinitygroup.com. No phone calls.

SLIDEOUT BREAKER WOES

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RV CLINIC

auto-reset circuit breaker that controls the landing gear and slideouts frequently trips in operation (although not simultaneously). The slideouts have only one switch. I recently replaced the circuit breaker, thinking maybe it was defective, but it still does it when moving either of the large slideouts or operating the landing gear. Can I safely replace the 30-amp with a 50-amp? There is no binding of the slides during operation.

Les Hubbard, Stagecoach, Nevada

First, do not replace the 30-amp breaker with a 50-amp! That's a good way to melt some wiring or start a fire. If everything else is normal about your slideouts and landing-gear jacks — meaning there are no mechanical binds or other problems — I'd suspect you have a bad wiring connection, or the voltage to the jacks may be somewhat low.

A bad connection, such as frayed wiring or a corroded or loose connection, will add resistance to the circuit, and that

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means that the component motors have to work harder to do the job using reduced voltage and amperage. This can lead to a popped circuit breaker. A similar situation applies to low power. If the voltage is low — say, the battery power is not fully up to snuff and/or the converter isn't supplying enough juice — it also causes the motors to run hotter while trying to move the slideout or jacks, and that situation can lead to a blown breaker, too. Check your wiring and you may well find your problem. — Jeff Johnston

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We have a 2007 Forest River 17-foot Surveyor trailer with a Dometic model 2652 refrigerator/freezer that runs on either 120-volt AC or LP-gas. The Dometic manual indicates this model could draw 2.7 amps at 120 volts and rates this load as a nominal 175 watts. I have already installed a 1,000-watt 12-volt DC to 120-volt AC inverter on the "house" battery for convenience. Do you see any problem

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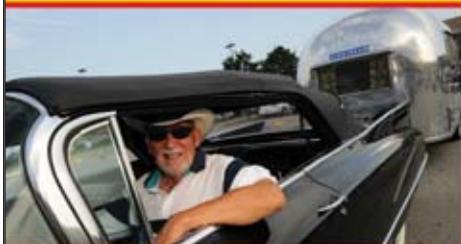
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RV CLINIC

powering this refrigerator with this inverter while towing? I estimate the extra load on the tow vehicle's alternator to be less than 30 amps at 12 volts DC. My present tow vehicle is a 2002 Dodge Durango 4 x 4 SLT Plus with a nominal 146-amp alternator.

I would not use a shoreline while the refrigerator is on the 12-volt DC inverter and house battery. As is, I would have to unplug the refrigerator from the existing 120-volt outlet and plug it in to the inverter for travel. Of course, I could install a proper extension and "A/B" switch if this fix is viable.

Clifford N. Click, Tucson, Arizona

It should work if you use heavy enough (8-gauge) wire for the charging line and if the alternator doesn't overheat from the extra load. When you park, the battery will run down fast with that much load. You might want to add a checklist so you don't forget to switch it over to LP-gas when you stop, even if only for a long lunch. — K.F.



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10-MINUTE TECH

A compilation of tried-and-true tips **From RVers**



SCUFF-PROOF

No matter how careful I was, I still managed to scrape the pins on my main power cord on the pavement or gravel as I was putting it back in the storage compartment. To remedy this, my wife sewed a protective slip cover, which I now place over the cord before I begin the storage process. She even put a drawstring in the end to help the cover stay on the plug. Now, we have no more scraped pins.

Ray McCalment, Depew, Oklahoma



ELBOW ROOM

I've had several RVs over the years, and an ongoing problem has been where to store the sewer-hose adapter/elbow. Because of its size, the elbow won't fit inside the sewer pipe. So, I purchased some sheet metal from the hardware store and constructed a small metal box that is just large enough for the elbow. I mounted the unit under the trailer to the frame with three 1/4-inch bolts. Now, the elbow isn't near anything I wish to keep clean. I use a cotter pin to keep the door closed.

Dave Carrow, Wright City, Michigan



A SHARPE IDEA

There are many options for makeshift jack pads, but here's one that most everybody has in their galley: a cutting board. If you don't already have a couple, they are readily available; we found ours at a grocery store. The strong plastic cutting boards are flat, don't take up much room and are very easy to clean off with a hose.

Mark Sharpe, Port Hueneme, California



SOCK IT TO ME

For the rare occasions where you have to lean an extension ladder against your RV (roof cleaning and/or maintenance), try this old painter's trick to protect the finish: Simply duct-tape an old sock around each leg of the ladder that will come in contact with the RV side wall. It's quick and easy, and it has never failed me.

David Lee, Cedar Creek, Texas

Illustrations By Bill Tipton

To send a submission to *10-Minute Tech*, write to 2575 Vista Del Mar, Ventura, CA 93001. Please include an illustration if applicable.

TRAILER LIFE March 2011 65

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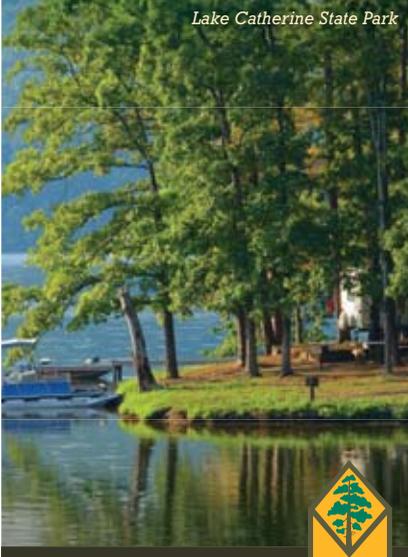
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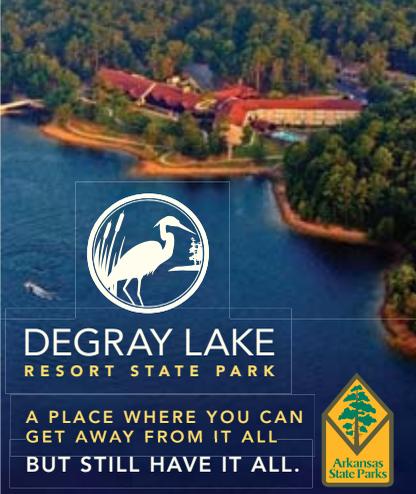
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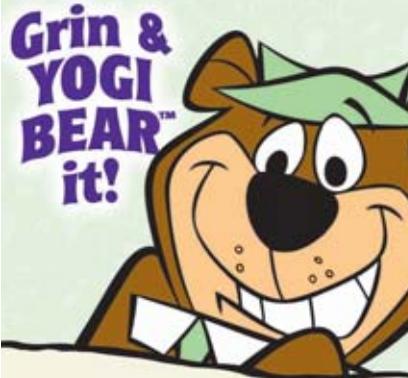
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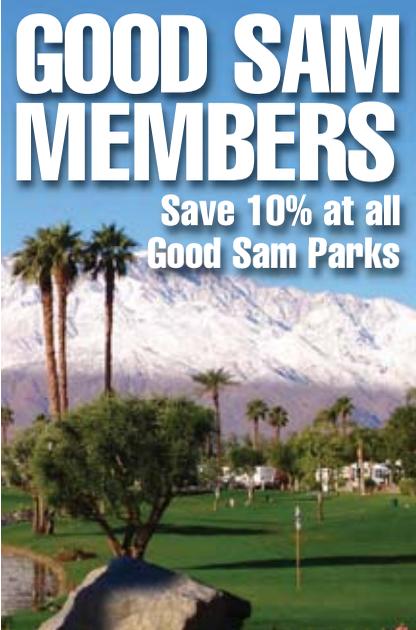
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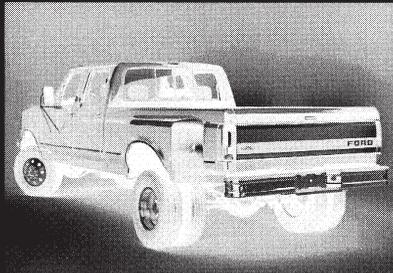
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For **FREE** additional information on products and services in this issue, visit www.trailerlife.com/info

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

AMERICA'S OUTBACK

by Bill Graves

HOME ON THE RANGE IN FLORIDA

**"I AM IN CENTRAL FLORIDA — THE
LAND OF MANY LAKES, LARGEMOUTH
BASS AND MOSQUITOES."**

My education about the West began with Gene Autry movies, back when matinees cost a dime: Cowboys are a creation of the American West. After all, that's where the cows are.

So I was dumfounded — I even lost a bet — to discover in Florida that the American cowboy originated down here. They called them cow herders or "crackers." It's quite a story.

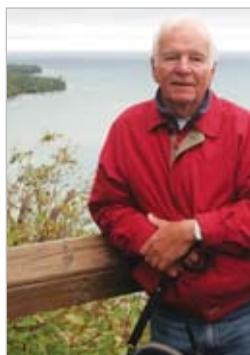
This, too, was a surprise: Florida is home to four of our country's 10 largest cow-calf operations; one ranch here owns the largest brood-cow herd in the country. With nearly half of the state's farmland in cattle production, Florida ranks 12th among the states in number of beef cows.

It started in 1521 when Spanish explorer Ponce de León, on his second Atlantic crossing, offloaded seven cows here along with some horses. Spanish settlers and missionaries raised them, which meant fighting off fever ticks, alligators, hurricanes, snakes, wildcats, wolves and Indian raids.

Still, by the early 1800s, the Spaniards had developed significant herds, as had the Seminole Indians. Because Florida was all open range, uncounted thousands of unmarked cows roamed wild, mostly in Central Florida.

When the railroad reached down into the peninsula state, it brought new settlements and an explosion in the Florida beef industry. During the Civil War, the Confederate army became a huge customer, both for beef and leather. Cuba was also a significant buyer of Florida cattle.

In search of the cow herder story, I am in Central Florida — the land of many lakes, largemouth bass and mosquitoes. Here in Polk County there are 554 lakes. The big one — the third largest in the state — is Lake Kissimmee. On its northwest edge is a 6,000-acre state park,



Storyteller Mark Koruschak from Kissimmee is referred to as the local cracker cow hunter. In costume, he shares tales about the Deep South's cow camps of the 1800s.

named for the lake. It was once a cow camp, set up around 1876. By 1890 cow camps were spotted all over the state, usually a day's horseback-ride apart.

An abbreviated version of a cow camp has been created here at Kissimmee State Park. On weekends, Mark Koruschak, a park ranger, gets into the costume and character of a cow hunter and talks about "his life," or how life was here in 1876.

The hiking trail to the camp is lined with tall ferns and live oak trees burdened with Spanish moss that hangs like shredded bed sheets. The camp is in a grass clearing where cattle are enclosed by a pole fence — no nails in it. A shelter, its roof heavy with long grass, is open on all sides. Inside is a kitchen on wheels, what Gene Autry called a "chuck wagon."

Mark had coffee brewing over a campfire. He offered us some. "It's ready," he said, "and strong enough to float a bullet."

"Florida is a fence-out state. We don't fence cattle in," he told us. "If you don't want cows to eat your vegetable garden, then you better fence them out. And it's that open-range concept that spawned the cow hunters, or 'crackers.' We were guys who went out to find the cows and bring them into camp. Sometimes we'd be gone for a couple months.

"To move cattle, we use a whip, made of braided leather, about 10 feet long — also called a drag, cuz we drag 'em a lot. When we 'pop the drag,' that means we crack the whip. We don't touch the cow. It's the snap that gets their attention. And that's why I am called a 'cracker.'"

"Don't they call you cowboys?" Someone asked.

"No sir!" Mark said. "We send all our boys to Texas."

Welcome to America's Outback. 🐾

Next month Bill will be in Brenham, Texas.

Collect something other than baggage fees and hotel bills.

MEMORIES, PERHAPS.



Fig. 1 Bullfrog

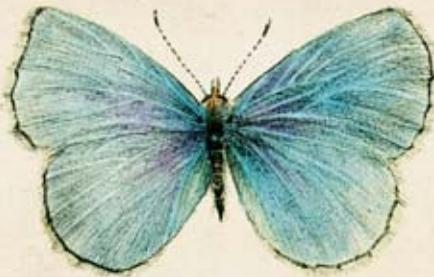


Fig. 3 Spring Azure Butterfly



Fig. 5 Queen Caterpillar



Fig. 7 Pollywogs



Fig. 2 Banded Gecko



Fig. 4 Ladybug



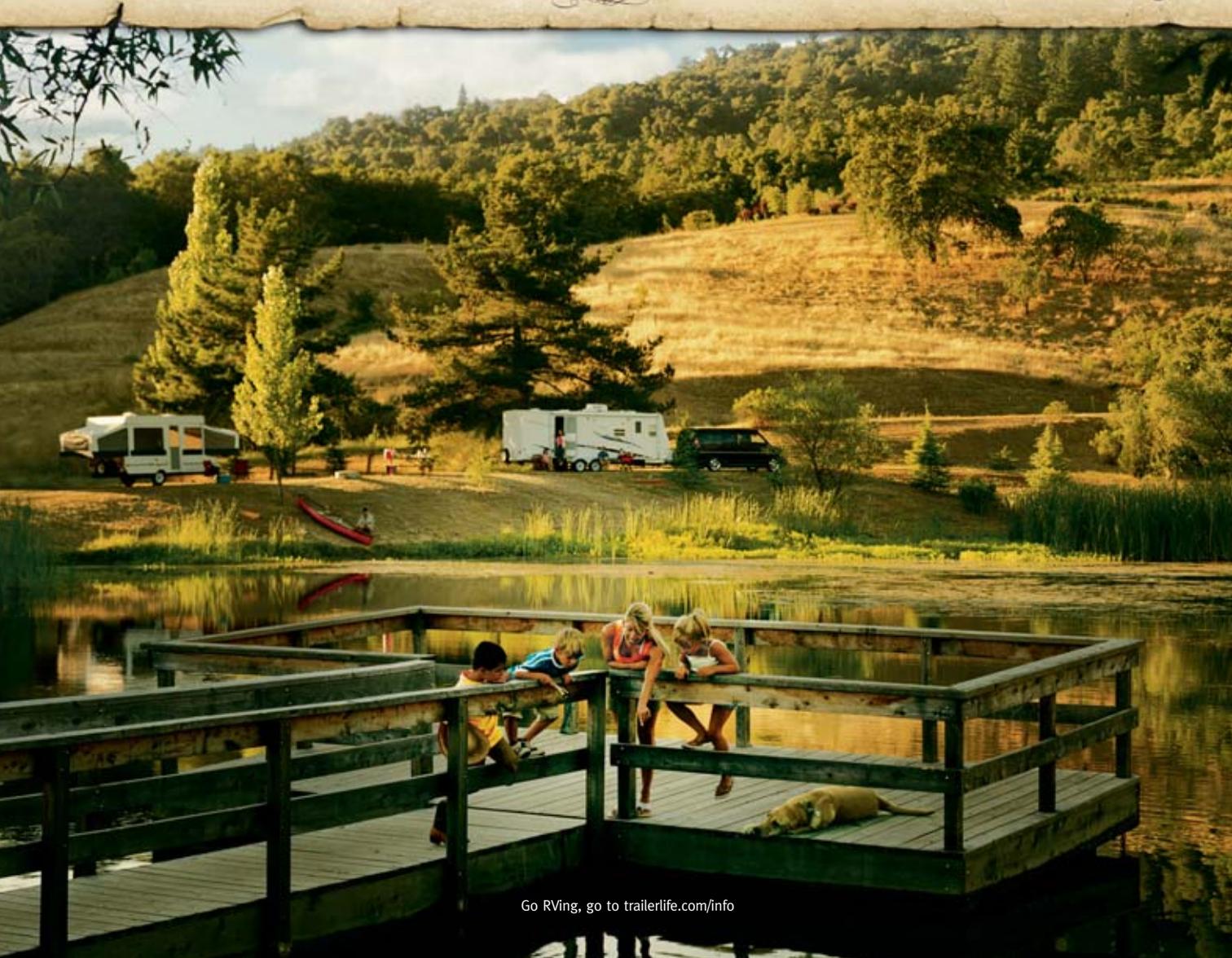
Fig. 6 American Toad



Fig. 8 Dragonfly

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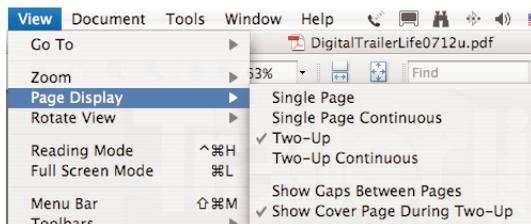


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We hope you enjoy reading our Digital *Trailer Life* magazine, and we encourage your comments and suggestions to our editor at kbunker@affinitygroup.com