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September 2016

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Moab, Utah, offers visitors pulse-pounding adventures, stunning red-rock landscapes and two national parks (see page 22).



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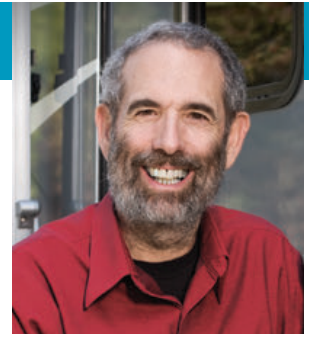
A hose is most definitely not just a hose when it comes to delivering fresh water to your motorhome; we explain why

ON THE COVER

The RV Factory's Avion Azur luxury Class B heads to a site at Ventura Ranch KOA in Santa Paula, California. Built on the Sprinter chassis, the Azur is a fuel-efficient cruiser that is likely to fit in most residential driveways. Photo by Scott Hirko.



By Bob Livingston



Taking a Quick Quiz

I have a quiz for you and it's only one multiple-choice question: Why do you own a motorhome? (A) Because it provides the ultimate in travel freedom; (B) It gives you opportunities to explore places that normally are overlooked by travelers who have to rely on airplanes and hotels; (C) It satisfies the urge to tinker; (D) You don't have to give up the conveniences of home while on the road.

The correct answer, of course, is all of the above.

Every time I book hotel reservations and plane tickets for a business trip, I'm reminded about travel freedom. My wife, Lynne, and I almost never go on a pleasure trip without an RV. Heck, we've never even been on a cruise! Struggling to find seats on airplanes and to book rooms in hotels during the busy travel season can be quite frustrating. In contrast, jumping in a motorhome and heading to a favorite destination can be done even on a moment's notice. Granted, finding space in popular campgrounds during the busy travel months takes some doing, but we've always found a place to park. The freedom to easily change plans or destinations alone makes motorhome ownership worth the investment.

When it comes to exploring new places more intimately, nothing beats the convenience of an RV. Most RV parks are right in the thick of inter-

esting attractions, be they natural or commercial. This month's issue is filled with great places to visit, where you can spend unplanned extra time without incurring airline-change fees. My favorites are Sequoia, Kings Canyon and Yellowstone national parks, featured on pages 52 and 72, respectively. Sequoia is only a five-hour drive from our home, and I can remember numerous times staring at the motorhome parked in the driveway, jumping out of my easy chair and packing for an impromptu trip to Sequoia. Refer back to answer A.

Tinkering on any RV is almost an obsession for me. I love to fix, modify and install just about anything that makes life on the road easier and more fun. And sometimes, fixing appliances out of necessity becomes a learning experience. I can well remember tearing apart a furnace after arriving in Sequoia in the wee hours of the morning during a snowstorm when the heated air

unexpectedly quit blowing. As for accessorizing, I'm right up there with the most fanatical tinkerers. We've made it simple to peruse what's out there with our guide to accessories on page 74. I have confidence you'll find something to add or a way to improve your motorhome.

Most owners who live in cold-weather country store their motorhomes for the winter, but there's a flipside to that process. Winter travel can be exhilarating, but it's not much fun without preparing the motorhome for such usage. Following the procedures on page 92 will help offset the difficulties of motorhome travel in cold country and may even open new horizons.

Whether you're heading for a snowbird location or braving the cold this fall and winter, the answer to my one-question quiz will always be "all of the above." It's hard to beat the pleasures of motorhome ownership and travel, and there's plenty of material in this month's issue to encourage trip planning, spur-of-the-moment journeys and tinkering — all without giving up any of the amenities of home.

But be careful out there, or you could be fodder for next year's RV Oops Awards (see page 45). **M**

Contributors | September



Ann Eichenmuller is a retired educator and freelance writer living in Virginia's Northern Neck. She and her husband, Eric, divide their time between sailing and traveling in their Minnie Winnie.



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



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Alan Rider has been wandering America's backroads for more than four decades, and is passionate about collecting memories of the remarkable people and unforgettable places he encounters along the way.



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



Rosanne Wagstaff and her husband, Greg, an award-winning photographer, are living their dream of full-time RVing in their Monaco Diplomat motorhome, and enjoy sharing their adventures.

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Are you happy with the amount of counterspace in your motorhome's galley as well as the kitchen's layout and design? What improvements would you like to see RV manufacturers make in the galley?

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



Space? What Space?

We are on our third motorhome, the latest a 2009 38-foot Damon Challenger. All three we have owned offered limited counterspace. It appears as if there is more of it when the sink covers and the stove covers are on, but when you are preparing a meal, it's necessary to use both of those spaces.

We have a lift-up extension at the end of the counter, which gives us about an additional foot of space when it is up. There is also a piece of countertop on the narrow base cabinet near the door, which has limited use.

Cabinets have also been an issue for me. They are either not deep enough or tall enough to accommodate cutting boards, sheet pans, platters, etc. The coffee pot needs to be left on the counter for convenience, and also

to allow other kitchen appliances to be concealed in a cabinet.

I would rather have fewer cabinets if they were sized to accommodate ordinary household items. I would like wider drawers, even if there are fewer (but more than one), an oven (not a convection microwave) and a large, single-basin sink that I could actually get a pot into, with a high curved-neck faucet.

I'd also rather have a floor-to-ceiling cabinet in the corner of my kitchen/dining area instead of the narrow base cabinet with a third TV.

Sharyn Rothgarn | Via email

Vast Vista

This past January while spending the winter in Florida, my husband and I traded our older RV in on a 2015 Winnebago Vista 27N. The actual

length of this three-slide motorhome is 28 feet 5 inches. We really like our new galley, which has lots of storage space for dishes, pots, pans, cleaning supplies, cooking utensils and everything else we need, including a small crockpot and an electric skillet. The food pantry is large and easy to access. We do some of our cooking and grilling outdoors, but we prepare most of our meals inside. We love the extra counterspace, double sink and tall faucet with pull-down sprayer. We chose a model without an oven because the microwave convection oven is enough for us.

Regina L. Hollis | Louisville, Kentucky

Design Flaws

For those of us who cook, galley design is very important and a critical consideration when purchasing a motorhome.

Featured Letter

Terrific Trek

We love our motorhome, including the galley and counterspace. We have a 2005 Monaco Safari Trek, and have plenty of space in the galley (and bathroom) because we don't have a bedroom. We lower our bed from the ceiling at night when we're ready for sleep, and raise it back up each morning. This gives us the living space of a 38-foot motorhome in just 30 feet of space. We wish they would start making the Trek again, but they quit making them in 2008 (except for a trial revival this year, which is nothing like the high-quality originals).

Harry and Mary Carlson | Henderson, Nevada

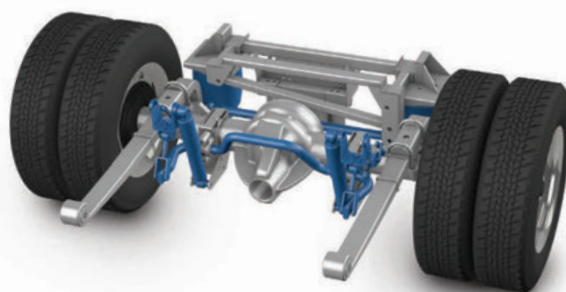


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The problem appears that those who design galleys in motorhomes do not cook from scratch nor spend enough time “living” in an RV, especially in a smaller unit, for a long period of time.

Roadworthiness and keeping things simple, coupled with “putting 5 pounds in a 10-pound space” should be the main design criteria, not how glitzy can we make the galley.

I have modified our galley to help

gain additional countertop space, plus creative use of our combination microwave convection oven, toaster oven and an induction cooktop compensate for the limited space in our motorhome. Additionally we have converted multipot meals to one pot, maximum two pots, without sacrificing quality to create gourmet meals.

For those of us who enjoy cooking in an RV, it is fun and challenging, plus

it allows us to be creative and inventive while taking advantage of local products and produce as we travel.

John Holdos | Slatington, Pennsylvania

TV Dinner

I don't think there is ever enough counter-space in an RV, which makes preparing and serving meals very challenging and frustrating.

A suggestion

I would make to

RV manufacturers is to give people the option of not having an extra TV, and use that space as a countertop. I also think an L-shaped kitchen is the best design, as it seems to offer more counterspace.

We have a 2008 Class A Mandalay that came with three TVs, and an optional one for outside. Who needs three or four TVs, especially in such a small space? The first thing we did was remove the galley TV, which immediately gave us more counterspace.

Last year we took the RV in for some repairs, and decided to have mirrors put on the dining-room wall, where the TV was formerly located. Next, we had two drawers (there are never enough of those, either) and shelves added in the lower cabinet. A new countertop without holes for the electronics was added, along with additional outlets on the mirror wall.

The space in the cabinet is now used much more efficiently. The two additional drawers are great for silverware and cooking utensils.

Pam Boersma | Auburn, California



COMFORT ZONE | 02



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morning. We have more than ample countertop and cabinet storage — including a handy pantry — compared to the design of newer motorhomes. The design makes it convenient to cook for a crowd, or for just the two of us.

Vicki Hogan | Willow Springs, Missouri

Island Living

We own a 2014 Tiffin Open Road. While I love the layout of the kitchen area, once the sink and range top are opened up and uncovered, there is precious little prep or service space. My solution was to buy a tiny kitchen island from Wal-Mart. This wheeled little island has two shelves underneath to hold bowls or pans, and hooks on one side to hold towels and potholders. It has a wood surface for chopping, or to put hot things on. I also fitted foam pipe insulation onto the legs of the island to prevent scratching or damage to the cabinets, and bungee-cord the island to the handle of one of the cabinets to secure it when in motion.

Deborah Gillert | Rockledge, Florida

How Are U?

We have a 43-foot 2005 Holiday Rambler Navigator with a galley featuring a residential refrigerator/freezer, a two-burner stove and a microwave convection oven. What it does not have is counterspace, which means we normally have one side of the sink covered with a chopping block.

Recently, we've seen kitchens with a bigger window for more light, induction cooktops, dishwashers, garbage disposals, more pantry space, etc. Our conclusion is we can't have it all, but a U-shaped kitchen with a large single-bowl sink in a peninsula configuration would be a great start.

My husband and I may not be gourmet cooks, but we prefer cooking in rather than eating out. We do it together, which means we are crowded in our space, and a U-shaped galley would provide the space for him to be on the living-room side of the peninsula prepping and the cook can be in the kitchen.

Susan and Jim Franks
Hot Springs Village, Arkansas

Accessible Access

We are pleased with the galley in our 2014 Winnebago Access 26QP. There is good counterspace to the left of the sink, and also some behind the sink and stove. Even when the toaster oven is out, we can make do. The space between the sink and stove has room enough to set cooking utensils. The galley is arranged in a straight line, which works well with two people. We

especially love the pullout shelves in the pantry. The double sink is good quality, and there is plenty of cabinet space for our needs.

What manufacturers could do to improve galleys is to lower the height of microwaves. I can't safely remove deep dishes when they are hot, as the microwave is too high, especially when the dish is on the rack for convection cooking. If the average American



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woman is still 5 feet 4 inches tall, this must be a problem for others.

Deb Mansfield | Warren, Maine

Tiffin Twofer

We personally feel that motorhome galleys today are very efficient in their design, and that every inch is used as well as it could be.

I've been an RVer for 40 years, and I recall that some of the first motorhomes I encountered contained little, if any, extra space in the galley. One unit that particularly comes to mind is an Executive that was maybe 24 feet in length, which I used to travel in for business.

I was afraid because I felt like I spent our last dime on a motorhome that had just enough room for the two of us in the living area, plus a bath and a small closet. The kitchen itself was nonexistent! We took a few TV dinners along, and stored them in the ice box. We also had to bring along a small stove/oven for cooking. Despite all of these limitations, we were admired by many.

For some 15 years now we have owned a Tiffin Allegro Bus, and I have no idea how any manufacturer could put any more space in the galley. There's even an expandable island for storage that can be pulled out when more room is needed. We never really have found the need to use it.

Perhaps we are not huge eat-in-your-RV people, but we are pleased with the galley layouts every time we shop for and buy a new rig.

Steve and Cynthia Ecton | Dallas, Texas

We own a 2006 Tiffin Allegro Bus, and are extremely pleased with the layout of the galley, especially the very deep countertops. We would never go without the convenience of the pull-out drawer system, which expands the countertop by leaps and bounds, leaving plenty of work, prep and serving space.

The only drawback we see in many of today's newer motorhomes is that the manufacturers seem to have removed the window in the galley-area design. For someone who enjoys

making coffee in the morning while looking outdoors at nature, I wouldn't want to buy a motorhome without this valuable window to the outside world!

Karen and Dwayne McAbee

Fort Worth, Texas

A Lake Makes All the Difference

As someone who grew up in Chicago, I was anxious to read James Richardson's article about Grand Haven, Michigan ("Beachy-keen Destination"), in the June issue.

But the second sentence has an error that caused me to do a double take: "Situating on the western shore of Lake Michigan ..."

Anyone who knows Michigan knows that Grand Haven is most definitely not on the western shore of Lake Michigan. My husband and I finally figured out that the author must have intended to say, "Situating on the western shore of Michigan," but somehow the word "Lake" was inserted.

You might want to issue a correction on this statement and save your readers a lot of time hunting around the western shore of Lake Michigan looking for Grand Haven [tongue firmly planted in cheek].

Linda Adams | Horseshoe Bend, Idaho

You and your husband are correct, Linda. Grand Haven is indeed located on the western shore of Michigan. MotorHome regrets the error.

Timing is Everything

A big thank-you to E. Don Smith and MotorHome for the June article, "Motorhome Window Swapping." As luck would have it, I had just ordered and received the driver's side window for my 2007 Tiffin Allegro Bus. The original window had become so fogged that it was nearly impossible to see out of.

After receiving the window from Tiffin and seeing the size of the shipping box, I was having second thoughts on whether replacing it was really a DIY project or if I should hire a local glass company to handle the task. After reading Smith's detailed article I decided it was something I



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P.O. BOX

could tackle. I followed the step-by-step instructions, and the removal and replacement went smoothly. It took a little less than two hours start to finish (unlike Smith, I did not have to stop and take pictures along the way).

Thanks again for a great article!

Gerald Demuth | Blair, Nebraska

Radio Contact

In the June "P.O. Box," we read with interest how various people use hand signals for maneuvering a motorhome, sometimes even slapping a hand against the side of the motorhome to alert the driver to come to a complete stop ("Full Stop"). We felt we had to add our two cents to this subject.

We use our two-way radios, and sometimes even our cellphones, and simply talk to each other. The driver switches to speakerphone, or keeps the two-way radio next to him/her in order to keep both hands on the wheel.

By using either of these devices there is absolutely no misinterpretation of hand signals.

Ronnie and Milt Abrams | Mentor, Ohio

Sideview Cameras?

I am considering the installation of sideview cameras to my motorhome. The motorhome has a backup camera, but no side cameras. I understand that sideview cameras are great when changing lanes, and also help eliminate blind spots. I am interested in reader recommendations on the use of these cameras, and if the cameras are really worth the expense?

Gus Cordova | Vadito, New Mexico

Question of the Month

Did your motorhome come equipped with sideview cameras or, if not, did you have them installed? If so, do they perform as advertised and are they worth the expense? Which brand(s) do you prefer?

Send your comments to:

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Historic Copper Harbor

This off-the-beaten-path town on Michigan's Upper Peninsula offers outdoor adventure and small-town charm in scenic backcountry splendor

By James Richardson

Copper Harbor, a small town on the Keweenaw Peninsula, juts out from Michigan's Upper Peninsula into Lake Superior. It is the northernmost town in the state and is aptly named for its copper-mining history.

Many of the Keweenaw Peninsula's biggest attractions are in Copper Harbor, including Fort Wilkins Historic State Park, Copper Harbor Lighthouse, Delaware Copper Mine, the 10-mile Brockway Mountain Drive and ferry service to Isle Royale National Park (no motorized vehicles are allowed on the island; parking is available adjacent to the dock for an additional fee).

Outdoor opportunities in Copper Harbor include visiting the area's waterfalls, photographing its abundant wildflowers and watching the local wildlife. The annual

Keweenaw's International Migratory Bird Day fest is held here each spring. Copper Harbor is also a winter wonderland during the cold season.

The campground of choice is Lake Fanny Hooe Resort & Campground, which offers boat rentals, a camp store, a swim beach and playground and a 64-site campground. Available Memorial Day weekend through early October (weather permitting), each lakefront site offers water and electricity, and full-hookup sites are available as well. Not all sites are suitable for motorhomes, so we recommend calling in advance to ensure availability.

For more information on Copper Harbor, visit www.copperharbor.org. For information on Fanny Hooe Resort & Campground, call 906-289-4451 or visit www.fannyhooe.com.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

It's Apple Time!



From top: Apples are the perfect fruit for traveling. Cindy Miles, co-owner of Bear Creek Artichokes farm stand, says she uses a tart variety of apples in her Raw Apple Cake (recipe below).

In September and October — the peak months for apple season in North America — communities all over the nation celebrate the apple, one of the most delicious and ubiquitous fruits. Originally from Central Asia, archaeologists have found evidence of humans eating this member of the rose family as early as 6500 B.C. Today, 7,500 varieties of apple are grown around the world; 2,500 total varieties are grown in the U.S. (about 100 varieties grown commercially).

There's an old saying, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away," and that may just be true. An unpeeled apple contains about 100 calories, 2.4 grams of dietary fiber and is a healthy source of antioxidants. Preliminary evidence suggests nutrients and some phytochemicals apples (with skin on) contain may even prevent certain types of cancer.

For travelers, apples are terrific because they're available year-round, they're inexpensive and they travel well. In fact, sliced apple and a bit of cheese is a go-to snack for me on the road.

Apple celebrations also make a great destination for RVers. In spring, many places have apple-blossom festivals and, in fall, there are hundreds of apple-harvest festivals throughout the U.S. and Canada. One of my favorites is the Hood River Valley Harvest Fest in Hood River, Oregon, held this year October 14-16. This picture-pretty farm community is perched in the hills above the river in the Columbia River Gorge and is home to Hood River County's Fruit Loop, a 35-mile driving loop. This meandering route is perfect for exploring several farm stands and orchards such as Kiyokawa Family Orchards & Fruit Stand, where more than 80 different varieties of apples and pears are offered. Many of the farm stands offer picked and pick-your-own apples (including many heirloom varieties) and other fruit; fresh apple juice and hard apple cider; local artwork; pastries; desserts; and even apple donuts.

This recipe from our friends at Bear Creek Artichokes farm stand in Beaver, Oregon, is a variation of an old-time recipe you may recognize from your mother or grandmother. The cake is easy to make and rich and super moist. It also travels well. Share it with other campers during your next trip and you'll be the darling of the RV park.

Got a favorite apple recipe you'd like to share?

Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com with "apple" in the subject line.

RAW APPLE CAKE WITH BUTTERCREAM FROSTING



- ☐ 4 cups apples, chopped (a tart variety is best)
- ☐ 2 cups sugar
- ☐ 3 eggs
- ☐ ½ cup oil
- ☐ 1 teaspoon salt
- ☐ 2 teaspoons vanilla
- ☐ 2 cups flour
- ☐ 1 cup walnuts, coarsely chopped
- ☐ 2¼ teaspoons baking soda
- ☐ 2 teaspoons cinnamon

► Preheat oven to 350 F.

Combine first two ingredients and let stand while preparing the rest of the cake.

Beat eggs slightly before beating in the oil and vanilla. Mix all dry ingredients and sift in. Add apple/sugar mixture and stir until apples partially break down. Stir in walnuts.

Pour mixture into greased 9-by-13-inch pan. Bake at 350 F for 40 minutes, or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean. Cake will still be very moist. Allow it to cool before frosting.

Buttercream Frosting

- ☐ 6 tablespoons butter
- ☐ ¾ pound powdered sugar
- ☐ 1 teaspoon vanilla
- ☐ ⅛ teaspoon salt
- ☐ 3½ tablespoons half-and-half

► Whip all ingredients until light and airy. Allow the cake to cool before applying frosting.

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Fitness from Above

Montague Bikes is rolling out the all-new Paratrooper folding bicycle. The Paratrooper was originally developed to allow airborne soldiers to drop out of airplanes and into combat with a bike. The Paratrooper features a Suntour suspension fork and standard 26-inch wheels, mechanical disc brakes and a 24-speed drivetrain. When folded, the bike compacts to just 36 inches wide, 28 inches high and 12 inches deep, all in a package that weighs only 32 pounds. The Paratrooper includes the DirectConnect folding system, which provides increased frame stiffness for superior ride quality, and can be folded and unfolded in less than 20 seconds, according to the company. The bike also comes equipped with Montague's RackStand, which serves as a standard cargo rack and mud guard when the bike is in use, converts into a kickstand when parked and allows the bike to stand upright when folded. MSRP: \$899.

Montague Bikes, 800-736-5348, www.montaguebikes.com

Camera-Ready

When selecting an after-market navigation system, owners whose motorhomes are equipped with sideview and backup cameras are often faced with a limited selection based on compatibility. In the past, integrating a new multimedia system with a standard three-camera system necessitated an external switching box, and limited users to existing knobs and switches (e.g., the turn signal) to control the camera system. The Jensen JRV9000 from ASA Electronics eliminates the complicated integration and enables users to seamlessly shift between camera angles. The unit has been designed specifically for motorhomes and allows users to program their vehicle's profile for navigation, which helps avoid narrow roads and low overpasses, and even includes Canadian maps in addition to the extensive USA routes. The JRV9000 also includes CD/DVD, Bluetooth, SiriusXM and HDMI input. MSRP: \$699.99.

ASA Electronics, 877-305-0445, www.asaelectronics.com



A New Look

Thor's Windsport features several updates that you'll likely notice right away ... and several that you may not. The redesigned front cap and grille are sure to catch your eye, as is the new-for-2017 rear cap. Five floorplans are offered on the Ford F53 Super Duty chassis, including a rear king-bed configuration (29M), a bunkhouse (34J) and a bath-and-a-half model (35C). All floorplans feature a removable cockpit coffee table and updated galleys with taller backsplashes, deeper drawers and expanded cabinets, and all but the 35C feature exterior kitchens. Larger windows in select locations help maintain the motorhome's bright and airy interior, which is further opened up by the 7-foot ceilings. Additional upgrades include a flush-mount rear camera, a power front shade and overhead LED reading lights and entry-step lights. Each Windsport is outfitted with most everything you'd want, so few options are available; they include attic fans, upgraded exterior graphics, frameless radius windows and a power driver's seat. MSRP starts at \$126,600.

Thor Motor Coach, 800-860-5658, www.thormotorcoach.com

This is a Stick-Up!



Large storage compartments are a very desirable feature on a motorhome, but it can be difficult to retrieve items when you can't see inside. Super Bright LEDs has the answer to light your way with portable stick-up lights. The AA battery-operated lights are safe for use in any dry location, making them handy for lighting hard-to-see areas, including inside dark, recessed cabinets and storage compartments. Each unit features 15 LEDs to emit cool or warm-white light, and a touch-button switch controls three brightness levels. The light can be mounted using its built-in hook or screw holes. Or, you can supply strong double-sided tape to mount them virtually anywhere. MSRP: \$5.95.

Super Bright LEDs Inc., 866-590-3533, www.superbrightleds.com



Katherine Delaney (pictured) reflects on her time spent camping as a child; today she visits her favorite spots in her Zion by Roadtrek.



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Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve, Idaho

Lava Loop

Have you ever wanted to walk on the moon without leaving the ground? Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve in Idaho allows visitors to tour a truly alien landscape, created by a series of volcanic eruptions over the past 15,000 years. The most recent eruption occurred only 2,000 years ago, and geologists expect more to follow at any time. The resulting lava tubes, cinder cones and various lava flows are accessible to visitors via a 7-mile loop road. Plan to spend at least a day at this very eerie place.

First, make a stop at the visitor center to learn more about the park. Next, set out on the loop road, which leads to a number of short hiking trails. On these walks, you can view crater flows, spatter cones and lava tubes. Be careful and wear sturdy shoes, as many of these trails include walking through the lava fields (they've long since cooled), which can be sharp and abrasive.

Want to camp among the volcanic rock? A 51-site campground is available at Craters of the Moon. There aren't any hookups, showers or even a dump station, but many large sites can accommodate motorhomes. The campground was recently closed for renovations and likely won't reopen until 2017, so be sure to call ahead for availability.

For more information, call 208-527-1300 or go to www.nps.gov/crmo —
Morey Edelman



Photo: Morey Edelman

Clinton, Tennessee

The Museum of Appalachia

The Museum of Appalachia, located 16 miles north of Knoxville, was established in the 1960s by John Rice Irwin, who spent a lifetime collecting artifacts of the Appalachian people. The result is a living-history museum interpreting the pioneer period of the Southern Appalachian region. The museum, which is a collection of more than 30 historic buildings set on 63 acres, has been named an Affiliate of the Smithsonian Institution, in an effort to enrich communities using

Smithsonian resources. The museum also displays authentic relics, maintains one of the nation's largest folk-art collections and hosts demonstrations by regional craftsmen in addition to performances by traditional Appalachian musicians.

The museum grounds are set up as a working pioneer Appalachian farm, with gardens growing typical crops and farm animals roaming freely (visitors can roam freely, as well).

For more information, call 865-494-7680 or go to www.museumofappalachia.org — *James Richardson* **M**

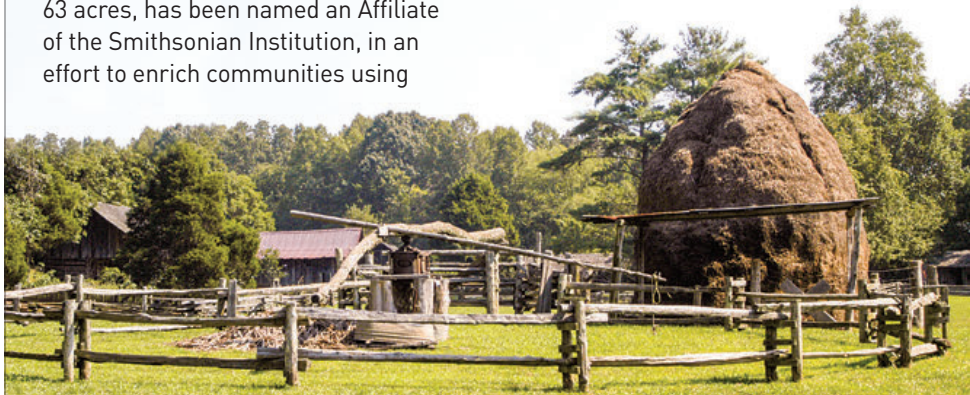


Photo: James Richardson

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Hikers enjoy a close-up view of Delicate Arch, Arches National Park's celebrity location for capturing images.

Gateway to Adventure

Moab, Utah, offers a variety of outdoor recreation sure to get your heart pumping

By Rosanne Wagstaff

“Must he always set his tripod at the very edge of the cliff?” I wondered, peering over my boots into the deep, purple chasm below. Winds gusted. The sun dropped. In the changing light, colors flowed over the canyon like an artist’s brush making final touches on a canvas. All my worries about my photography-loving husband’s cliff-hanging photo setup vanished. Sunset had arrived in Canyonlands National Park.

With Arches and Canyonlands national parks on its doorstep, Moab, Utah, is the gateway to adventure. It caters to outdoor enthusiasts craving to indulge their passions. The activity menu abounds with four-wheeling, mountain biking, river rafting, hiking, zip-lines and more. Plus, with peak season stretching from April through October, Moab is a perfect destination to extend summer travels.

Fall temperatures in the high 80s welcomed my husband, Greg, and I to the fiery-red rock desert. We strolled Moab’s Main Street past

shops touting bicycle, kayak and Jeep rentals, and a smorgasbord of guided tours. Like kids on a playground, we wanted to do it all! The best advice we can offer is to follow your passions and dial up the adrenaline meter for some added excitement.

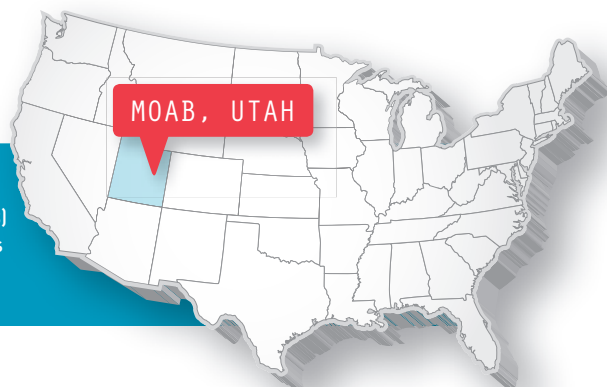
Hiking Arches National Park

Entering Arches felt like a theme-park ride. Towering rock walls splashed in sunset colors stretch skyward as the road serpentine above the visitor center. Monstrous boulders balance precariously on pedestals. Huge holes gape through massive rocks. Just 5 miles north of Moab, the park delights visitors with more than 2,000 natural sandstone arches and a menagerie of unusual rock sculptures. With names like Balanced Rock, Three Gossips and Park Avenue, I

Photos: Greg Wagstaff

Getting There ➞

From Interstate 70, take either Exit 182 (Highway 191) or Exit 204 (Scenic Byway 128) to reach Moab. Highway 191 continues south of Moab linking up with other highways providing access to Monument Valley, Lake Powell, southwestern Colorado and points beyond.





Above: Off-roaders enjoy miles of trails near Moab. The author's brother-in-law, Mike, skillfully leads the way down the rocks. Tour companies offer half- and full-day guided excursions down the Colorado River.

couldn't help but smile.

People clad in sandals and hiking boots with cameras slung around their necks streamed up and down a steep rock face. "It looks like a pilgrimage of sorts," I mused, as we joined the masses trekking up to Delicate Arch. The 3-mile round-trip trail traverses slick rock, sand and a 200-yard rock ledge with dizzying views. What a treat it was to turn the last corner and see the iconic arch! A partylike mood filled the air. People cheerfully handed their cameras to strangers and lined up to pose for photos under the arch, a perfect frame for handstands and happy faces! If hiking is not your passion, you can view Delicate Arch from a distance, at two lower viewpoints accessible from the parking lot 1 mile past the Wolfe Ranch trailhead. Pack a lunch, snacks and plenty of water, as there is no food service in the park.

"How far does the path drop?" the woman asked, fear filling her eyes. We looked back. The rock fin curved and disappeared into blue skies. Despite our reassurances, she froze, explaining that her husband was up ahead. Our friend offered to lead her across. She grabbed his hand, found her courage and the two vanished from sight. Several minutes later, our friend reappeared and we continued our descent on the primitive trail from Double O Arch to Devil's Garden trailhead. This challenging, 4-mile

round-trip rock-scrambling hike over sandstone slabs and steep fins rewarded us with views worth the effort, and a high score on the adrenaline meter.

One of the most popular hikes in Arches is Fiery Furnace, a maze of narrow canyons and fins. Access is permitted only by a ranger-guided hike or a special permit. Tours sell out quickly, and the park recommends booking the 2½- to 3-hour morning tour online at least four days prior to the date of the hike. Reservations are also accepted up to six months in advance. Afternoon tour tickets can be purchased at the visitor center seven days prior to the hike date. Next time, we'll get our reservations in early.

Four-wheeling in Canyonlands

Canyonlands National Park occupies 527 square miles of rocky wilderness replete with mesas, canyons, arches and the confluence of the Green and Colorado rivers. These merging rivers thunder through Cataract Canyon creating one of the most treacherous whitewater runs in the nation. I wouldn't even think of dipping a toe in that!

Dirt roads wind into the canyon, taking adventure-seekers to places inaccessible from park paved roads. "Now, that's where I want to go!" I exclaimed, hanging over a viewpoint railing on our first visit a few years ago. Four-wheeling in Canyonlands became a must-do this time around. We took the backroad in from Potash-



Right: Expert-rated Slickrock Bike Trail draws mountain bikers from around the world.

Right: The sun sets over Archview RV Resort & Campground, 11 miles north of Moab. In Arches, the trail to Double O Arch turns primitive after Landscape Arch, with narrow rock fins and exposure to heights.

Lower Colorado River Scenic Byway (Utah-279) for 16 miles to the end of the pavement. From there, a dirt road rated for high-clearance vehicles begged us to continue another 32 miles to the park's boundary. All-terrain vehicles (ATVs) and side-by-sides are not allowed in national parks, but our dinghy vehicle — an all-wheel-drive Honda CR-V — negotiated the terrain admirably with a few strategic teeter-totters over rocky patches and deep ruts.

For miles, ours was the lone vehicle on the road. Just the whisper of a slight breeze broke the silence as we stood on the overlook admiring the Colorado River ribbon around the gooseneck bend. If four-wheeling isn't on your adventure list, you can still enjoy this not-to-be-missed view from the cliffs above in Dead Horse Point State Park.

A weathered wooden sign announced our entry into Canyonlands. Not ready to abandon the dirt roads yet, we headed to Musselman Arch and found ourselves walking across the arch top, as if on a bridge, over a gaping canyon. Saving the best (or scariest) for last, we zigzagged out of the canyon up Shafer Trail's infamous switchbacks with sheer drop-offs. My hope of reaching the top without encountering another vehicle faded when a bumper peered around the curve. Thankfully, the Jeep backed into the curve pocket and we cautiously motored past. Glancing over the edge, I concluded that driving up the mountainside was a lot less heart-racing than heading down!

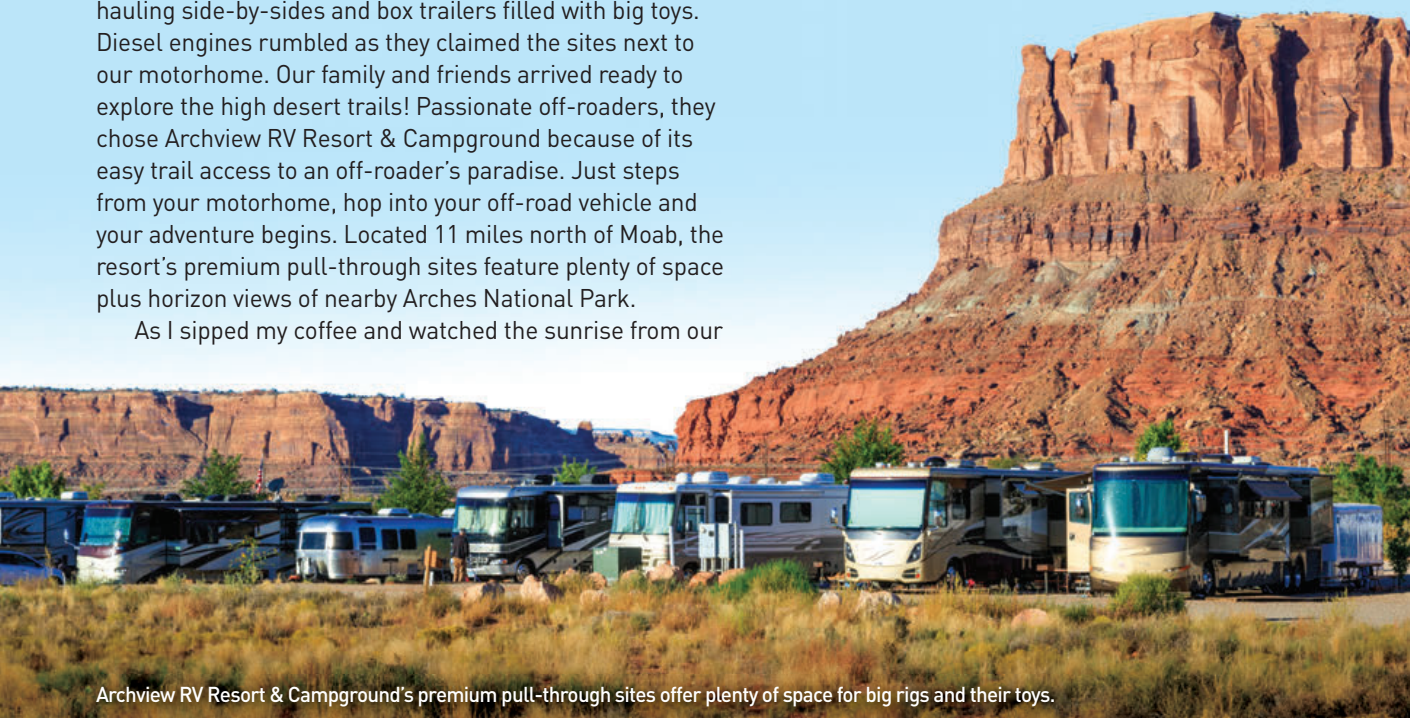
Rock Crawling and Off-roading

Like a modern-day wagon train they rolled into the RV park, hauling side-by-sides and box trailers filled with big toys. Diesel engines rumbled as they claimed the sites next to our motorhome. Our family and friends arrived ready to explore the high desert trails! Passionate off-roaders, they chose Archview RV Resort & Campground because of its easy trail access to an off-roader's paradise. Just steps from your motorhome, hop into your off-road vehicle and your adventure begins. Located 11 miles north of Moab, the resort's premium pull-through sites feature plenty of space plus horizon views of nearby Arches National Park.

As I sipped my coffee and watched the sunrise from our



motorhome window, I wondered what the day's adventures held. My answer came quickly. Hat-clad, bandana-faced folks began congregating near their side-by-sides. Motors started and seats filled, but one remained empty. Grinning like a kid, my adventure-seeking husband quickly accepted our friend's invitation to join the expedition to Gemini Bridges, a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) site. A popular route for off-roaders and mountain bikers, the dirt road climbs the mountainside delivering panoramic views. After several miles, a sign and parking area mark the general location of the twin arches. From



Archview RV Resort & Campground's premium pull-through sites offer plenty of space for big rigs and their toys.

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GETAWAY

MOAB, UTAH

Right: A 1-mile stroll from nature's rendition of Park Avenue leads to a pickup point at Courthouse Towers in Arches National Park.

there, a short walk leads to the arches. Rated as an easy-to-moderate off-road route, our team still managed to dial up the adrenaline meter with some rock crawling over a portion of the adjoining Gold Bar Rim Trail before heading back. Exploring the area's miles of dirt and rock trails is great fun. Just be sure to stay within your skill level, keep your maps handy and pay close attention to signs that read: "Caution. Very difficult. Great place to change your plan!"

Slickrock and Hell's Revenge

Gravity-defying rock domes, bowls and fins lure mountain bikers to Moab's world-famous Slickrock Bike Trail. In a wheels-versus-rock duel, it challenges riders on a 9½-mile course marked by a dashed white line painted on bare, slick rock. Rated as an expert trail

and not recommended for novices, we didn't consider pedaling it. The trail is closed to ATVs and 4x4s but is open to hikers and motorcycles.

We couldn't resist hoofing a portion of it to get a firsthand look. It turned out to be a great spectator sport, plus a respectable hike. A 1.7-mile practice loop, not any less difficult than the actual trail, allows cyclists to muster courage and test out skills and equipment. The trail appears and disappears over the terrain. On steep domes, we heard tires crunch

behind us before we saw bikes crest the hill. Silently, we cheered on the challengers, especially those who lost momentum on steep inclines and ultimately walked their bikes to the top. At certain points, Slickrock Bike Trail intersects Hell's Revenge 4x4 Trail, an added plus for us spectators as we watched Jeeps and side-by-sides scale narrow fins and crawl over rocks. These trails are just two of many offered in the Sand Flats Recreation Area located 3 miles from Moab's city center. Nominal day-use fees apply,



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and dry campsites are offered. Three campgrounds (A, E and Juniper) have dry-camping sites suitable for RVs.

The Moab area offers miles of dirt, paved and road cycling routes to satisfy any pedaling persuasion, from comfy rides to heart-pumping hill climbs. A relaxing 2½-mile paved bike path follows the Upper Colorado River Scenic Byway (Utah-128) and is easily accessible from town. The paved, 9-mile Moab Canyon Bike Trail along U.S. Highway 191 connects cyclists to Arches National Park, in addition to a network of routes including access to Canyonlands.

River Splashing

An eclectic flotilla of paddleboards, canoes, kayaks and rafts drifted downriver heading toward the rapids. Crews paddled in rambunctious disorder. Dogs stood comfortably on bows like sea captains. Laughter danced across the water. Described as a fun, splashy float by tour companies,

the Colorado River's Fisher Towers section is a popular half- to full-day float. Bobbing through moderate rapids along Utah's Scenic Byway 128, the river-carved canyon delivers a refreshing break from the desert heat. Launch your own watercraft, rent a vessel or leave the navigating to a professional tour company.

If you prefer a more thrilling river journey, the Colorado River's Westwater Canyon kicks up the adrenaline meter with Class III and IV rapids mixed with calm-water sections. Permits are required, so booking with a tour company is most convenient. Plan on a full day, as the canyon is a two-hour drive from Moab.

Adventure On

Moab bid us farewell with a sign that reads: "Discover Moab again and again. The adventure never ends." This resort town knows the secret to adventure. It simply lies in the heart of the traveler. From enjoying glorious sunsets to

white-knuckling down steep rock faces, Moab's abounding activities keep visitors coming back for more! **M**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Arches National Park

435-719-2299, www.nps.gov/arch

Canyonlands National Park

435-719-2313, www.nps.gov/cany

Sand Flats Recreation Area

435-259-2444, www.sandflats.org

CAMPGROUNDS IN THE AREA

ACT Campground and Environmental Learning Center

435-355-0355, www.actcampground.com

Archview RV Resort & Campground

800-813-6622, www.archviewresort.com

Canyonlands RV Resort & Campground

800-522-6848, www.highwaywestvacations.com

Moab Valley RV Resort & Campground

435-259-4469, www.highwaywestvacations.com

Portal RV Resort

435-259-6108, www.portalrvresort.com

Spanish Trail RV Park

800-787-2751, www.spanishtrailrvpark.com



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Three generations of Good Sam Club campers: (Above) At a 1987 campout, Ray Fitzgibbons holds Jeremy, and Cindy cradles newborn Julie. (Right) Cindy's dad, Carl Guild, sets up his Jayco next to the Fitzgibbons' now-classic winged Shasta.



Flashback to the '80s

With the Good Sam Club celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, I wanted to share a little about our family's Good Sam history. We are Cindy Fitzgibbons and my husband, Raymond, the middle of three generations of a Vermont Good Sam family.

Ray and I joined the Good Sam Club in December 1984, and my parents, Carl and Carrie Guild, joined at about the same time. That month we found out we were expecting our first child, Jeremy. Jeremy's first campout, at the age of three and a half weeks, was the 1985 Vermont Samboree. Julie, our daughter, was just 10 days old on her first camping trip, a 1987 outing in Henniker, New Hampshire, with our Good Sam chapter, the Rolling Wheels Sams. At that time, we had a three-passenger truck to pull our newly acquired Shasta trailer, so two-year-old Jeremy rode to the Samboree in his grandparents' GMC pickup.

Since then, Ray and I have attended our state's Samboree every year but one, and Julie, who is now 29, has not missed a single Vermont Samboree her whole life. Ray and I have served on the state Good Sam staff for a dozen years and are currently wagonmasters, and Julie also works on the state staff.

Carl and Carrie were proud of their grandchildren and enjoyed many years of camping with us and the rest of our Good Sam family, prior to their passing in 2007 and 2009, respectively. Thanks for the memories, Good Sam! — CINDY FITZGIBBONS

GOING PLACES WITH GOOD SAM

From special events and regional gatherings to RV tours, let the Good Sam Club be your guide

2016 EVENTS

Don't miss the chance to connect with fellow Good Sam Club members at the following RV-friendly regional events:

Alabama Fall Festival at the Beach

September 18 to 25
Johnny's Lakeside RV Resort
Foley, Alabama

Great Prosser Balloon Rally

September 23 to 25
Wine Country RV Resort
Prosser, Washington

Norsk Høstfest Festival

September 28 to October 1
North Dakota State Fairgrounds
Minot, North Dakota

Country Fest/Bellamy Brothers

October 7 and 8
Red Barn Convention Center
Winchester, Ohio

Sun Valley Jazz and Music Festival

October 19 to 23
Sun Valley and Ketchum, Idaho

Beer and Wine at the Vines

November 4 to 6
Vines RV Resort
Paso Robles, California

2017 EVENTS

Havasú Balloon Festival and Fair

January 11 to 15
Lake Havasu City, Arizona

Taste of California

May 5 to 7
Golden Village Palms RV Resort
Hemet, California

2016 TOURS

Experience world-class events and must-see destinations on members-only RV tours:

Autumn in New England

September 20 to October 17
Start: Kennebunkport, Maine
End: Niagara Falls, Ontario

Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta

October 7 to 10
Balloon Fiesta RV Park
Albuquerque, New Mexico

New Orleans

Christmas Rally
December 6 to 12
New Orleans, Louisiana

2017 TOURS

New Orleans Mardi Gras

February 21 to March 1
New Orleans, Louisiana

An American Civil War

March 26 to April 9
Start: Charleston, South Carolina
End: Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Australia and New Zealand

March 28 to May 5
Start: Christchurch, New Zealand
End: Sydney, Australia

Alaska Your Way

June 26 to August 26
Start: Anacortes, Washington
End: Prince George, British Columbia

Best of the Canadian Maritimes

July 21 to August 16
Start: Bar Harbor, Maine
End: Saint John, New Brunswick

Calgary Stampede

July 13 to 18
McMahon Stadium
Calgary, Alberta

Autumn in New England

September 14 to October 11
Start: Kennebunkport, Maine
End: Niagara Falls, Ontario

Polar Bear Migration

September 29 to October 13
Start: Dunseith, North Dakota
End: Île-des-Chênes, Manitoba

Florida Sunshine Getaway

October 10 to November 13
Start: Pensacola, Florida
End: Daytona Beach, Florida

Rose Parade Rally

December 28 to January 2, 2018
Pasadena, California

► Find the full schedule of Good Sam events, including State/Provincial Rallies, at www.goodsamclub.com/events. For more details about RV tours, go to www.fantasyrvtours.com/goodsam.



NEW: Pet-Supply Discounts

The Good Sam Club has partnered with the following pet-supply companies to offer members discounts on products for dogs, cats and other family pets. PawPack delivers all-natural dog treats and toys on a customized schedule, Pet Stuff sells high-quality pet food without the fillers, and Rover lets users book dog-sitters in more than 10,000 cities. Good Sam Rx Saver, another club benefit, helps members save on common pet medications.

► Visit www.goodsam.com/pets for more details and to get the members-only discount codes.

Kickoff to Fall Savings

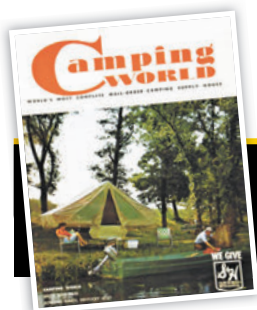
Game Day Deals: Tailgating season is here, and football fans can load up on everything they need to enjoy the fun with Game Day Deals at Camping World, presented by Honda Generators. From August 22 through September 11, Camping World shoppers can save \$50 when buying any Honda portable generator and score extra savings on grills, chairs, tables, recliners, patio lights and more. To top that off, on August 26 and 27, shoppers can take advantage of Camping World's two-day Doorbuster deals on RV and outdoor accessories. On both days, the first 100 customers will receive a mini football, and free lunch will be served from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m.



U-Bag-It Sale: During the annual U-Bag-It Sale, September 16 and 17, Camping World shoppers who join the Good Sam Club or renew their membership can save an extra 10 percent on everything they can stuff, squeeze or cram into a free reusable shopping bag. The 10 percent discount is on top of the already low sale prices for Good Sam members. All items must be in their original packaging and extend no higher than 6 inches above the top of the bag. Life and Elite members receive the shopping bag and an additional 10 percent savings simply by showing their Good Sam membership card. Some restrictions apply; ask for more details at any Camping World SuperCenter.

Good Sam Days: Mark your calendars for Camping World's Good Sam Days, October 7 through 16, when members can fill up on half-price LP-gas and enjoy exclusive savings on a wide selection of RV, outdoor and towing accessories.

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SELDOM-SEEN YELLOWSTONE

The geysers, hot springs and wildlife may get top billing, but hiking off the beaten path reveals some of the first national park's most breathtaking sights

When visiting Yellowstone, the country's first national park, you can see most of the notable sights without ever having to leave the Grand Loop Road. The famed road follows a 142-mile figure-eight pattern through the heart of the park and includes famous scenes such as Mount Washburn; Lower Yellowstone Falls, roaring over a 309-foot drop in the Yellowstone River; Mammoth Hot Springs' travertine terraces; and Old Faithful, spewing streams of hissing hot water against a robin's-egg blue sky. Then there's the wonderment of nature untouched by mankind's progress: bison lumbering along with winter brown shags clinging to thick middles and russet calves romping close to mama's side; bear cubs climbing aspen saplings while protective mother bears forage for tasty treats; an elk bull sunning himself on a grassy shelf; and river otters playing at a clear stream.

Indeed, the world's greatest collection of geysers, paint pots, fumaroles and hot springs adjoin the convenient parking lots that connect to the Grand Loop Road. However, the treasures hidden in the interior of the park require a bit more time and effort. By taking summer jobs in West Yellowstone, Montana, my wife, Arline, and I had the luxury of several days a week over four months to seek out the seldom-seen Yellowstone. Some of our

treks off the Grand Loop Road were together; others were long, arduous day hikes I took into the park's backcountry.

We walked the boardwalks at Midway Geyser Basin, but the rising steam from Grand Prismatic Spring obliterated the sapphire blue of the largest hot spring in the United States. We wanted more defining photos of the boiling blue pool, measuring 121 feet in depth. With research, we discovered a wide bike path leading from the

Fairy Falls parking lot to a hill behind Midway Geyser Basin. Less than a mile down the path, a well-worn trail rises up the grassy hillside toward the tree line. Although numerous photographers had carved trails crisscrossing the hillside, I hiked alone, except for one French-speaking woman whom I photographed with the Grand Prismatic in the background.

On another day, we took the same trail, bypassing Grand Prismatic and hiking on to Fairy Falls. A relatively easy and popular hike, we had plenty of company along the trail. The less than 5-mile round-trip route is shorter than the two other options for hiking to the 197-foot waterfall, aptly named for its delicate beauty. On rocks at the foot of the falls, we sat mesmerized by the silvery strands of water falling over granite gray rocks. (Editor's note: Due to renovations being made in the Grand Prismatic Spring area, some areas will be closed for the next one to two years. Hikers can access Fairy Falls using the Fountain Freight Road Trailhead located north of Midway Geyser Basin, but should be prepared for a much longer hike of 8.8 miles round trip rather than the usual 5-mile round trip.)

On another day, I ventured alone into the wilderness of Yellowstone from a trailhead at Golden Gate, approximately 4 miles south of Mammoth Hot Springs on the Grand Loop Road. My destination for the day: Osprey




Above: Travertine Terraces at Mammoth Hot Springs are said to resemble a cave turned inside out. The colorful stripes are formed by thermophiles, which are heat-loving microscopic organisms. Yellowstone is home to the highest concentration of mammals in the lower 48 states.



Getting There

Yellowstone National Park is primarily located in the northwest corner of Wyoming (3 percent of the park is in Montana and 1 percent is in Idaho). Yellowstone has five entrances and directions vary depending on where you are coming from. Please visit the park's directions page for more information (www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/directions.htm).

A wide-angle photograph of a powerful waterfall cascading over a dark, layered rock face. The water is white and frothy as it falls, creating a misty spray at the base. The surrounding landscape is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees, with some rocky outcrops visible. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. In the upper right corner, there is a black text box with white text.

A challenging 8-mile hike (one way) leads to Colonnade Falls in Bechler Canyon, Idaho. The upper falls are 35 feet tall, while the lower falls cascade 67 feet.

Falls, one of Yellowstone's hidden jewels. At 8-plus miles round trip, the relatively moderate trail was my first journey into backcountry. The first 3 miles to Osprey Falls followed an abandoned Jeep road with gentle hills through woods and meadows. The last mile grew steep and narrow, dropping 800 vertical feet in switchbacks into the

Gardner River Gorge.

Yellowstone weather is unpredictable. Although it was summer, a light, cold rain fell before I reached Osprey Falls' splash basin. While setting up the camera and tripod, I discovered my special filters were missing — lost along the trail. To add to the challenge of getting a remarkable photo, the

camera lens required drying between each shot. Yet, viewing the frothy water falling 150 feet into Sheepeater Canyon proved worth the steep climb and the dripping cold.

Gibbon Falls, located on the Gibbon River about midway between Norris Geyser Basin and Madison Junction, is one of Yellowstone's most accessible

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SELDOM-SEEN YELLOWSTONE

waterfalls. A paved walk leading from a large parking lot affords views of the falls tumbling approximately 80 feet in a gradual descent. However, Little Gibbon Falls is another of those hidden gems, discovered on a hike along Wolf Lake Trail, accessed about 3 miles east of Norris Junction. We crossed the north edge of Virginia Meadows, carpeted with yellow buttercups. A few spots remained boggy from snowmelt, but the flat trail eventually turned upward to a hilltop view of Little Gibbon Falls, dropping only 25 feet in the Gibbon River below. Hiking this trail less traveled, we sensed the vastness of Yellowstone and the tranquil absence of civilization.

Still deeper in Yellowstone's wilderness south of Old Faithful, trails leading to tall, forceful waterfalls called my name. I set my sights on the 265-foot Union Falls, second in height to the Lower Yellowstone Falls. To reach the trailhead, I drove 2 miles out the south entrance of the park and headed 10 miles east on a gravel road to Grassy Lake.

The trail to Union Falls is well-pounded with heavy horse traffic as atop a horse is the ideal mode for getting to the falls. But since I had no horse, fording the swift-moving, icy-cold Falls River with expensive camera equipment around my neck proved quite a challenge. The knee-deep ford is about 1 mile into the 16-mile round trip. Up-and-down hills create a moderate hike. Lodgepole pines, unspoiled by the devastating fires in 1988, grow from cracks and crevices of the stony hillsides along the path. The roar of Union Falls reached my ears at least a mile before I discovered horses hitched at permanent racks, waiting for their riders.

Horsemen descended the last hill as I climbed to the overlook, leaving me to stand alone in the awesome beauty of Union Falls, so named because two creeks unite and fall like a veil over the symmetrical conical shape of tall rocks.

When we read in a guidebook that Cave Falls is visible from a car,

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Above: Grand Prismatic Spring, located in the Midway Geyser Basin, is the park's largest hot spring, measuring more than 370 feet in diameter and more than 121 feet deep.

we wondered why it wasn't a more popular daytrip. We understood once we traveled west from Montana into Idaho and turned south. The Grand Tetons loomed as a backdrop along our route until we turned east onto Cave Falls Road — a bone-jarring, potholed, 10 miles of dirt and gravel through a national forest. We recommend leaving the motorhome behind and traveling in the dinghy vehicle. Once we entered the southwest corner of Yellowstone, the asphalt started again. We continued a one-way loop, and Cave Falls filled our Jeep's windshield. Only 20 feet in height, Cave Falls is the widest waterfall in Yellowstone, stretching 250 feet across the Bechler River.

We drove to the end of Cave Falls Road and took an easy 3-mile wooded hike along the Fall and Bechler rivers. The confluence of the two rivers in a heavily wooded setting rivals the celebrated status of better-known scenery in the park.

Mount Washburn sits at the top of Dunraven Pass, at an elevation of 10,243 feet.

Approximately as tall as Cave Falls, though not as wide, Bechler Falls has a petite, quiet prettiness, contrasting with the roar of Union Falls.

I ended my summer hiking with separate trips to Dunanda and Colonnade falls, each more than 8 miles one way. Retracing the route over the rough section of Cave Falls Road, I started from the Bechler Ranger Station in the southwest corner of Yellowstone.

Bechler Meadow was the tricky part for both of these hikes. This trek is not for everybody, and is best left for more advanced hikers. The guidebook warned that the meadow could be under a foot of water in late July, so I saved these trips for early September. But a strong rain had re-energized the fields.

The going was slow, and required wading, slogging in mud, fording thigh-deep creeks and rivers, and crossings on improved, unimproved and improvised log bridges. I even crossed one Indiana Jones-style suspension bridge, though I was relieved to see that the planks were new.



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Right: This suspension bridge aids hikers in crossing Bechler Meadow, on the way to a number of waterfalls, including Dunanda and Colonnade. The northern river otter (a member of the weasel family) is active year-round in Yellowstone.



A quarter-mile short of Dunanda Falls, I scrambled down a steep side path to photograph Silver Scarf Falls, a 250-foot sloping cascade. Continuing on to Dunanda, the path offered only a view looking down on the falls. The hillside was steeper to negotiate, especially with camera gear. My tripod resisted leveling and my left leg slid downhill. In Shoshone, Dunanda means "straight down," and the name is befitting of the 150-foot drop.

On the way to Colonnade Falls, accessible via a different trail through the meadow, I viewed the upper half of Ouzel Falls above the treeline, from about 2 miles away. Ouzel is a 235-foot sloping cascade on Ouzel Creek. A side trip fording the Bechler River and forging through underbrush to

find Ouzel would have kept me from reaching my vehicle before dark, so I had to take in its beauty from afar. In fact, all of my long hikes flirted with dusk. I had to opt for Ouzel captured with a telephoto lens.

Once I reached an overlook for Colonnade Falls, I didn't have to cling to the steep hillside, but wriggling around for a perfect camera angle proved hazardous. No guardrail protected me from a nasty drop into the Bechler River. At a little more than 100 feet, Colonnade is not the tallest waterfall in the park, but its double falls makes it worth the journey.

In one summer of exploring seldom-seen Yellowstone, we experienced but a fraction of the treasures hidden throughout the 2.2 million acres of the national park. One could explore Yellowstone for a lifetime, but we settled for all we could see beyond the Grand Loop Road in one memorable summer. **M**

For More Information

Yellowstone National Park
307-344-7381, www.nps.gov/yell

Yellowstone National Park Campgrounds
www.nps.gov/yell/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm

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MAINE COURSE

Acadia National Park offers beauty and history off the beaten path

Acadia National Park on Maine's blustery Atlantic coast is a rugged and varied land where ocean surf crashes onto craggy rocks while just a few steps from shore heavenly pine scents waft through dense woods. We were enchanted by the vast slabs of granite that make a jagged route to the sea, by the resilient lighthouses that stand watch over sailors from the shore, and by the miles of lovingly groomed trails that meander throughout the park, embracing a history all their own.

Acadia National Park spreads out across most of Mount Desert Island in an out-of-the-way corner of the country, and in addition to natural beauty, it offers a unique glimpse of America's early roots, both working-class and aristocratic. True to the favorite seafood of the area, the island is shaped like a New England lobster's claw, with two big lobes pointing down. The park takes up most of these two lobes, and what great fortune it is for all of us today that John D. Rockefeller Jr. donated almost all of his massive land holdings on the island to contribute to this glorious national park.

New England is known for having small states and small roads, so we were very surprised on our recent RV road trip to the area to find that this is a good-sized park that spans

several sections with many lookouts, vistas and points of interest. Although there are three campgrounds in the park that are suitable for motorhomes (Blackwoods and Seawall have no hookups, while Schoodic Woods has some partial-hookup sites, is open from late May until Columbus Day and can be accessed by passenger ferry), most rigs won't fit under the low bridges, and many of the winding roads make tight turns (see sidebar for additional restrictions). So, my husband, Mark, and I parked our RV at an oceanfront campsite just a few miles away at Narrows Too Camping Resort.

Our first stop was the pretty and upscale town of Bar Harbor, which hugs a beautiful cove. This town is a shopper's delight, full of swanky boutiques, trendy clothing stores,

high-end galleries and artisan shops. Bar Harbor is a terrific place for an elegant evening meal out, but we went there in the early morning, before the crowds swelled and the traffic got heavy. We happily window-shopped for an hour and had the quaint New England streets all to ourselves.

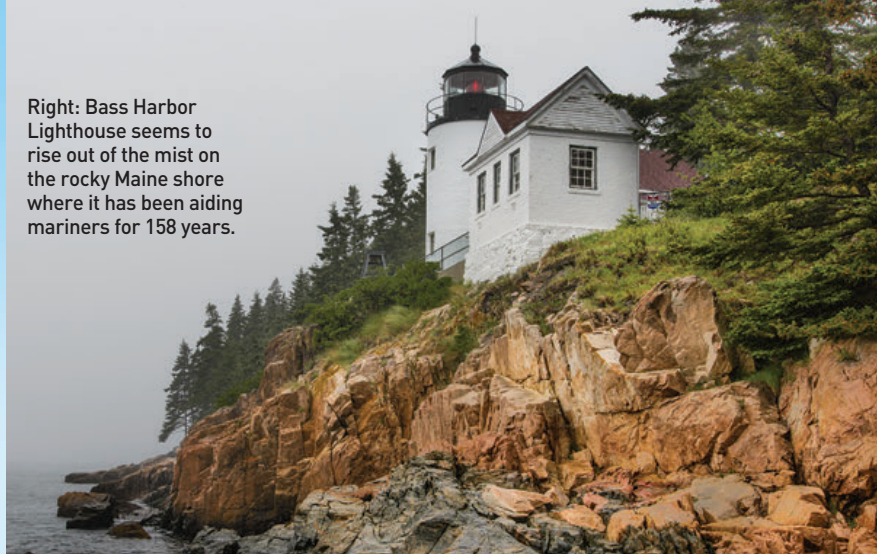
The Park Loop Drive that circles through Acadia National Park begins just outside of Bar Harbor. This is a one-way, clockwise loop, and getting started going in the right direction right outside of Bar Harbor is important, or you will wind up facing one-way oncoming traffic 5 miles later, with no way to proceed except to backtrack (we made this mistake!). Luckily, Acadia National Park is so scenic that driving any of the roads more than once is time well-spent.

After winding through the woods, the Park Loop Road emerges at the shore near Thunder Hole, a fantastic blowhole that spews water high in the air. We loved scrambling around on the massive granite boulders surrounding Thunder Hole, but the solid metal railings and stairs down to an overlook just above the spray made it easy for everyone to enjoy.

Photos: Mark Fagan



Right: Bass Harbor Lighthouse seems to rise out of the mist on the rocky Maine shore where it has been aiding mariners for 158 years.



Getting There

From Boston, take Interstate 95 north to Augusta, Maine, then Route 3 east to Ellsworth, and on to Mount Desert Island. For an alternate route, continue on I-95 north to Bangor, Maine, then take Route 1A east to Ellsworth. In Ellsworth, take Route 3 to Mount Desert Island.

The Park Loop Road continues along the shoreline, and there are many places to park and sneak between a thin veil of pine trees to get out onto the fabulous granite rocks for a view of the ocean. In places, we discovered the granite boulders cradle tide pools filled with complex ecosystems of soft red-velvet algae, periwinkles, limpets and tiny crabs. Each tide pool receives a fresh flush of clean Atlantic Ocean water twice a day as the tide advances in and out, and the pools were all crystal clear.

Out on the ocean, we watched the lobstermen plying their trade. The lobster industry is huge in Maine, and it is very labor-intensive because the little creatures are caught one at a time by individual lobstermen who motor from trap to trap each morning. Each trap is marked by a buoy with a unique color pattern, and every lobsterman in the area claims a buoy color pattern of his own. As I watched a lobsterman pulling a lobster pot up from the water onto his boat, he paused and held up a wriggling lobster

for me to see!

The Park Loop Drive ducks back into the woods after passing the southern end of the island, and it slips under some beautiful stone bridges as it makes its way to Jordan Pond. Here the vast saltwater vistas of the coastline are replaced with protected freshwater pond habitats in the woods, and we watched kayakers floating across placid, mirrorlike water. Jordan Pond is also a fun place to stop for lunch, and we ate outside on the upper deck looking out across the pond.

From right: Bar Harbor has many quaint boutique shops. A horse-drawn wagon takes visitors on a tour along Acadia's famous carriage roads. The Schoodic National Scenic Byway passes several iconic Maine harbors filled with lobster boats (below).



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MAINE COURSE



Above: Thunder Hole, on Park Loop Road, is a fun "blow hole" where waves make booming sounds as they crash into a large cave hidden below the granite boulders on the shore.

Continuing our scenic drive around the park, we drove up Cadillac Mountain (RVs are not permitted on Summit Road, so bring your dinghy vehicle), the tallest peak in the park, where the views across the many islands of Frenchman Bay seem to go on forever. By some stroke of pure luck, we happened to be there on the same weekend as a national Ford Model A rally, and dozens of the cute cars, all in pristine condition, were driving up and down the mountain. Some had classy leather luggage bags strapped to the back, and many were convertibles. One hundred and seventy Ford Model A's were in attendance at the rally, and during our stay we continued to see them all over Acadia National Park. What fun it was to watch these antique cars driving on roads that were originally built for them back when the park was first established as Sieur de Monts National Monument in 1916.

A trip to Mount Desert Island (pronounced "dessert," despite the spelling) is not complete without a visit to some of the small fishing villages on its shores. The towns of Southwest Harbor and Northeast Harbor sit on opposite sides of Somes Sound, the body of water that separates the two lobes of the island, and each

NPS TRAVEL TIP

► During the summer months, the Park Loop Road and parking lots at the carriage road entrances can be quite crowded. Parking is permitted only in designated areas, parking lots and established roadside pullouts. To avoid the crowds and parking issues, you can ride fare-free Island Explorer buses (207-667-5796, www.exploreacadia.com) to many park destinations.

snuggles up to a sizable harbor filled with lobster boats and sailing yachts. Running down to the docks in Northeast Harbor, we watched people enjoying boats of all kinds, from an antique sailboat to a gorgeous, brand-new retro power yacht to a classic sloop that takes visitors out sailing between the islands.

Maine weather is notoriously unpredictable, and after many sunny days we awoke one morning to a foggy, drippy, wet day. In other places, this would be the end of the stunning landscapes, but Mount Desert Island takes on a different kind of beauty when the skies go gray. We decided to drive down the western lobe of the island to see Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse at the far southwestern tip in a remote corner of Acadia National Park.

On our way, we passed many little harbors and coves where the fog lay thick across the water and the boats were barely visible. The haunting, piercing cry of the seagulls added to the mysterious air, and the distant hum of invisible lobster boats going about

their daily task was proof that life doesn't stand still on the Maine coast when gloomy weather comes.

Getting to Bass Harbor Head Lighthouse required a very short hike through the woods on a pine-needle-strewn path between thick, spongy stands of moss. This was a delightful walk. Moisture was thick in the air, and little beads of water ornamented the flowers and leaves like glistening jewels.

The path opened up to the vast, gray ocean at the end, and to catch a glimpse of the lighthouse, we had to clamber down on huge, beige granite boulders that were a bit slippery from the drizzle. The lighthouse faces the ocean, but the view from the rocks is sidelong. Many images of this iconic building can be found in tourist literature and coffee-table books, and the best photos are taken when a brilliant sunset lights the sky. On our visit the background was gray mist, but the distant sounds of bell buoys and whistle buoys out in the ocean were stirring reminders of the importance of all navigational aids for ships traversing this treacherous and rocky coast.

Back in the heart of Acadia National Park, one day we took a memorable bike ride on the unique carriage roads that set this park apart from all others. At the turn of the 19th century, when cars first came into use, a class war broke out between the locals and the millionaires who had summer estates on the island (people like the Pulitzers and the Vanderbilts).

The aristocrats came to Maine from their homes in Boston and New York City seeking peace and tranquility. They wanted to take their horses and carriages into the countryside and enjoy a slower pace of life, leaving the hustle and bustle of automobiles and traffic back in the city. The locals, on the other hand, seized upon the newly available automobiles as a fantastic way to get around and conduct their business, run errands and commute efficiently.

The aristocrats wanted to ban automobiles from Mount Desert Island all together, which enraged the locals. The state of Maine declared that each individual town should decide whether their roads would be open to automobiles or not. As a result, the locals drove flagrantly on forbidden roads while the wealthy protested with barricades.

Rockefeller quieted his affluent peers by building a massive nearly 50-mile road system on his land that he opened exclusively to nonmotorized traffic. An experienced road builder, he participated closely in the construction of charming stone bridges, and they remain truly beautiful to walk over and under. As he gradually handed his land holdings over to the National Park Service, the pretty carriage roads were part of the deal, and they have been beloved by Acadia National Park visitors ever since.

The carriage roads are very lightly traveled, and it was a real joy to hear the clip-clop of horses' hooves in the distance and then see a wagonload

⊕ Height Restrictions

Plan your route carefully. Many park roads feature historic bridges constructed with lower-than-conventional clearances. The shortest underpass on Park Loop Road is 11 feet 8 inches. Vehicles exceeding that height must exit Park Loop Road using Otter Cliff Road at Fabbri Picnic Area. Additional height restrictions are as follows:

- Park Loop Road is closed to vehicles taller than 12 feet 2 inches from Sieur de Monts to Sand Beach Entrance Station.
- Park Loop Road is closed to vehicles taller than 12 feet from Fabbri Picnic Area to Wildwood Stables.
- Stanley Brook Road is closed to vehicles taller than 10 feet 4 inches.
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Check the website (www.nps.gov/acad) for more details before you make the trip.



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Above: Peace and tranquility rein on Schoodic Point, which offers visitors a large parking area with a turnaround and interpretive panels. Right: Waterfront camping is available at Narrows Too Camping Resort, located just minutes from Acadia National Park.



of tourists coming by. The roads are a veritable maze of intersections, however, and before venturing out on a bike ride, it's a good idea to take a map. The intersections are extremely well-marked, but it is still easy to get lost.

While the carriage roads are famous, a little-known jewel of Acadia National Park lies on a mainland peninsula east of Mount Desert Island, made even more majestic by the spectacular Schoodic National Scenic Byway route that leads there. Going deep into the heart of Downeast Maine, the byway passes classic, tiny, pine-tree-studded coves that harbor handfuls of skiffs and lobster boats as well as many small, simple homes whose driveways are piled high with lobster traps and buoys. In an entire day of exploration, we saw only a few tourists.

In Prospect Harbor, down on the docks, we met an 82-year-old lobsterman coming in from a day of work at sea. Dressed in a workman's jumpsuit and tall boots, his eyes sparkled as he told us he had been lobstering since his dad first took him out at age 7, and that he had joined his granddad on offshore fishing exploits to the Grand Banks at age 9. His shaggy salt-and-pepper beard and lively step belied his years, and

when he peeled out of the parking lot in his pickup, making the dust fly as he showed off to a crowd of younger friends, his youthfulness and exuberance made us smile.

Encounters like this are a treasure, and that moment, for us, epitomized the character of coastal Maine, far off the beaten path. Acadia National Park offers a little something for everyone, from majestic ocean views to lighthouse peeping to high-class shopping to a glimpse of history to an immersion in a life lived in harmony with the sea. We had thought we would breeze through in just a day or two, but in no time two happy weeks had slipped by! **M**

For More Information

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Hadley's Point Campground

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2016 RV **OOOPS** AWARDS

OUR ANNUAL COUNTDOWN OF
THE TOP-10 MOTORHOME MISHAPS,
FROM DUMB TO DUMBEST

What's the dumbest thing you've ever done while RVing?

RVers tend to be a sociable lot, always willing to lend a helping hand. We've all experienced the delight of nearby RVers coming over to welcome us to the RV park or wish us well upon departure. As well-meaning as these cordial chats are, they can sometimes get us sidetracked from our normal routines, leading to mishaps. Several such incidents made our RV Oops list this year, all caused by friendly conversation at exactly the wrong time.

The key here is not to be antisocial, but to wait until arriving or departing RVers are completely finished with their duties before engaging them in conversation. Unless of course, it appears that they are in need of assistance, such as needing a backup spotter, lifting a heavy boat trailer or trying to fix a defective whatever.

We'll start our list of Top-10 mishaps, ranging from Dumb to Dumber to Dumbest, with three examples of the aforementioned theme: distraction by others.

DUMB THINGS

10

Adios, and Have a Good Day. Bob and his wife were spending a couple of weeks in Mexico camping in their motorhome. One day, they and another couple agreed to go shopping in a nearby town, using Bob's motorhome since neither had a dinghy



vehicle. As often happens on outings, the guys sat up front with the gals in the back. After shopping, Bob was maneuvering his Class A through the crowded parking lot while his friend, Chuck, was showing off his new watch, talking about what a great deal he had made. In a tight turn, the right front corner of the motorhome clipped and broke off the mirror of a parked truck. Seconds later, the owner of the truck was pounding on the door. After some frantic hand-waving and shouting in Spanish, it was obvious the truck owner was not happy. Partly to calm him down, Bob immediately gave him \$200 to replace the mirror. The man seemed satisfied and Bob was relieved he didn't have to deal with the police or his insurance company.

Scratches on the motorhome continue to remind Bob to not get distracted while driving, especially while maneuvering in a crowded parking lot. Chuck also learned a lesson and apologized for talking about his shopping experience at exactly the wrong time.

9

Enjoy Your Biscuits. This story was relayed to me by a reader named Ruth, whose grandparents had decided they would buy a

motorhome and hit the road “before they got much older.” They purchased a new Class A and planned a trial run to several state campgrounds. After a couple of weeks at their first campground, it was time to move on to another not far away. While pulling in the slides and raising the jacks, a neighboring RVer came over and offered them a plate of biscuits for the next leg of their trip. How nice is that?

After thanking the neighbor and getting into the front seats, they drove out of the campsite. As they neared the exit, a fellow RVer was waving his arms and pointing to the side of their coach. Their electrical cord, hose and sewer line, which they had forgotten to detach, were all dragging along the ground. Oops! Annoyed and embarrassed, they finished their departure routine and carried on.

According to Ruth, her grandparents love the RV lifestyle, particularly the friendly campers they’ve met along the way. One thing they learned from the experience is to always do a walk-around before departing to ensure they really are ready to hit the road.

HELPFUL HINT: While doing a walk-around, instead of just looking, consider using a checklist, either written or on an iPhone or iPad, using an app such as RV CheckList. Another product, RV Minders, uses magnetic tabs that attach to your steering wheel as a reminder.

8 Almost Hitched. Joe was getting ready to depart the campground after a great weekend of waterskiing and fishing at the adjoining lake. His final task was to hook up his boat trailer to the hitch on the back of his diesel-pusher motorhome. In the process of doing so, a friendly RVer came over and asked Joe where he was headed next. Being a sociable guy, Joe explained that he was off to another campground and another lake. Conversation continued as Joe walked to the front of his motorhome, said goodbye and drove off.

“THE BIGGEST PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED WHEN FLAT-TOWING ARE TOWING WITH THE DINGHY VEHICLE IN GEAR OR WITH ITS EMERGENCY BRAKE ON.”

When Joe reached the highway and got up to speed, he could hear a rattling noise at the rear of the motorhome. Pulling off to the side of the road, Joe applied his brakes purposely to stop in a hurry, resulting in a loud crunch. Upon inspection, the trailer had become disconnected from the coach and the coupler was firmly implanted in the radiator, causing steam to shoot skyward.

Thinking back about his hookup procedure, Joe recalled that his camping neighbor interrupted him just after he had attached the trailer and just before he normally tightened down the coupler latch. That brief conversation resulted in a \$2,000 repair bill and a vow to always use a checklist, especially when well-meaning neighbors interrupt his departure routine.

► Some motorhome owners use a trailer or dolly to tow their dinghy; others tow the car flat, with four wheels on the ground. As we’ve seen in previous RV Oops Awards, the biggest problems encountered when flat-towing are towing with the dinghy vehicle in gear or with its emergency brake on, causing burned-out brakes or transmissions. But mistakes can also occur when towing a trailer or dolly. The next two awards include an Oops with a tow dolly and another while flat-towing a dinghy vehicle.

7 Pins and Dollies. Gerry and his wife had just arrived at the parking lot of a big-box store in their Class A and wanted to do some shopping in a local downtown area. After unloading the car from their tow dolly, off they went. Upon returning, Gerry ran the car up onto the dolly and strapped down the front wheels. With several hours of daylight remaining, they decided to drive to a

campground. While heading down a four-lane highway, Gerry heard some scraping sounds but couldn’t find a pullover to check it out. A passenger in a passing car was waving frantically at them from an open window while pointing to the rear of their motorhome, shouting, “Sparks!”

At the first opportunity Gerry pulled over and walked back to his tow dolly. Everything seemed fine, until he looked more closely at the dolly platform. The pin to prevent the ramp from lowering should have been inserted. Instead, it was still laying on the platform, just where he put it. Apparently, the car was merrily bouncing up and down while the back edges of the ramps were scraping along the highway.

Except for some scratches to the ramps, there was no serious damage. Gerry said he now places the pin on the ground beside the connection when unloading his car. I suggested he might want to tie a cord to the pin, so that it dangles from the dolly, a better option than placing it on the ground or hiding it on the platform under the car.

6 Brain Freeze. Don had recently purchased a new car and was flat-towing it to a local campground. Not wanting to unhook his car, he chose a pull-through site. As his wife was making dinner, Don was admiring his new car from the driver’s seat. Before going inside the coach, he moved the gearshift lever from NEUTRAL to PARK.

After dinner, his wife mentioned the coach was not quite level, and maybe they could back up a bit to try to level it. Don agreed, so he fired up the engine and slowly backed up. Within 2 feet he heard a crunching noise. Getting out to investigate, he saw that the car had not moved, but the tow bar had risen up to the point where it broke the panel under the front bumper;

\$600 later, his car was like new again. To this day, Don has no idea why he put the shift lever into PARK.

DUMBER THINGS

5

One Hot Highway. This RV trip starts in the cool, refreshing mountains of western Canada and ends in the hot, dry city of Las Vegas, Nevada, a few weeks later. Mike and his wife had done some camping in their Class A, mainly in Canada. They discussed, and Mike agreed, that it would be nice to take his mother-in-law to Vegas, a place she had always wanted to visit. Both the roof and the cab air conditioners hadn't worked for some time in their aging motorhome, but Mike didn't see that as a problem. After all, "How hot can it be in Las Vegas in August?" They were about to find out.

All went well as they crossed the border and spent a couple of weeks in the northern mountainous states. The last leg of their trip had them leaving Utah and heading for Vegas. The closer they got, the higher the temperature rose: 90 degrees Fahrenheit ... 100 degrees ... 110 degrees. The previously cool air blowing through the vents was beginning to feel like the blast from a hair dryer on hot. Mike reported his mother-in-law saying, "Now I know what it would feel like if I drove to hell." His wife protested loudly: "Why didn't we get the air conditioners fixed in Canada?"

"No worries," Mike said, "We'll get some ice cubes at the next gas station and place them in front of the vents. That will cool things down." And it did: The temperature dropped from 110 to 100 degrees Fahrenheit, which now felt like a hair dryer on medium. When they finally got to Las Vegas, Mike was given an ultimatum: Get the air conditioners fixed or the ladies were flying home to Canada, with or without him. While the women played the slots in an air-conditioned casino, Mike visited several RV



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HELPFUL HINT: As an alternative means of remembering, instead of a ribbon consider adding, "Remove Temperature Remote" to a departure checklist.

3 Post Trauma. I was recently in a campground where each site is numbered on a 3-foot-tall, 8-by-8-inch wooden post, anchored in concrete at the entrance to the site. While camped in a corner site, I watched a brand-new Class A arrive, which was headed for the pull-through site directly across the road from us. When I say "brand-new," I mean that the owners had just picked it up at an RV dealership a few miles away, and this was their first outing.

The front left side of the coach was already past our post when the driver stopped to let his wife out so she could make sure they cleared a tree on the right side. It was obvious to her that some branches would scrape their new motorhome unless he turned sharply left, so she motioned for him to turn, a bit more, just a bit more ... "OK, you're good to go!"

Having cleared the tree, the driver then was in a position to turn right and enter the site. Crunch! "What was that?" He hollered to his wife. They both came around to the driver's side and saw our post pushed over and a major tear in the rear left side of their motorhome. I hadn't seen the actual contact with the post, but I did see a grown man cry after he realized what had happened ... he hadn't accounted for tail swing to the left as he turned sharply right to enter the site.

He called the dealership about the damage and they suggested he bring it back in for repairs, which pretty much ended what could have been a lovely maiden voyage. Based on feedback I've

repair shops, dismayed to find out that it was going to cost about \$1,200 to totally replace the roof unit and install a new compressor in the cab unit. Since the two flights home would likely cost close to that amount, he figured he might as well get them fixed.

They had only budgeted for three days in Las Vegas; unfortunately, it required a week to fix the air conditioners. Mike said he refused to add up the total costs of the repairs, hotel rooms, meals and gambling losses. As he put it, "I didn't want to know. We had been to hell and survived ... not many RVers can say that!"

4 Where's the Remote? Carol and her husband had camped in their motorhome for many years. Early on, they purchased an outdoor-temperature gauge for the inside of their motorhome. The instructions indicated that the wireless remote temperature sensor be placed in a shady spot and not exposed to moisture. Carol found what she considered the perfect location ... on top of the rear wheel. It worked fine as long as she remembered to remove the remote before getting underway, which she did numerous times, except for three occasions. On two of them, as her husband pulled out of the campsite, the remote fell on the ground, out of harm's way. On the third, it fell directly in line with the rear tire and was "totally squashed."

Their new remote came with a clip, allowing it to be attached under the front bumper and removed before getting underway. The one time Carol forgot, the remote fell off "someplace between San Francisco and Sacramento!" She purchased another and now ties a yellow ribbon on the steering wheel to remind her to remove it before moving the motorhome.

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received from other RVers, more posts and stop signs are knocked down by tail swing than any other maneuver.

HELPFUL HINT: For each 3 feet of overhang beyond the rear wheels, expect 1 foot of tail swing. Thus, 15 feet of overhang can result in 5 feet of tail swing. It's instructive to line up the left side of your motorhome with a white line in a parking lot, turn sharply to the right, and move very slowly forward while someone watches and tells you to stop when the rear of your motorhome reaches the maximum distance from the line. Awareness of how much your tail swings will make it less likely you'll hit those posts and stop signs.

2

Welcome to Pleasant View.

Not long after purchasing his new Class A, Bruce arranged to meet friends for a weekend of camping. He decided to go to the campground a day early to settle in and make preparations for his friends' arrival. Driving along a narrow two-lane road out in the country, he noticed the sign for the campground just as he passed the entrance. Not being able to back up with his motorcycle trailer attached, he continued on, looking for a place to turn around. Finally, he came to a church with a graveyard, which had a paved driveway around it. "Perfect," he thought!

Scoping out the driveway, he noticed a small hump at the entrance, which might cause his hitch receiver to drag, but he "figured it was worth a little dragging not to have to drive farther down the road." As he entered the cemetery, Bruce was anticipating the sound of the hitch receiver hitting the pavement. Instead, he heard a loud ripping and tearing sound from overhead. He immediately stopped and looked over his right shoulder, amazed to see a hole in the ceiling where his air conditioner used to be. While focusing his attention on the hump, he failed to notice the 12-foot overhead iron arch "Pleasant View Gardens" sign, previously supported by two brick pillars. The arch was lying on top and the brick pillars were leaning against

the sides of his motorhome.

A couple of hours later, after cleaning up the mess and leaving his personal information at the church, he drove to the campground with the wind whistling through the hole where his air conditioner used to be. Bruce said he saved some of the iron letters from the arch to serve as a reminder of his misadventure.

When his friends arrived the next day, he described the mishap and showed them the damage, which resulted in some chuckles and one lame comment: "Well, at least you made it out of the cemetery!"

DUMBEST THING

1

Double Trouble. Jim and

Judy had spent a few weeks camping in their new Class A. They worked out a division of duties such that Jim looked after the outside while Judy took care of the inside. One evening Jim fired up the barbecue and grilled some steaks. After they were done, he decided to leave the barbecue on for about 10 minutes to burn off the steak juices on the grill. The barbecue was hooked up to an LP-gas quick-connect fitting serviced by the onboard tank. On this particular evening, the "Academy Awards" was just beginning on TV, which the couple watched while enjoying their evening meal with a glass or two of wine. After doing the dishes, it was pretty much time to go to bed. Little did Jim know, he was working on an award of his own!

The next morning, Judy tried to heat up some coffee, but the stove burners wouldn't light. Jim checked the LP-gas gauge and sure enough, it was on empty. And, wouldn't you know it, the barbecue valve was still turned on. After minimizing his error by saying, "the tank was most likely near empty anyway," he decided to drive the motorhome to an LP-gas station across the street.

Jim performed (most of) the

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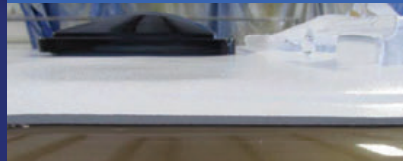
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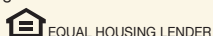
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outside departure duties while Judy secured the inside. With both of them seated inside, Jim drove slowly out of their site toward the exit. The sound of Kaboom! and the motorhome coming to a grinding stop indicated that something was amiss. Their awning, still extended, had hit the first tree and was bent at a rakish angle backward. When I asked Jim why he hadn't retracted it, he said, "It was so high up that I never saw it during my walk-around." With the assistance of some helpful RVers, he managed to get it rolled back and tied to the side as best he could. His insurance covered all but \$1,800 for the awning.

Jim is one of many RVers who empty their LP-gas tank by forgetting to close the valve to the barbecue, which is something that could easily be avoided by purchasing an automatic shut-off valve with a timer, online or from a local barbecue store. Driving off with the awning extended, another unfortunately common mistake, could also be avoided by using either a checklist or a spotter outside to watch for obstacles until the motorhome is clear of the site. Judy has since added this "outside" duty to her inside departure checklist.

In this case, it's obvious the LP-gas error did not lead directly to the awning error, but two blunders in two days earns Jim this year's top award.

► With today's technology, wouldn't it be nice if alarm bells went off whenever the shift lever is moved from PARK, indicating an extended awning, antenna or lowered jacks? Of course, that would mean fewer RV Oops Awards, but hey, that's what this annual list is all about ... reducing the number of errors we make by learning from the mishaps of others, resulting in more enjoyable outings in our motorhomes.

If you've done something dumb (that you wish you hadn't) and are willing to share it with fellow RVers, please send a brief email to the author at captmac@shaw.ca, explaining your mishap and how it could have been avoided. Who knows, with any luck (bad choice of words) you may win a coveted spot in next year's RV Oops Awards. **M**



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Now, just because the National Park Service celebrated its 100th birthday last month, don't get the idea that the party's over. In fact, we're so jazzed about this historic milestone that MotorHome will be marking the occasion for the rest of the year with our Find Your Adventure series. We encourage you to follow right along as we comb the country's highest peaks and darkest forests in search of the wide variety of adventures — from mild to wild — to be had in the 400-plus locations under the protection of the National Park Service.

WOODS

NATIONAL PARKS WILL RARELY IMAGINE

When was the last time you looked at a tree with a true sense of wonder? If you can't remember, perhaps it's time you paid a visit to the awe-inspiring Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

That's because one of these parks, located in central California's Sierra Nevada, is home to a colossus of the tree world. Namely, the 275-foot-tall General Sherman (in Sequoia National Park), a giant redwood that's considered to be the world's largest tree by volume, calculated at a mind-boggling 52,500 cubic feet.

But while these supersize sequoias, found in both parks, may be the marquee attractions, they're far from the only reason you'll want to visit these parks.

Largest, Deepest, Highest

If there was a single word that sums up Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks it might be "ginormous." Not a technical term, mind you, but it seems somehow fitting for a place that's home to not only the world's

largest tree, but to a valley deeper than the Grand Canyon and the highest mountain in the Lower 48.

To plan your visit, it helps to know that Sequoia and Kings Canyon, with a total of 1,353 square miles, are actually two different contiguous parks that fit together like puzzle pieces. They are administered as a single unit, however, which explains why we — and the National Park Service itself, for that matter — often refer to them by just the one name.

"God of the Woods"

Renowned naturalist John Muir called the giant sequoia the "God of the Woods." One look and we think you'll understand what he meant.

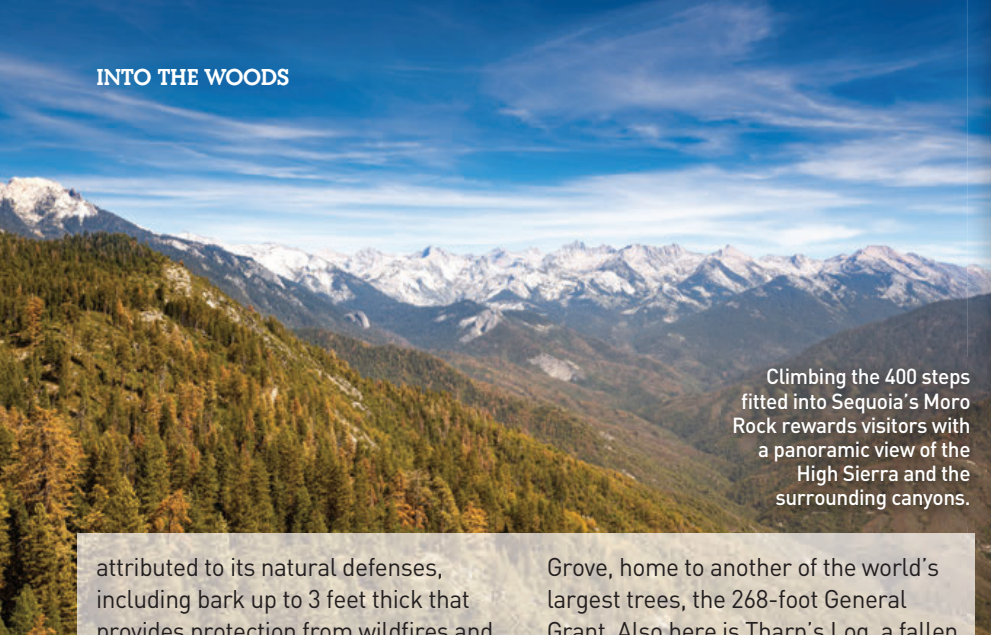
Once found throughout the Northern Hemisphere, today the last of the giant sequoias live in roughly 75 groves on the western slopes of the Sierra Nevada. Combine their long lifespans — as long as 3,000 years — with their fast growth rates, and you have a recipe for the world's most massive trees.

The sequoia's longevity can be



Getting There

Two highways enter the parks. State Highway 180 from Fresno leads to Kings Canyon National Park, then continues 30 miles east to Cedar Grove. State Highway 198 enters Sequoia National Park from the southwest via Three Rivers. Inside the parks, Highway 198 becomes the Generals Highway and connects to Highway 180. In winter, the Generals Highway between the parks often closes.



Climbing the 400 steps fitted into Sequoia's Moro Rock rewards visitors with a panoramic view of the High Sierra and the surrounding canyons.

attributed to its natural defenses, including bark up to 3 feet thick that provides protection from wildfires and insects. The sequoia's main threat, however, has long been man himself. Loggers targeted these groves in the late 1800s until — in a fortuitous twist of fate — they realized the trees weren't commercially viable, as they tended to shatter upon impact with the ground.

Walk Among Giants

If you're like most people, the first thing you'll want to do is see some big trees. Following are some of the best places to do just that.

In Sequoia National Park you'll want to visit the 1,880-acre grove John Muir named the Giant Forest. There are roughly 8,000 sequoias here, including the General Sherman tree and four more of the planet's 10 biggest. Best of all, they're easily accessible thanks to 40 miles of walking trails that wind through this grove alone. Note that the section of the Generals Highway leading to and from the Big Trees in Giant Forest was built in 1926, and the road was not constructed to accommodate long vehicles, so leave the motorhome in camp and take your dinghy.

Kings Canyon has 154-acre Grant

Grove, home to another of the world's largest trees, the 268-foot General Grant. Also here is Tharp's Log, a fallen sequoia that was used as an impromptu cabin by former miner and would-be cattle rancher Hale Tharp, one of the earliest white men to enter the area.

While you're in the neighborhood, be sure to take a stroll on the 2-mile Big Stump Trail. Here you'll get a feel for the huge trees that were lost to logging, and what it must have been like for the lumberjacks who felled them using nothing more than a double-sided axe and a very large cross-cut saw.

To touch a remarkable remnant of this period, head for the heavily logged Converse Basin to check out the Chicago Stump, all that's left of a giant sequoia that was chopped down, sawed up and shipped to Chicago, where it was reassembled for the 1893 World Columbian Exhibition. Also, where it was promptly declared a hoax because no one could believe there could actually be trees that large.

Sequoia Must-Sees

As we said at the outset, Sequoia and Kings Canyon have much more to offer than just the big trees that, quite literally, put them on the map.

IF YOU GO

Here are a few things you'll want to know if you're planning a visit to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks:

- ▶ For starters, you should understand that the park's major features are accessed by two main roadways, the 32-mile Generals Highway that winds its way through Sequoia National Park, and the 50-mile Kings Canyon Scenic Byway. Unlike Yosemite, there are no roads that connect the park with the small towns along scenic U.S. Highway 395 on the eastern side of the Sierras like Lone Pine and Independence, so the only approach is from the west.
- ▶ Next, bear in mind that park roads can be steep, narrow and winding. Many also have vehicle length restrictions, so better to leave your motorhome in a nearby RV park and take your dinghy to do your exploring.
- ▶ While we're on the subject of driving, we suggest taking frequent breaks, as the concentration these roads require can wear on you.
- ▶ Finally, be sure to top off your tanks before heading in, as there are no fuel stations in the park.
- ▶ As you're out exploring, heed the warnings about rivers and streams in the park, which can be fast-moving and very cold.
- ▶ This is bear country, so be sure to place your food and other scented items in the metal bear-proof lockers located throughout the park if you expect to be away from your vehicle for more than a few minutes.

RV Campgrounds in the Parks

For complete campground information, visit www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/campgrounds.htm.

For one of Sequoia National Park's most old-fashioned attractions, start your visit with a photo op at the rightly famous Tunnel Log. After all, it's not every day you get to drive underneath a 275-foot sequoia like the one that fell across Crescent Meadow Road back in 1937. You'll need your dinghy for this part of the journey: Vehicles longer than 22 feet are prohibited during shuttle season (May through Labor Day weekend).

Just up the road from Tunnel Log is the equally noteworthy Moro Rock, a granite dome that offers sweeping views of much of the park. Hardy hikers can access those views by way of a half-mile trail that includes a



Far left: Kings Canyon is often less crowded than Sequoia, but the views are equally as spectacular. It's difficult to grasp the size of a giant sequoia until you experience it up close.



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400-step stairway built in 1931 by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

To get another perspective on Sequoia National Park, try looking at it from the bottom up on a trip through Crystal Cave. These caverns are home to elaborately decorated rooms full of stalactites, stalagmites, flowstone and more (this is a popular attraction, so it's best to purchase your tickets online ahead of time at www.recreation.gov). Crystal Cave is generally open from May through late November, weather permitting, but vehicles longer than 22 feet are prohibited on Crystal Cave Road.

Finally, don't miss the impressive Tokopah Falls, located at the end of a 1.7-mile hike along a fork of the Kaweah River. Although this waterfall is actually 1,200 feet high, it descends in a series of shorter, frothy cascades that enhance its beauty.

Kings Canyon: End of the Road

If you looked at a map and got the

A half-mile trail in Sequoia leads visitors to General Sherman; at 275 feet tall, with a volume of 52,500 cubic feet, it's the world's largest tree.

impression you could motor through both Sequoia and Kings Canyon in just one day, you may want to rethink your plan. While it may be possible, it's not recommended, as Kings Canyon National Park is worth taking a full day to explore all by itself.

The classic drive into this less crowded part of the park follows state Highway 180, better known in this area as the Kings Canyon Scenic Byway, that winds its way 50 miles to the spot simply known as Road's End.

Along the way it passes several waterfalls, including the thundering 75-foot drop of Grizzly Falls, en route to the Cedar Grove Visitor Center, where you'll find it hard to miss the steep-walled valley's resemblance to nearby Yosemite National Park.

At Road's End will be the trailhead for Mist Falls, a 100-foot cascade that,



as its name implies, throws up enough spray to make rainbows above its pool on a sunny afternoon. The 8-mile round-trip hike to get there passes rapids and cascades on the Kings River before turning steeply uphill as you approach what is one of the largest waterfalls in the park.

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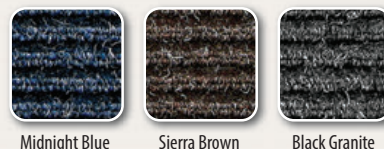
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Adventures Galore

Of all the outdoor adventures to be had in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, you'll find hiking opportunities to be the most plentiful. Hardcore hikers looking to explore this rugged wilderness could spend a lifetime here and never get bored, thanks to 800 miles of maintained trails that wind through the 800,000 acres of dedicated wilderness.

There are also plenty of trails here for folks who just want to take a leisurely stroll in nature. Topping this list are the Big Trees Trail and Congress Trail in Sequoia National Park. In Kings Canyon National Park, try the 1½-mile loop around tranquil Zumwalt Meadow and the short, paved trail to the powerful Roaring River Falls, which drops 40 feet out of a granite chute into the pool below.

If you'd rather tour the backcountry on horseback, check out the park's Grant Grove Stables and Cedar Grove Pack Station. You'll find horseback-

riding opportunities that range from one-hour trail rides to overnight trips into the spectacular Sierra Nevada backcountry (advance reservations recommended; www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/horseride.htm).

If you're curious to see more of what's below the surface, you can sign up for Crystal Cave's Wild Cave Tour. While it's not for everyone, this half-day underground romp should be just the ticket for adventurous souls whose idea of a good time includes crawling on your belly and getting good and dirty while marveling at underground rooms and passages most visitors will never even know exist.

Finally, back above ground, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks offer plenty of opportunities to cool off. Hume Lake has a large swimming beach as well as canoe and kayak rentals. Rafting trips on the Class III Kings River (more info from Kings River Expeditions at www.kingsriver.com) are about 90 minutes away.

The lake and park creeks and rivers are also full of trout, so fishing aficionados are going to want to break out their rods. If you want to improve your chances in the epic man-versus-fish battle of wits, check out www.sierraflyfisher.com to get hooked up with the park's first authorized fishing guide service.

Recipe for Wonder

In the final measure, it doesn't matter so much exactly what you decide to see or do in Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks.

What matters is that this is a place that will make you feel small by comparison. Which, not surprisingly, is the one key ingredient necessary to add more wonder to your life. **M**

For More Information

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks
559-565-3341, www.nps.gov/seki



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By E. Don Smith

START ME UP!

Installing an LSL AMP-L-START chassis-battery charger for improved starting power

If your motorhome is a modern unit built within the last decade, it may have come from the factory with a chassis-battery charger/maintainer. When plugged into 120-volt AC shorepower, this charger keeps your motorhome's chassis (engine-starting) batteries topped off. Most of the factory-installed chassis-battery chargers are very small models that only deliver about 1 amp of current. While this may be enough to keep the starting batteries topped off in a perfect world, often you may need more current than they can deliver. Many motorhome systems such as slideouts, electric leveling jacks and engine starting rely on the chassis starting batteries, so keeping them properly charged is very important.

When your motorhome is in storage and connected to shorepower, most of us assume that



the batteries are not being used and that the built-in 1-amp charger is enough to keep things topped off. However, unless you are using the main disconnect switches to cut off all parasitic drains, the batteries may still be under a small load. That small drain may be enough to prevent the batteries from being fully charged

due to the low current that the typical chassis-battery charger provides. And, if your motorhome is a bit older, or is an entry-level model, it may not have a chassis-battery maintainer installed at all.

A good solution is one of the high-amp chargers on the market today that uses a different method of handling its charging duties. This type of charger connects to your house batteries and "steals" some power from them (when 120-volt AC power is available or a solar system is used to charge the house batteries) to provide up to 15 amps of charging current to the chassis batteries.

Since your house batteries are usually the highest-capacity battery bank in the motorhome and are often charged by a sophisticated

Left: Nobody likes a dead battery, and with a few tools and a little time you can significantly upgrade the chassis-battery charger in your motorhome.

three-stage, built-in high-amp inverter/charging system, this makes them an ideal source to power this relatively new type of charger. Another advantage is that in most motorhomes both battery banks are stored in the same bay, making installation of this type of charger easy.

Two of the most popular chargers of this type are the Xantrex Echo Charger and the LSL Products AMP-L-START. For our purposes, we selected the AMP-L-START due to its lower price (\$64.95 versus \$129.99) and its widespread use in the motorhome market. LSL calls this a “diversion charger” because it steals a little of the charging energy from the house-battery bank and diverts it to the chassis batteries. This type of charger can be used in gas and diesel motorhomes and is designed to work on dual or single starting batteries; the house-battery bank can be of any size. LSL says the AMP-L-START can be used with all types of batteries, even if the house batteries and the chassis



1



2

[1] Remove all sources of external power by unplugging the motorhome from shorepower, disconnecting the solar panels (if any) and removing the negative battery cable from the house to the starting batteries, as well as the negative cable that connects the motorhome to the house batteries. [2] Locate the factory-installed battery charger and unplug it from the motorhome. On this motorhome, the charger was located quite a distance from the battery bank, so a long cable was routed through the electrical bay to the battery bank. We had to cut the cable to remove the charger since it was routed under the motorhome. We plan to repurpose the charger and use it at home for a car or lawn mower battery, etc.

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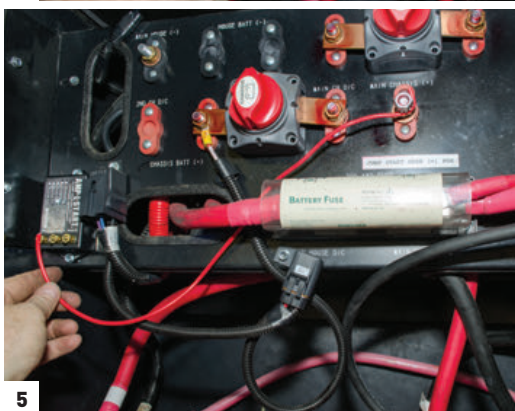
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[3] After locating the wires from the charger to the motorhome, remove them from the chassis-battery terminals in the electrical bay. [4] Find a good location in the battery bay to mount the new charger. After drilling two pilot holes, we used sheet-metal screws to secure the charger to the panel. [5] The instructions from LSL detail several ways to connect the charger; we elected to connect ours to the same posts the original charger was connected to. Here we are measuring the proper length of 12-gauge wire. [6] Remove the insulation from each end of the wires, crimp on the supplied connectors and apply shrink tubing for a clean install. We repeated this for all three of the wires needed for the installation.

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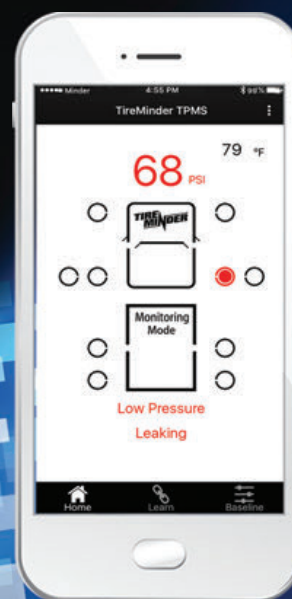
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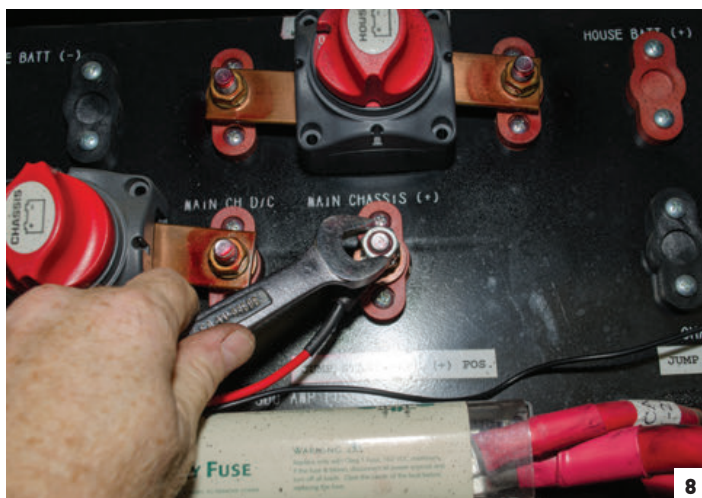
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[7] After crimping on the terminals, attach all three to the charger using the supplied lock washer. For safety reasons, be sure to make this connection to the charger before connecting the wires to the battery banks. If you connect the wires to the batteries first, the wires are hot and present a danger to you and the device. [8] Take the lead connected to the charger (labeled here Chassis +) and route it to the post where the original charger was connected. You can also connect it directly to the positive lead on the 12-volt chassis battery bank if that is easier. The installation manual provided with the charger describes other connection methods that you can use based on your setup.

batteries are different types. In fact, the motorhome we used for the installation has mixed battery types, and the AMP-L-START has worked great for us.

When the AMP-L-START senses voltages greater than 13.2 volts on the house batteries, it starts charging the chassis batteries. (The house batteries can be receiving voltage from solar panels, or the built-in inverter/charger.) This 13.2 volts is higher than resting voltage, and it serves as the trigger to activate the chassis-battery charger we installed. Once the house-battery voltage drops below this level, the charger goes off and does not add a parasitic load of its own to the battery bank.

This charger also has an over-voltage protection circuit that shuts it down during battery equalization, and it emits an audible alarm if the chassis-battery voltage drops below 11.9 volts. The device features an easy-to-see LED panel to advise you of its charging mode, as well as lights to indicate improper wiring.

Once connected, the AMP-L-START is a fully automatic system, and we have used it for several months with

⚡ SAFETY TIP

Since a battery cannot be turned off, be careful any time you are working with the positive battery terminal or any wires that are connected to the positive terminal. If you allow a hot wire to come into contact with metal surfaces or any electrical ground, sparks will fly. In an area that potentially has battery gases present, this is something you need to avoid.

[9] For the ground wire, we used the negative terminal for the chassis-battery connection from the original charger. You can use any suitable ground, including a negative battery post. [10] Connect the charger to the house-battery bank. We used the positive post of the house battery that has the main cable attached to it coming from the motorhome. If you are in doubt about which of the many positive battery posts to use in the house-battery bank, test each one with a voltmeter and make sure the post you are connecting to reads 12 volts rather than 6 volts. [11] Although it is not a requirement, we used wire loom purchased from a local auto parts store to cover the wires and make them look similar to the OEM wiring. [12] Reinstall the negative battery cables to the house and chassis batteries.



9



10



11



12



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13



14

[13] After connecting everything properly you will see a light on the front panel indicating the type of charging that is occurring. If there is a problem with the house or starting batteries, or with the polarity of the wiring, there will be a red light indicating the problem area. [14] In addition to all the connectors needed for the install, the unit comes with a handy sticker that can be applied in the battery bay near the charger to clarify what the lights indicate.

great results. According to the manufacturer, the AMP-L-START uses a tapered charge rate that is optimized to prevent electrolyte loss in the battery bank. Although it is a very easy charger to install, we have included a

pictorial of the steps to remove your motorhome's old charger (if equipped) and to install the new one. With only three wires to connect, the AMP-L-START is one of the easiest upgrades you will ever perform. **M**

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B's of Azur

Avion Vans joins the luxury Class B market with factory-direct Sprinter-based conversions By Dave Riggs

Those with creative ideas are often lauded for their ability to think outside the box. But in the case of motorhome design, quite the opposite is true. A new motorhome essentially begins its life as a box, and it's the designer's job to think about life inside it. When given the freedom of a large floorplan and multiple slideouts, the sky is the limit; the real challenge comes in the form of a small space, where the dimensions are inflexible and the options are few. It's the world of the Class B van conversion, and it's one of the hottest, most competitive segments in the RV industry today.

Once dominated by humble family campers equipped with little more

than a minimalist kitchen and a small bed, today's Class B market is decidedly high-end. Younger, adventurous buyers expect more — and the current variety of van platforms, combined with European-inspired design (and equipment in some cases) have led to the \$100,000-plus Class B. Certainly, there are lower-priced options, but the sleek lines and gleaming three-point star of the diesel-powered Mercedes-Benz Sprinter are especially alluring. The Sprinter-based Class B has quickly become a popular weekend wanderer that can double as a family vehicle. And many manufacturers have taken notice of the demand for such motorhomes.

One of the latest is The RV Factory. Based out of Wakarusa, Indiana, The RV Factory is a factory-direct manufacturer launched last year by NeXus RV partners and RV industry veterans Dave Middleton, Brian Shea and Claude Donati. The company's 50,000-square-foot facility manufactures the iconic Weekend Warrior toy-hauler trailer and recently revived another brand name from the past: the Avion, and its premier product, the Avion Azur Class B.

Limited as all manufacturers are to a van's exterior appearance and interior dimensions, the key to differentiating a product like the Azur

ABOVE: It's easy to reach most campsites with the nimble Azur Class B. The full-size power awning smoothly deploys via a handy remote control.

from others on the market is to offer features and benefits that others don't. Aside from the manufacturer's pledge to work with its customers to provide some degree of personalization, the key feature of the Azur 24KBX floorplan is a rear seating area that converts into an RV king-size bed. To test the effectiveness and overall livability of this new floorplan, we took delivery of a demo model from the company's showroom in Temecula, California, and embarked on a journey into California's Mojave Desert for some sightseeing and overnight stays in dispersed public (read: dry) campgrounds.

Many Class B vans we've tested struggle with exterior storage — after all, a van by its very nature is *interior* storage — so generally there are no exterior compartments to work with, nor can any sizable ones be added. This often results in some interesting arrangements at the back of the van, most of which are far from ideal. The Azur, however, makes useful storage space underneath the rear bed, which is accessed through the rear cargo doors. It's not a huge amount, but it had room enough for our chairs, barbecue, a bin for the freshwater hose/coax cable and a rolled-up exterior mat. There are access doors for the plumbing, which is a thoughtful and welcome feature, and also a storage tube underneath the rear of the van for the sewer hose.

Storage is of little concern inside

Below: The galley features a solid-surface countertop and a sink cover for meal-prep duties. The cabinet below the acrylic sink is large enough for a trash can and to store various kitchen items.



the Azur. The unit has an abundance of glossy white overhead cabinets throughout, which fit nicely and seemed well-made. There is even a space large enough for a trash can underneath the galley sink, and a good-sized wardrobe amidships that accommodates hanging clothes. The Sprinter's cockpit also has storage space for items like maps above the visors, and there are cup holders and cubbies for loose items atop the dash. A high-gloss Anigra wood-grain applique package on the center console attempts to break up the sea of gray plastic, though it looks a bit

out of place. Another addition was the optional Pioneer stereo head unit with a 6.5-inch LCD touch screen and rearview camera input (\$1,895). Operating this stereo while driving takes some acclimating since the controls are on the complex side.

Overall performance of the Sprinter platform can be a bit polarizing; although many swear by the popular marque, I found the cockpit seats to be somewhat flat, and it took some time to get comfortable with the steering feel, especially when confronted with moderate to strong side winds on California's

Below: The front seats can be swiveled around and combined with the second-row seats to make an intimate social area situated around the oval dinette table. Storage in the cockpit area is plentiful, with cubbies, cup holders and space above the visors for maps and the like.



Specifications

Chassis

Model	Mercedes-Benz Sprinter
Engine	2.1-liter 4-cylinder diesel
SAE Hp	161 @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	265 lb-ft @ 1,400 rpm
Transmission	Seven-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.92:1
Front Tires	LT215/85R16
Rear Tires	LT215/85R16
Wheelbase	170"
Brakes	4 wheel disc with ABS
Suspension (F/R)	Transverse leaf springs with struts/leaf springs with shock absorbers
Fuel Capacity	26.4 gal
Fuel Economy	18.2 mpg
Warranty	3 years/36,000-mile basic limited warranty, 5 year/100,000-mile diesel engine limited warranty

Coach

Exterior Length	24' 1"
Exterior Width	6' 4"
Exterior Height	9' 11"
Interior Width	5' 10"
Interior Height	6' 3"
Construction	Radiant reflective barrier, R-7 fiberglass insulation, AstroShield reflective insulation, Azdel composite insulative panel (R-3), soft-touch vinyl with foam backer
Freshwater Capacity	30 gal
Black-Water Capacity	30 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	30 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	Tankless on-demand
LP-Gas Capacity	18.9 gal
Air Conditioner	11,000 Btu with heat pump
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Refrigerator	3.1 cubic foot
Inverter/Charger	45-amp converter, 2,000-watt inverter
Battery	Group 31 deep cycle AGM
AC generator	2.5 kW
MSRP	\$93,995
MSRP as tested	\$114,585
Warranty	1 year

Wet Weight

(Water and water heater, fuel and LP-gas tanks full, no supplies or passengers)

Front Axle	3,400 lbs
Rear Axle	6,140 lbs
Total	9,540 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR F/R	4,410/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
ROCCC	1,490 lbs

GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combined Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity

Highway 14 through the Mojave Desert, and while being passed by large trucks on the highway. The test unit was also equipped with the base 2.1-liter four-cylinder diesel. If you're not in a rush, you can probably live with the performance — and the motorhome will certainly handle most roads — but given the choice, the six-cylinder engine is more efficient, and there's not that much of a fuel-economy sacrifice. Fuel economy was recorded at 18.2 MPG during our test, which is good, but the last similarly equipped six-cylinder diesel Sprinter we tested logged 16.95 MPG. That's a difference of just 1.25 MPG, making the bigger engine a better option.

Once at our destination, we fired up the available 2.5-kW generator (\$3,220), switched on the air conditioning and deployed the full-size power awning with remote while waiting for the sun to go down. We kept cool while preparing a simple meal in the compact galley, which is equipped with a solid-surface countertop, a two-burner stove with a glass cover (which we discovered interfered with the vent hood when open) and a black acrylic sink with cover. And although the added countertop space afforded by the covers helped with food prep, there's no denying it was tight, but that's to be expected in a Class B motorhome. On the curbside of the galley is a small microwave and 3.1-cubic-foot refrigerator equipped with what is basically a freezer shelf — good enough for ice trays or frozen personal pizzas, but not much else.

WHAT'S HOT

Plenty of interior storage, large king-size rear bed, comfortable second-row seats, clean and functional interior design.

WHAT'S NOT

Underpowered four-cylinder diesel engine, unsupportive driver's seat, cramped bathroom, awkward bed-platform storage.



For those times when you want to use the Azur as an RV, the 24KBX is equipped with a table just behind the cockpit that is within reach of the second-row chairs. Swiveling the cockpit seats rearward to make a dining/entertainment space takes some effort because the Sprinter seats require numerous backrest and fore/aft adjustments to get them to rotate. The single-post table could use a little more work in preventing a wobble and its oval shape offers additional surface area, but does occupy quite a bit of the interior space. The two-tone second-row seats, however, are well-padded, supportive and very comfortable, and the Samsung 19-inch TV on an articulating arm was easily viewable from inside, or even outside through the sliding door.

Without the benefit of a slideout, the hallway space, like in most Class B's, is inherently narrow, requiring passersby to turn sideways in order

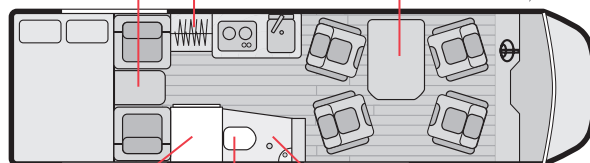
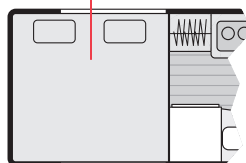
AVION AZUR CLASS B

KING BED W/STORAGE BELOW

FULL-LENGTH CLOSET W/DRAWERS

DINETTE

DINETTE

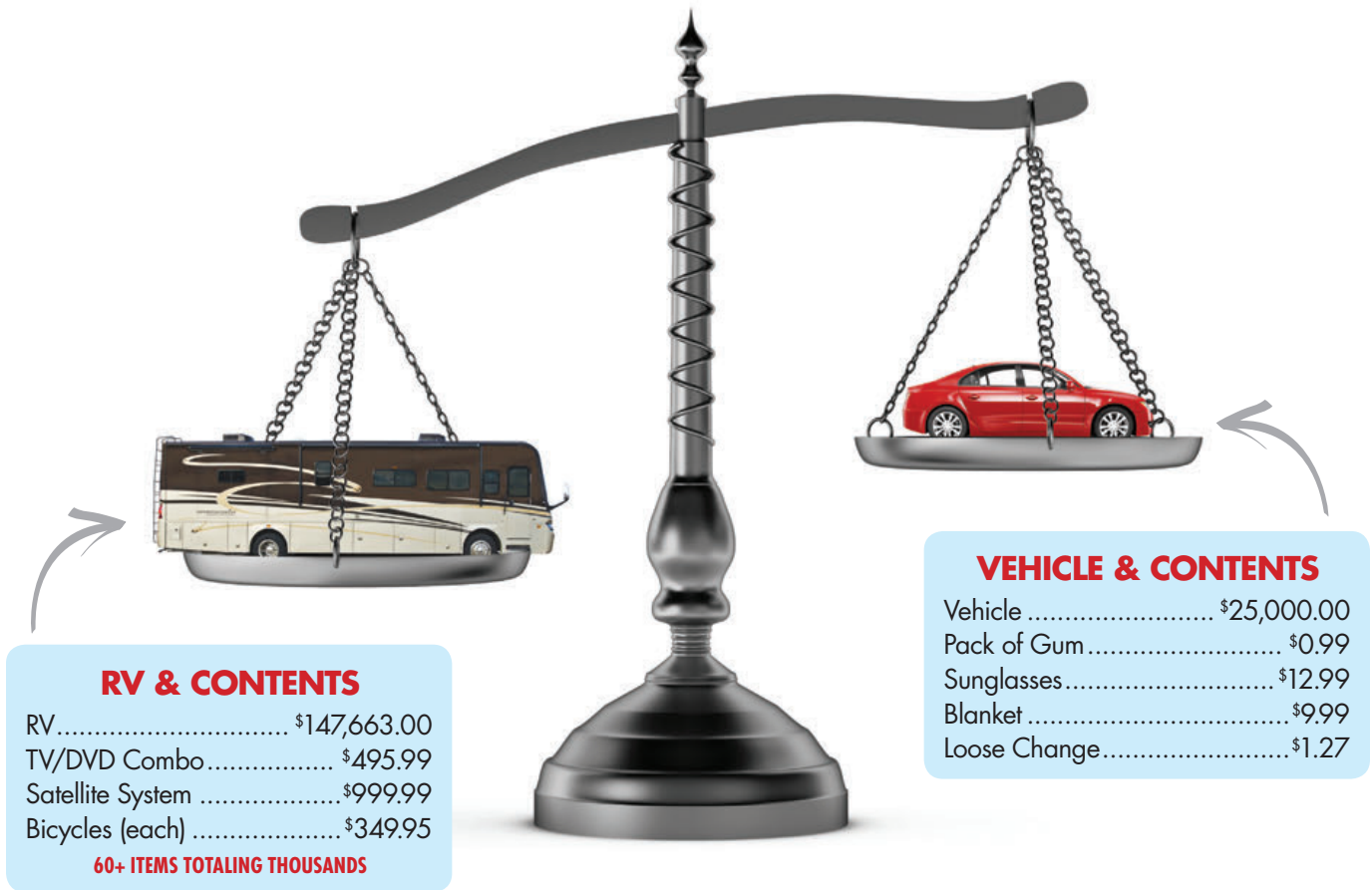


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TEST AVION AZUR CLASS B



To convert the rear area for sleeping, the rear jackknife seats fold down, the platform moves into place and the cushions are placed on top. Side window pods offer additional sleep-position options.

to scoot through. And the wet bath is small, so using the toilet or taking a shower is a little tricky. The corner sink is small and requires moving the showerhead from wall to basin in order to wash up — or leaving it at the sink and turning around to operate the faucets behind you. But making concessions to reap the benefits of an easy-to-handle motorhome is always in order when trying to fit all the amenities into the naturally limited space of a Class B shell.

Where the 24KBX does go big is the aforementioned rear RV king bed. Normally, the space is partially occupied by opposing jackknife seats with seat belts, which brings this floorplan's seating capacity to six. Avion also supplies another, smaller table to place between the seats for snacking or a game of cards, and another 19-inch TV. Half of the bed's platform encroaches on the space, and two long, heavy cushions must be stowed on top of it, compromising comfort a bit.

To convert the area for sleeping, the seats are folded down to join at the middle, and the lower section of the bed platform is pulled into place. The bed in the test unit routinely stuck halfway through deployment and required a sharp tug to get it to move; using roller guides would likely ease the operation. Once in place, the long cushions are set into position to make up the rest of the mattress, after which you are left

with a firm, comfortable bed.

Uniquely installed rear window "pods" increase the width of the space so taller people could sleep sideways if more room was desired. The pods make the area feel lighter and roomier, and there may be some bumping into the pleated shades and climbing over each other in order to use the bathroom, but the space is used more efficiently in this configuration. Sleeping lengthwise also works just fine.

The Azur's interior design is clean and functional, with brown wood-grain vinyl flooring and soft-touch vinyl paneling on the walls and ceiling. There is an abundance of overhead LED lighting with logically placed switches — and an LED lighting strip above the streetside second row adds ambiance. Pleated cloth shades and a fabric windshield curtain on an aluminum rail provide privacy, but could be a little thicker to aid in blocking out light.

All things considered, the Avion 24KBX is a good first effort from The RV Factory, and we expect the product will only get better. With customer input during the build process, the end result will likely be a clean, comfortable RV that can double as a second vehicle when needed — and that's always been the true appeal of a Class B motorhome. **M**

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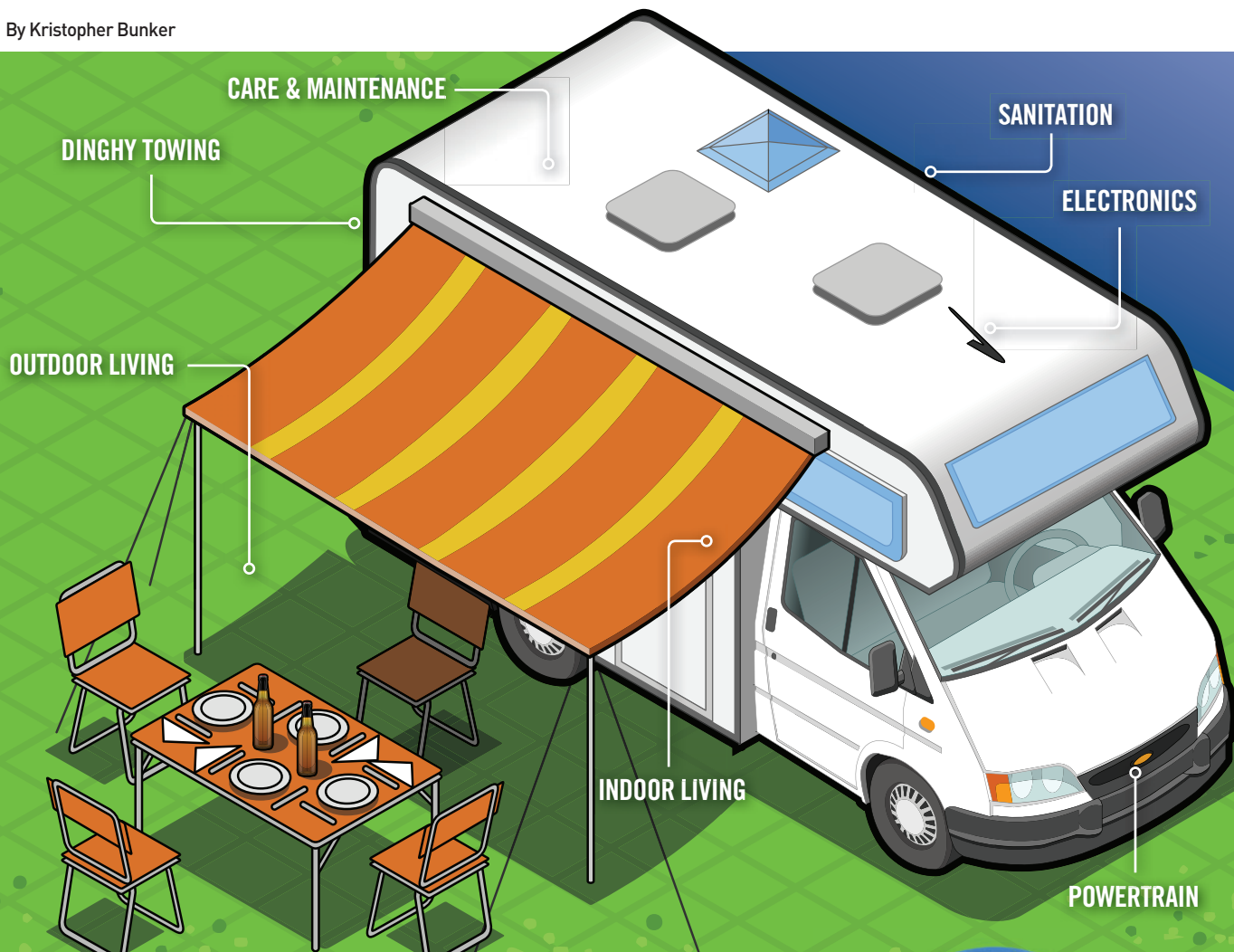
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READY TO ROLL

THE COMPLETE GUIDE TO RV PRODUCTS DESIGNED TO ENHANCE THE MOTORHOME OWNERSHIP EXPERIENCE

Owning a motorhome is the best way to enjoy the open road. Onboard amenities like running water, a galley, bathroom facilities and your own bed mean you're always ready to pull up stakes and head out in search of adventure. But, as fully outfitted as today's motorhomes can be, they still need a few accessories designed for the lifestyle to help owners fully realize their rig's potential. What good are the hookups if you don't have the hoses to connect? How can you tow a dinghy vehicle without the proper equipment? And, where do you turn when one of the appliances quits working and needs to be replaced? These are but a few dilemmas that every RVer, new and seasoned, faces at one time or another.

In order to smooth out the process of finding the products needed to truly enjoy everything the lifestyle has to offer, we offer our annual guide to outfitting a motorhome, complete with a comprehensive list of the top manufacturers in the industry. The following popular must-have gadgets, gizmos and necessary equipment will help you get your motorhome in order and ready to roll.



Freshwater Systems

Water Hoses, Appliances and Connectors ▲

A good RVing experience begins with getting water to the motorhome. Selecting the proper hoses, adapters and fittings is an important task. When it comes to hoses, you should carry at least two: one for the city-water connection and one for rinsing the

black holding tank. Your motorhome already has a demand water pump, but you may wish to upgrade to a more efficient (or quieter) model.

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Camping World, 888-626-7576,
www.campingworld.com

SHURFLO, 800-854-3218, www.shurflo.com

Teknor Apex, 800-556-3864, www.apexhose.com

Valterra, 818-898-1671, www.valterra.com



Water Filters ▲

Once the water hookup has been made, it's a good idea to install an in-line filter to reduce contaminants that not only taste bad, but can damage freshwater components, including the water heater and faucets. We recommend a filter with a rating of 1 micron or less to block bacteria and cysts.

Camco (TastePURE), 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Culligan, 877-386-0823, www.culligan.com

Flow Pur, 234-759-3077, www.flowpur.com

Hydro Life, 800-626-7130, www.hydrolife.com

Multipure Drinking Water Systems, 800-622-9206,
www.multipure.com

The RV Water Filter Store, 602-625-1875,

www.rvwaterfilterstore.com

Water King, 337-988-2360, www.waterking.com

Exterior Showers and Accessories

Most new motorhomes are equipped with an exterior shower. But even under the best circumstances, exposure to the elements can eventually lead to damaged fittings, hoses, etc. These should be replaced immediately to avoid damage to the motorhome's side walls and structure.

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

ITC, 616-396-1355, www.itc-marine.com

LaSalle Bristol, 800-718-7187,

www.lasallebristol.com

Sanitation

Sewer Hoses ▶

It may be a taboo subject, but we're all adults here. One of the primary benefits of RV ownership is plumbing, and the wastewater we generate needs to go somewhere. Spending a little more on high-quality components like hoses and connectors is a good way to ensure smooth operation, and will help avoid embarrassing and messy spills at the campsite or dump station.

BlueLine RV Sanitation (Prest-o-Fit),

888-770-5849, www.prestofit.com

Camco (RhinoFLEX), 800-334-2004,

www.camco.net

Lippert Components, 574-535-1125,

www.lci1.com

Thetford Corp., 800-543-1219,

www.thetford.com

Valterra, 818-898-1671, www.valterra.com



seals, which helps to prolong the life of these vital components.

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Dometic Group, 800-544-4881,

www.dometic.com/usa

Eco-Save, 800-950-9666, www.eco-save.com

Odorlos (Valterra), 818-898-1671,

www.valterra.com

Pure Power Blue/Green (Valterra),

818-898-1671, www.valterra.com

Star brite, 800-327-8583, www.starbrite.com

Thetford Corp., 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com

Travel Jon (Century Chemical Corp.),

800-348-3505, www.centurychemical.com

Walex, 800-338-3155, www.walex.com

Worldwide Monochem, 512-267-5190,

www.satellite-environmental.com



Toilets ▲

In addition to the obvious side effects, a leaking toilet can seriously damage the interior of your motorhome. Selecting the proper toilet, be it porcelain or plastic, or hand- or foot-flush, is a matter of necessity.

Dometic Group, 800-544-4881,

www.dometic.com/usa

Thetford Corp., 800-543-1219,

www.thetford.com

Chemicals ▶

Adding chemical treatments to the holding tank controls nasty odors, and also aids in breaking down the solids for a smooth flow. In addition, many of the treatments are formulated to lubricate the

Sewer Vents ▶

For additional odor control, specialty vents create an updraft to expel odors from the holding tank before they can reach the interior. They operate with or



without a breeze and generally don't contain any moving parts.

360 Products Inc., 503-559-8094,

www.360productsnorthamerica.com

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Coil n' Wrap, 866-603-8388, www.coilnwrap.com

LaSalle Bristol, 800-718-7187,

www.lasallebristol.com

Lippert Components (360 Siphon), 574-535-1125,

www.lci1.com

Ventline, 574-848-4491, www.ventline.com

Macerators ▶

These handy pumps make dumping holding tanks easier than ever, as they not only draw the contents out of the tank at a more aggressive rate than conventional gravity flow, but they also grind up the solids for removal through hoses as small as 1 inch in diameter, over longer distances.



Clean Dump, 360-798-2437, www.cleandump.com

Flojet, 949-608-3900, www.xylemflowcontrol.com

Thetford Corp. (Sani-Con), 800-543-1219,

www.thetford.com

Valterra, 818-898-1671, www.valterra.com

Portable Tanks

In a boondocking situation, the holding tanks can fill up in a hurry. It's often easier to utilize portable, rolling tanks to transport the contents to the dump station rather than completely breaking camp. They attach via

standard sewer hoses and can accept the waste directly from the motorhome's dump outlet.

Barker Manufacturing Co., 800-537-9940, www.barkermfg.com

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Thetford Corp. (SmartTote), 800-543-1219,

www.thetford.com

Holding-tank Monitors/Sensors

Most newer motorhomes are equipped with holding-tank monitors, but adding new probes to an existing system or replacing an older component with one that uses external sensors can work wonders for knowing how much space is left in the tanks, which helps you plan accordingly.

Horst Miracle Probe, www.rvprobes.com

SeeLevel (Garnet Technologies Inc.), 877-668-7813,

www.garnetinstruments.com

Dinghy Towing



Tow Bars ▲

Dinghy tow bars are available in two basic styles: A-frame or self-aligning.

A-frame tow bars are offered in solid or folding varieties and are designed to fit specific baseplates mounted to the dinghy-vehicle frame. The folding design will generally fit a wider range than the solid design.

Self-aligning tow bars are available in dinghy- or motorhome-mounted configurations. Self-aligning tow bars are designed to fit a wide range of vehicles by attaching to model-specific baseplates. Motorhome-mounted bars are often the better choice, as there is less chance of damage when not in use, and hitching is virtually a one-person job.

Blue Ox, 800-228-9289, www.blueox.com

Demco, 800-543-3626, www.demco-products.com

Roadmaster Inc., 800-669-9690, www.roadmasterinc.com

your motorhome-and-dinghy combination. Such a braking system will also ease the burden on the motorhome's braking components, which helps improve long-term durability and maintenance costs.

Whether it's direct or proportional, or permanently or temporarily mounted, an auxiliary braking system is a must-have if you plan to tow a dinghy vehicle.

Blue Ox, 800-228-9289, www.blueox.com

Brakebuddy (Hopkins Towing Solutions), 800-835-0129,

www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com

Roadmaster Inc., 800-669-9690, www.roadmasterinc.com

RViBrake (Danko Manufacturing), 800-815-2159, www.rvibrake.com

SMI Manufacturing Inc., 800-893-3763, www.smibrake.com

VIP Enterprises, 734-516-2056, www.viprv.com

Tow Dollies

Whether you own a vehicle that isn't approved for four-down towing behind a motorhome or you'd simply prefer not to install the mounting hardware to your motorhome or dinghy, a tow dolly is the way to get your commuter vehicle to the RV park. And, if your vehicle is FWD, no transmission lube pump is necessary.

Demco, 800-543-3626, www.demco-products.com

Roadmaster Inc., 800-669-9690, www.roadmasterinc.com

Auxiliary Braking Systems ▶

Adding an auxiliary braking system to your motorhome/dinghy combination is not only required by law, but will also help to improve the stopping power of





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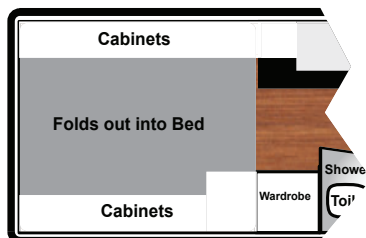
Azur ELX is here



Large entertainment area in rear folds into queen bed.

ELX floorplan offers an optional entertainment center in place of chair.

ELX floorplan features a large 6.6 cu ft refrigerator.



Azur 24ELX



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Powertrain



Motor Oils and Lubricants ▲

One of the simplest — and most vital — tasks of keeping your vehicle on the road is changing the oil on a regular basis. As a hedge against premature failures, and longer service life, you should follow the vehicle manufacturer's recommended intervals to the letter when it comes to oil changes, and always stick to the type (weight) of oil it recommends.

AMSOIL Inc., 800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

Castrol, 800-462-0835, www.castrol.com

Delo, 800-822-5823, www.deloperformance.com

Havoline, 800-822-5823, www.havoline.com

Lucas Oil, 800-342-2512, www.lucasoil.com

Mobil 1, 800-662-4525, www.mobiloil.com

Pennzoil, 800-237-8645, www.pennzoil.com

Quaker State, 800-237-8645, www.quakerstate.com

Royal Purple, 888-382-6300,

www.royalpurpleconsumer.com

Shell Rotella, 800-237-8645, www.rotella.shell.com

STP, 888-464-7871, www.stp.com

Valvoline, 800-832-6825, www.valvoline.com

Tires ▼

Tires take the brunt of the road's imperfections and, apart from oil changes, are perhaps the most important DIY maintenance item on your list. Inspecting the tires should be a part of your daily routine when on the road; check for uneven wear, sidewall cracks or bulges, and also the tread depth. Any red flags should



be addressed immediately. Tires should be rotated as instructed by the manufacturer, and replaced when they time out, even if the tread looks good. It's generally accepted that tires time out in seven years, but some manufacturers extend that period to 10 years if they have been covered or stored indoors.

Goodyear, 800-667-8138, www.goodyear.com

Maxxis, 800-462-9947, www.maxxis.com

Michelin North America, 888-622-2306,

www.michelinrvtires.com

Engine-power Enhancements ▼



Sometimes you just want a little more power from your motorhome. Engine-

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CLASS A & CLASS C



Kick-Down Jack



Straight-Acting, Telescoping Jack



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One touch operation. Computer selects the best leveling combinations.

enhancement products such as tuners, chips and programmers work with the engine's electronics to provide more oomph by adjusting heating points, air-to-fuel mixtures and even engine timing. Available for diesel- and gas-powered applications, these products include everything a power aficionado could want, including diagnostics, temperatures and horsepower/torque readouts.

A variety of air-flow enhancements are also available to help squeeze additional performance out of the engine.

Banks Power, 800-601-8072,

www.bankspower.com

BD Diesel Performance, 800-887-5030,

www.dieselpower.com

Bully Dog, 940-783-9914,

www.bullydog.com

Diablo Sport, 866-404-6141, www.diablosport.com

Hypertech, 901-382-8888, www.hypertech.com

Snow Performance, 719-633-3811,

www.snowperformance.net

Superchips, 888-227-2447, www.superchips.com

Suspension Enhancements ▼

A bumpy ride is more than a nuisance, as it can cause undue stress on chassis and driving components. Upgrading the motorhome's suspension shocks can help soften the blows, while installing a steering stabilizer can improve handling impacted by passing semis, high winds or even a blowout. Plus, a more stable ride eases the burden on the driver and lessens driver fatigue.

Bilstein, 858-386-5900, www.bilsteinus.com

Blue Ox, 800-228-9289, www.blueox.com

Koni, 859-586-4100, www.koni-na.com

Roadmaster Inc., 800-669-9690,

www.roadmasterinc.com

Safe-T-Plus, 800-872-7233, www.safe-t-plus.com

SuperSprings, 800-898-0705, www.supersprings.com



Fuel Additives ▲

Available for diesel- and gas-powered applications, fuel additives are often attributed to increasing mileage, prolonging an engine's lifespan by cleaning injectors and even increasing horsepower. Some RVers swear by them, while others remain skeptical; we'll let you decide for yourself.

AMSOIL Inc., 800-956-5695, www.amsoil.com

Lucas Oil, 800-342-2512, www.lucasoil.com

Marvel Mystery, 800-887-8539,

www.marvelmysteryoil.com

Red Line, 800-624-7958, www.redlineoil.com

Royal Purple, 888-382-6300,

www.royalpurpleconsumer.com

Sta-Bil (Gold Eagle), 800-367-3245,

www.goldeagle.com

Star brite, 800-327-8583, www.starbrite.com



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Entertainment



TV and Audio/Video ▲

Although many of us began RVing as a means to unplug, there's nothing wrong with catching up on the local news or munching popcorn in front of the television for movie night. Television technology is constantly evolving, offering better pictures and resolution every day. A good-quality large flat-screen is more affordable than ever (provided you don't go overboard on the bells and whistles). Be sure to select a model that offers a wide viewing angle, and one whose picture quality doesn't diminish when viewed at an angle from below

(which is the typical angle with most motorhome installations).

And though your motorhome may be equipped with speakers, upgrading is a relatively simple affair; many opt for the sleekness of a sound bar, or even the convenience of an exterior speaker for outdoor entertainment.

ASA Electronics, 877-305-0445, www.asaelectronics.com
 Furrrion, 888-354-5792, www.furrrion.com
 Insignia Products (Best Buy), 877-467-4289, www.insicniaproducts.com
 iRV Technologies (Patrick Industries Inc.), 888-373-3939, www.patrickind.com
 KING, 952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com

Satellite-programming Providers

Unless you plan on relying on the often inconsistent cable hookups at the RV park or over-the-air broadcast channels, you'll need a satellite provider. The equipment can be rented (under contract) or purchased, and there are plans designed for RVers that can be turned on or off depending

on your travel schedule.

DirecTV, 855-567-1663, www.directv.com

DISH, 888-434-0112, www.dish.com

Shaw Direct, 888-554-7827, www.shawdirect.ca

Antennas ►

In order to receive that satellite programming (or over-the-air local channels), you'll need an antenna.

These are available in permanent-mount and/or portable configurations, and have come a long way in terms of ease of use and functionality. Keep in mind that if you wish to receive over-the-air programming, you'll need a separate antenna in addition to one for a satellite provider.

KING, 952-922-6889, www.kingconnect.com
 KVH Industries Inc., 401-847-3327, www.kvh.com
 Shakespeare Marine, 803-227-1590, www.shakespeare.ce.com
 Winegard Co., 800-288-8094, www.winegard.com



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READY TO ROLL

Internet/Wi-Fi/Cell Boosters ▶

These gadgets are darn near a necessity in today's technology-driven environment, especially when you consider that most highly desirable off-the-beaten-path destinations offer spotty service at best. These boosters don't necessarily create Wi-Fi or cellular signals; rather, they amplify the existing signals to give users the best opportunity for the most bars.

C. Crane, 800-522-8863, www.ccrane.com

PDQ Connect, 858-598-5001, www.pdqconnect.com

Shakespeare Marine, 803-227-1590,

www.shakespeare.ce.com

SmoothTalker, 877-726-3444,

www.smoothtalker.com

weBoost, 866-294-1660, www.weboost.com

Wilson Amplifiers, 800-568-2723,

www.wilsonamplifiers.com



Indoor Living Shades ▶

A motorhome sitting in the sun can get quite hot, which puts additional demands on the air conditioning (if you're plugged in or running the generator). Shades can be your first line of defense against the penetrating heat, especially when you cover the large windshield. Many times, the shades can be so effective that you can limit the use of the air conditioning. The fact that the shades offer an additional measure of privacy is icing on the cake.

Auto-Motion Shade Inc., 905-470-6198,

www.automotionshade.com

Carefree of Colorado, 800-621-2617,

www.carefreeofcolorado.com

Irvine Shade & Door Inc., 574-522-1446,

www.irvineshadeanddoor.com

Magne Shade, 336-753-0905, www.magneshade.com

MCD Innovations, 972-548-1850,

www.mcdinnovations.com

United Shade (Dicor), 877-262-0954,

www.unitedshade.com



Climate Control ▼

Battling Mother Nature is a losing proposition; she'll win every time. When the undersized air conditioner that came with your motorhome just isn't up to the task, upgrading to a more efficient climate-control system can be one of the true joys of RVing. Replacing these components is easier than you think, as all are designed



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www.damprid.com

to fit standard 14-inch roof openings. Heat pumps are available that offer heating and cooling from a single unit, and options are available for ducted and non-ducted applications.

Airxcel Inc., 316-832-3400, www.airxcel.com

Atwood Mobile, 800-546-8759,

www.atwoodmobile.com

Dometic Group, 800-544-4881,

www.dometic.com/usa

MaxxAir (Airxcel Inc.), 316-832-3400,

www.airxcel.com

Roof Vents ▶

Circulating air inside an RV is an important part of life in a motorhome. Not only does it help keep things cool, but moving the air out can eliminate odors and reduce the likelihood of condensation and mildew forming in



the vehicle's interior. These fans are a great low-current-draw option to keep the air flowing freely. Some models can be controlled with a wireless remote, and some offer a rain sensor that will automatically close the dome when the wet stuff hits.

Fan-Tastic Vent, 800-521-0298,

www.fantasticvent.com

Hengs Industries, 877-295-1205,

www.hengsindustries.com

MaxxAir (Airxcel Inc.), 316-832-3400,

www.airxcel.com

Appliances ▶

Another segment that has come a long way is RV appliances. Today's appliances offer convenience that used to be reserved for stationary residences, including full-size refrigerators with icemakers, induction cooktops and microwave convection ovens. Just a few upgrades can help make any galley more conducive to preparing elaborate meals. Be sure to keep power requirements (especially



for a large residential fridge) and weight restrictions in mind when shopping for your dream kitchen.

Atwood Mobile, 800-546-8759,

www.atwoodmobile.com

Dometic, 800-544-4881, www.dometic.com/usa

Fisher & Paykel, 888-936-7872,

www.fisherpaykel.com

Furrion, 888-354-5792, www.furrion.com

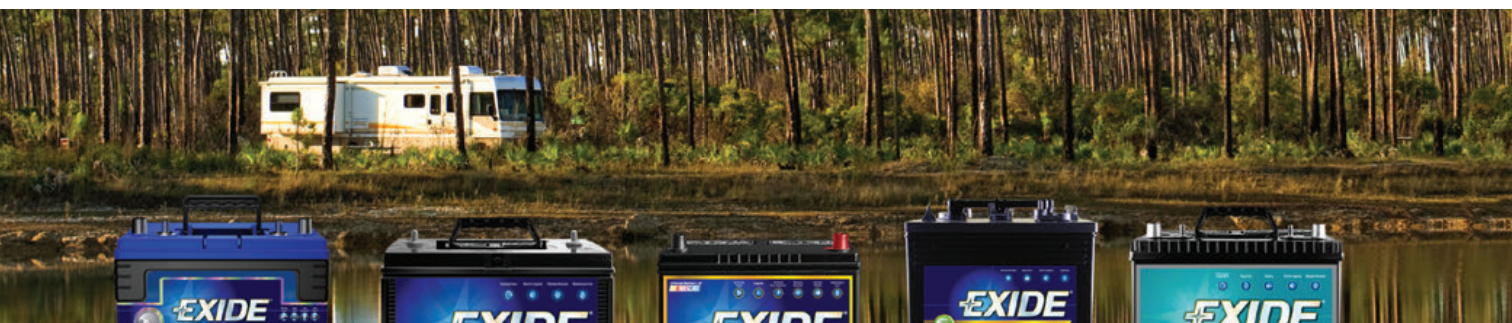
Norcold (Thetford), 800-543-1219,

www.thetford.com

Suburban (Airxcel Inc.), 316-832-3400,

www.airxcel.com

Truma, www.truma.com



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Outdoor Living



Awnings and Accessories ▴

A patio awning is a great way to take the fun outdoors without surrendering completely to the elements. But, rather than simply offering a nice patch of shade, awnings have evolved, and so have the accessories. There are a number of add-ons available, and some companies even offer a “powered” awning channel that enables you to plug in fans, lights, speakers and other campsite electronics.

Awnings by Zip Dee, 800-338-2378,

www.awningsbyzipdee.com

Camco, 800-334-2004, www.camco.net

Carefree of Colorado, 800-621-2617,

www.carefreeofcolorado.com

Dometic Group (Power Channel),

800-544-4881, www.dometic.com/usa

EEZ RV Products, 510-910-5397,

www.eezrvproducts.com

Girard Systems, 800-382-8442, www.girardrv.com

Lippert Components, 574-535-1125, www.lci1.com

Leveling Systems ▸

Automatic leveling systems make setting up easier than ever. Once you’ve arrived at the RV site, simply flip the switch and you’re on the way to being on the level. And, being level is more important than ever, as slides and some refrigerators may not work properly unless everything is just about level. These hydraulic levelers are fully automatic and are available for all motorhome classes. Plus, think of how much space you’ll save by not having to lug around lumber.

Bigfoot (Quadra Mfg.), 800-752-9815,

www.thebigfootleveler.com

HWH Corp., 800-321-3494, www.hwhcorp.com

Power Gear (Lippert Components),

574-535-1125, www.lci1.com



Care and Maintenance

Cleaners and Waxes ▸

Keeping your motorhome clean isn’t all about pride of ownership; it helps protect your investment for the long haul as well. Dirt and road grime can ultimately lead to cracked seals, bound slideouts and a generally unsightly appearance. Plus, the damaging UV rays from the sun wreak havoc on roofs and side walls, and can lead to permanent oxidation and fading. Spending some time regularly to protect your motorhome isn’t merely a suggestion, it’s a necessity. Be sure to check with the RV park as to whether it’s permitted to wash your motorhome on-site, as many of the water-free washes do actually require a small amount of water.



Dometic Group, 800-544-4881,

www.dometic.com/usa

Gel-Gloss, 800-243-3272, www.gel-gloss.com

Gold Eagle, 800-367-3245, www.goldeagle.com

Meguiar’s, 800-347-5700, www.meguiars.com

Poli Glow, 800-922-5013, www.poliglow-int.com

Protect All Inc., 800-521-3032, www.protectall.com

Rejex, 469-583-9218, www.rejex.com

Shurhold Industries, 772-287-1313,

www.shurhold.com

Star brite, 800-327-8583, www.starbrite.com

Thetford Corp., 800-543-1219, www.thetford.com

Voom! (Roadmaster Inc.), 800-669-9690,

www.roadmasterinc.com

Walex, 800-338-3155, www.walex.com

Sealants

Whether it’s a leaky roof, slideout, window or one of the many transition seams, there are products to close up cracks and holes that lead to costly repairs. It’s best to inspect the sealants on the roof annually for dryness, cracks or separations, and they must be refreshed as needed. These sealants come in a variety of forms, including tape, foam, caulking, silicone and more. Make sure you know which type of roof you have, and which sealants you need. Never

use silicone on roof membranes. It’s important to follow the curing instructions, and to always work in a well-ventilated area.

Alpha Systems LLC, 800-462-4698,

www.alphasystemsinc.com/productcare

EternaBond, 800-248-4010, www.eterabond.com

Dicor Corp., 800-837-2059, www.dicor.com

GE Silicone, 866-275-4372,

www.caulkyourhome.com

Loctite, 800-624-7767, www.loctiteproducts.com

Covers and Tire Covers ▾



Damaging UV rays, sheets of rain and snowfall all take their toll on any motorhome’s exterior. And let’s not forget to mention the effects of bird droppings. Protecting your motorhome (and its tires) with a cover is a great way to minimize the effects of the harsh elements. Covers are available as universal fit (good), sized for a particular size/type of RV (better) and finally, customized specifically for your particular motorhome (best). The covers that are made of breathable, rip-stop material prevent pooling and mold. Covers made using Tyvek material on the roof afford the best overall protection.

ADC0, 800-541-2326, www.adcoprod.com

CalMark Cover Co., 800-838-7236,

www.calmarkcovers.com

Carver Industries, 888-482-6837,

www.carvercovers.com

Classic Accessories, 800-854-2315,

www.classicaccessories.com

Covercraft Direct LLC, 800-274-7006,

www.covercraft.com

Coverking, 800-268-3754, www.coverking.com

CoverQuest.com, 888-726-9300,

www.coverquest.com

Elements (Camping World), 888-626-7576,

www.campingworld.com

Empire Covers, 888-872-6855,

www.empirecovers.com

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Backup Cameras ▲

A backup camera is a great tool when a human spotter is not available, and avoiding hidden objects can prevent downtime and additional costs necessary to make repairs. Side cameras are also valuable to battle blind spots while on the road, and both types of cameras become invaluable for keeping an eye on a dinghy vehicle.

ASA Electronics, 877-305-0445,

www.asaelectronics.com

Furrion, 888-354-5792, www.furrion.com

Hopkins Towing Solutions, 800-835-0129,

www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com

iBall, 877-298-2055, www.iballhitchcam.com

Swift Hitch (Toren), 617-600-8282,

www.swift hitch.com

GPS Systems ▶

It's true that many of us will never fully relinquish the folding map in our glove compartment, but GPS systems can do so much more. RV-specific GPS units allow users to program in their vehicles' profiles, offering the best route without leading them under short overpasses or through tight turns. Modern units can also update traffic and weather conditions, and can display the location of the nearest campgrounds, fuel stops, restaurants, convenience stores and other places of interest. And, virtually all of them feature audio directions.

ASA Electronics, 877-305-0445,

www.asaelectronics.com

Garmin, 800-800-1020, www.garmin.com

Magellan GPS, 800-707-9971,

www.magellangps.com

Rand McNally, 877-446-4863,

www.randmcnally.com

TomTom, www.tomtom.com



Solar-power Systems ▲

Using the sun's rays to generate usable power, a solar system is a valuable resource for RVers at campgrounds without electric hookups and boondockers alike. Keeping batteries charged properly stretches out the time between battery replacement and keeps electrical devices on longer when getting off the grid.

AM Solar, 541-726-1091, www.amsolarrv.com

Battery Tender (Deltran USA LLC), 877-456-7901,

www.batterytender.com

EEZ RV Products, 510-910-5397,

www.eezrvproducts.com

Go Power, 866.247.6527, www.gpelectric.com

Nature Power (available at Camping World),

888-626-7576, www.campingworld.com

Samlex Solar, 800-561-5885, www.samlexsolar.com

Sunforce Products Inc., 888-478-6435,

www.sunforceproducts.com

Surge Protectors ▼

With the sophisticated and sensitive electronics in today's motorhomes, a few seconds of faulty power or a power surge may be all it takes to fry the circuits in the expensive components. These surge protectors plug in to the RV park pedestal and protect your motorhome from damaging, unsteady/unreliable power. Some units are equipped with a mis-wired pedestal indicator, and all are designed to absorb the impact of faulty power before it reaches your motorhome.

Progressive Industries, 919-267-6948,

www.progressiveindustries.net

Technology Research LLC, 800-780-4324,

www.trci.net



Inverters ▲

An inverter can provide the necessary power to run residential refrigerators, TVs and other small appliances when 120-volt AC hookups are not available, or when it's just not proper to run your motorhome's AC generator. Using the battery bank as its power source, inverters come in sizes to produce as little as 150 watts to as much as 3,000 watts of 120-volt AC electricity, and many have multistage charging circuits. Don't scrimp here, as clean (pure) power is necessary to run your sensitive electronics.

Progressive Industries, 919-267-6948,

www.progressiveindustries.net

Samlex Solar, 800-561-5885, www.samlexsolar.com

Tripp Lite, 773-869-1111, www.tripplite.com

Xantrex, 800-670-0707, www.xantrex.com

Generators ▼

When you're camping off the beaten path, an AC generator is a great accessory for powering most of the appliances and electronics (within the power rating) when a 120-volt AC source is not available. For additional versatility, a portable generator will offer auxiliary power at the campsite. Just remember to calculate your likely power draw before purchasing a generator. Also remember that your motorhome's air conditioner requires surge amperage upon startup.

Cummins Onan, 800-888-6626,

www.power.cummins.com

Generac Power Systems, 888-436-3722,

www.generac.com

Honda Power Equipment, 770-497-6400,

www.powerequipmenthonda.com

Yamaha, www.yamahamotorsports.com



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Our one-piece shell is more costly and difficult to make, but we wouldn't have it any other way. Nor would our loyal customers, some of whom are now driving their fourth or even fifth Coach House motorhome!

Beyond the unique one-piece shell, here are some of the other factors that make the downsized Platinum and Platinum II your best motorhome value:

- More standard features than any other motorhome in their class.

- Professionally decorated interiors with solid-surface countertops, porcelain toilets, name-brand appliances, 32-inch HDTV, and more.
- Choice of chassis: Ford E-450 (gas) or Mercedes Sprinter (diesel).
- Nationwide warranty service.
- High ratings for ride and safety.



PLATINUM

PLATINUM II

Arriva



Ford
Class B+



Mercedes
Class B+



Mercedes
Class B

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VISIT US ONLINE AT www.coachhousesrv.com · PLANT TOURS AVAILABLE. PLEASE CALL AHEAD.

LED Lighting ▶

LED lighting is no longer the wave of the future ... it's here. Most newer motorhomes include LED lighting in one form or another, as LED lights are much longer-lasting than conventional incandescent bulbs, offer a more concentrated light source and last exponentially longer than their incandescent light-bulb counterparts. They may cost a bit more up front, but their lower draw and longer life make it worth a couple extra bucks.

Alpenglow Marine Lights LLC, 406-889-3586, www.alpenglowlights.com

Command Electronics Inc., 269-679-4011, www.commandelectronics.com

Diamond Group, 800-456-4498, www.dg-usa.com

EEZ RV Products, 510-910-5397,

www.eezrvproducts.com

Jirah, 909-297-1926, www.jirahled.com

M4Products, 818-717-8840, www.m4products.com

Star Lights Inc., 800-883-5444,



www.starlightsinc.com
SuperBrightLEDs.com, 866-590-3533,
www.superbrightleds.com

TPMS ▶

Considering that some sort of tire-pressure-monitoring device has been available on most new vehicles for nearly a decade, it should be obvious that these units deliver an important level of safety. A TPMS unit does exactly what it says: It uses sensors to monitor the pressures of all the tires on your rig (and dinghy vehicle, too, in some cases) and sends that information, wirelessly, to a monitor in the cab. If a tire loses pressure or merely approaches a preset low-pressure threshold, the driver is alerted with flashing lights and/or an audible alarm. This allows you to pull over and address the situation before a costly — and dangerous — blowout occurs.

Advantage PressurePro LLC, 816-887-3505,
www.advantagepressurepro.com



Doran Manufacturing, 866-816-7233,
www.doranmfg.com
EEZ RV Products, 510-910-5397,
www.eezrvproducts.com
Hopkins Towing Solutions, 800-835-0129,
www.hopkinstowingsolutions.com
TireMinder (Minder Research), 772-463-6522,
www.minderresearch.com
Tire Patrol (RviBrake/Danko Manufacturing), 800-815-2159, www.tirepatrol.com
TireTraker, 866-200-9773, www.tiretraker.com
Truck System Technologies, 770-889-9102,
www.tsstruck.com
Valor TPMS, 800-568-9188, www.valortpms.com

Two-way Radios

Owning a two-way radio is a great way to settle the nerves of a motorhome driver, as the spotter can guide the driver into the correct position without screaming over a diesel exhaust or gale-force winds. And, they're valuable in camp and while on hikes, keeping both users in constant contact.

Cobra, 773-889-3087, www.cobra.com
Motorola, www.motorola.com **M**

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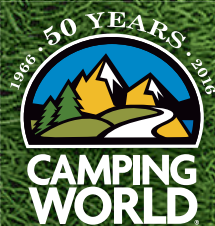
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WINTERIZING AND WINTER STORAGE PREP

Whether you're planning on traveling in your motorhome or storing it during cold weather, there are a few things you need to do before the freeze sets in

Before you know it, old Jack Frost will be getting his grip around the Northern Hemisphere, and for the next six months, motorhome owners will either become snowbirds or prepare

their rigs for winter. Now winter doesn't necessarily mean that the motorhome must go away until spring, but regardless of whether you're going to use your RV or not, there are some things you need to do to protect it.

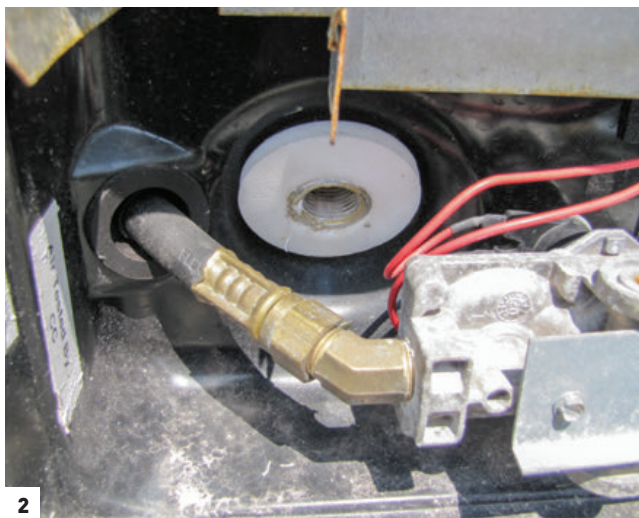
Winter Storage

The majority of RVers who stay in the northern climes from November to April put their motorhomes in storage for at least part of the winter, which means it must be protected from freezing, leaking, excessive snow loads and pests. No matter what kind of motorhome you own, it's still a significant investment that requires care and protection, not to mention the fact that you want it available and usable when you're ready to hit the road.

The first and most obvious thing to do is to protect the plumbing system. This includes the entire freshwater and sanitation systems. Failure to protect these systems, even for a brief period of freezing temperatures, can lead to very extensive damage.

Most, if not all, RVs manufactured today have PEX piping, which can put





up with some exposure to freezing without damage. All the connections, terminations, valves and plumbing appliances (faucets, etc.) can't put up with it at all and will suffer some damage if the water is allowed to freeze. Older motorhomes may have gray polybutylene piping, which will easily fracture if frozen.

The best way to winterize the plumbing system is to blow it out using compressed air, followed by running RV antifreeze through the system. This way, you can be certain that everything is protected.

Winterizing Plumbing

Winterizing a motorhome is a pretty straightforward process, made easier with the right equipment, including a water-heater bypass kit and a water-pump winterizing kit. Many RVs built today come with these already installed, but if yours doesn't, don't worry; the kits are available in the aftermarket from companies like Camco, and are easy to install.

The water-heater bypass kit is a valve or set of valves, tubing and a

[1] Drain the freshwater tank using the petcock or other type of valve. Class B's and C's will likely have one like this. Class A's may have one in the utility compartment. Check your motorhome's owner's manual. [2] You will need to drain the water heater by removing the plug or anode rod (depending on the brand), unless you have a specialty or on-demand water heater. Make sure the pressure is released from the system before removing the plug.

backflow preventer that is installed on the back of the water heater creating a loop in the plumbing system from the cold side to the hot side. Since most water heaters have a capacity of 6 to 12 gallons of water, filling the tank with antifreeze is not only expensive but also unnecessary. All RV water heaters have a drain plug that should be removed and left out for drainage and spring flushing. Also, filling the water heater — as well as the freshwater tank — with antifreeze always leaves a residue of antifreeze, which can be smelled and tasted for some time afterward.

The pump winterizing kit installs inline at the inlet side of the pump, and consists of a valve with a hose to draw from gallon bottles of antifreeze. This makes it possible to switch the valve so the pump either draws from the water tank or the antifreeze hose, ensuring that the pump is protected

without pouring excess antifreeze in the tank, as well as eliminating the resultant leftover odor and taste from the tank.

For winterizing, you will need:

- An air compressor set to 40 psi, with a male garden-hose /Schrader valve adapter to connect to the city-water inlet.
- At least 3 gallons of RV/marine antifreeze. Do not use automotive antifreeze! Note that the antifreeze comes in two levels of protection, minus 50 degrees Fahrenheit and minus 100 F.
- A drain wrench or a socket with an extension to remove the water-heater drain plug or anode rod.
- A screw gun with a square-tip bit, or a square-tip screwdriver to access the

⦿ ABOUT RV ANTIFREEZE

Not all antifreeze is the same, and this is very important for RVers to understand. Most automotive antifreezes are made from ethylene glycol, which is toxic to people, animals and the environment. This should never be used in a potable water system, or in the holding tanks of an RV.

RV/marine antifreeze is made from propylene glycol, and is considered safe. In fact, propylene glycol is even used as a food additive. An important point is that RV antifreeze will freeze, and in fact

the minus 50 F version will freeze at 10 F. The difference is it will not expand the way frozen water does, so it in essence provides burst protection, rather than freeze protection. It will not expand until it reaches about minus 50 F. If temperatures where the motorhome will be stored will drop below that, the more concentrated minus 100 F-rated antifreeze should be used. Camco offers a concentrated antifreeze that comes in a partially filled jug and is mixed with water prior to use.

back of the water heater if it is behind a panel.

The first step in winterizing a motorhome is to make sure the water source is disconnected and the demand pump is off, and to release any pressure in the system by opening a faucet, then closing it. Next, bypass the water heater and drain the water heater and the freshwater tank. Draining the water heater can be aided by opening the pressure/temperature relief valve on the front of the water heater. Leave the plug out for the winter, and leave the freshwater tank drain open. If there is a little water left in the bottom of each of these, that's OK. We're concerned here with burst protection, not freeze protection.

Next, screw on the Schrader air valve to the city-water inlet and connect a compressed air hose to it, again with no more than 40 PSI of

[3] Opening the water heater's pressure/temperature relief valve will release the pressure and allow air into the tank, allowing it to drain faster. [4] The water heater may have a bypass like this one, which has three valves. When the handle is across the pipe, the valve is closed. This one is in bypass mode; the top and bottom valves are closed, and the interconnecting pipe valve is open, which connects the hot and cold plumbing before the tank.

air pressure. While you can technically winterize without blowing out the system, I prefer doing this first. An alternative would be to also pump antifreeze through the city-water inlet to make sure that section of piping is protected, or to insert a small tool into the city-water inlet valve to allow antifreeze to backflow out of the inlet, expunging any water that might be trapped.

Once the air is connected, start your rounds. Go to each faucet in the system and open it until air comes



3



4

out. Don't forget the toilet, exterior showers, low-point drains and water-using appliances like washers, icemakers and so on.

Next, disconnect the air and recap the city-water inlet. Go to the water pump and switch the winterizing kit to the antifreeze pickup tube, open a gallon of antifreeze and insert the tube to the bottom. Turn on the pump and repeat the rounds, and leave each outlet open until you see pink at each one. If you don't have a winterizing kit, a flexible clear hose and ½-inch female PEX fitting will work fine, screwed onto the inlet side of the pump.

Next, turn to any special appliances you have, including the icemaker, washer or dishwasher. Once that is



5

[5] The motorhome may be equipped with a winterizing kit from the factory like this one. Follow the instructions provided in your motorhome's owner's manual on which valves to turn, routing the pump suction from the freshwater tank to the winterizing kit.

⊕ WINTERIZING SPECIAL APPLIANCES

Many late-model RVs, especially motorhomes, are equipped with icemakers, clothes washers, dishwashers and instantaneous water heaters that require special handling when winterizing.

The most common special appliance is the icemaker. In the 1970s and '80s, many higher-end coaches came with built-in U-line stand-alone icemakers. Today, many RV refrigerators come with icemakers in the freezer, whether installed in an RV or residential-style appliance. In the case of RV-style units, it is possible to apply 120-volt AC power to the icemaker valve to make it open out of sequence to winterize it, but this requires making a special cord set and is not recommended for those who aren't very familiar with the appliance and/or electricity. Most motorhomes with residential refrigerators will

require the waiting-and-running method. Basically this means winterizing the entire motorhome and then running the refrigerator-freezer until it makes ice and the antifreeze is passed through the system into the ice tray. If the winterizing process is started when the refrigerator has been off, it can take 24 hours or more to complete this cycle with the motorhome plugged in and the refrigerator running. This same process will work with an RV-style refrigerator as well; just remember that the motorhome still needs 120-volt AC power for the icemaker to operate.

In all cases, be sure to refer to your appliances' owner's manuals, or check with the component/appliance manufacturers for more specific instructions on winterizing.

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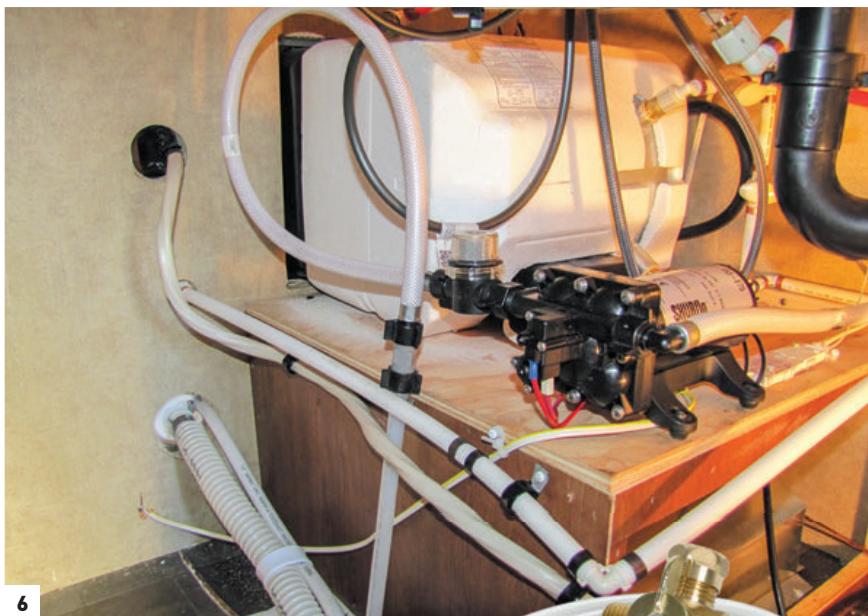
done, and you may have to open a new bottle of antifreeze during this process, shut the pump off and pour the remaining (at least 1 pint) down each sink and tub/shower trap.

The last step is to dump the holding tanks. When dumping tanks for winterizing, the tanks should have been rinsed thoroughly at the end of your last camping trip; dump the remaining water after you finish the winterizing procedure. As long as the tanks are thoroughly drained, it is not necessary to put antifreeze in these tanks.

Protecting the Rest of the Coach

When storing your motorhome there are some things you should do to make sure it's ready to go the next time you want to use it.

First, remove all food items. When you're not using the motorhome, pests like mice and bugs may want to use it for a free vacation, and nothing attracts them like food. This includes the refrigerator, cabinets and any



[6] When there is no winterizing kit, the hose is disconnected from the inlet side of the pump's inline filter, and a 3-foot suction hose with a 1/2-inch NPT female PEX fitting clamped on the end is attached. You can get these parts at most home centers. An alternative would be to install a pump converter winterizing kit made by Camco.



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remaining messes or spills on the floor and inside the cabinets. Remember, the base cabinets just sit on top of the flooring, so anything spilled on the floor can run into the cabinets, which is where mice prefer to play. Be sure to clean the appliances — paying special attention to the range top — and around the burners if the top opens. Leave the refrigerator open using the storage lock position or the little storage locks that were included with it, depending on the make or model.

Remove any items that may be used for pest nesting, or secure them in totes that are difficult for pests to get into. These include sheets, pillows, blankets, towels, etc. It's usually harder for pests to get into wall cabinets, so if you have to store these items, this may be a better option.

Thoroughly clean the entire inside of the motorhome, and vacuum the carpets if you have them. Check in and around seating to make sure there's no food left around them. Pest deterrents

can be put in the motorhome if you want to be extra-cautious or you think you're more likely to have a problem.

Clean the entire exterior, including the roof. It is imperative to check the sealants on the roof, which should be done three to four times a year, and reseal as necessary. Also do a visual check around the rest of the hardware and seals on the sides of the motorhome for damage, and repair as needed. Storage compartments should also be cleaned, and if you have a barbecue grill, take it out for the winter. Mice love the smell of a grill just like we do, and they'll make a

WINTERIZING A MOTORHOME IS A PRETTY STRAIGHTFORWARD PROCESS, MADE EASIER WITH THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT, INCLUDING A WATER-HEATER BYPASS KIT AND A WATER-PUMP WINTERIZING KIT.

mess if they get into a barbecue. Check underneath the motorhome, if you can, for any large holes or openings and reseal them. Spray-foam insulation from your local home center works well for this.

Batteries are best removed and stored in a cool (but not freezing) location unless you plan on keeping them connected to a charger. Fully charged batteries are less likely to freeze in a more moderate climate such as in the United States, as temperatures need to dip down to a frigid minus 76 F to do so.

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[7] If your motorhome is equipped with a clothes washer, be sure to winterize it properly. Antifreeze must be run through the machine, the hot and cold connections and through the drain pump. [8] Many motorhomes have icemakers that operate only on 120-volt AC power. While the ice tray itself doesn't need to be winterized with RV antifreeze, the icemaker valve must be protected with RV antifreeze to prevent freezing and cracking due to water that may be remaining in the bowl of the valve.

strongly recommended for long-term storage. Environmental exposure is very hard on any motorhome; spending a few hundred bucks to save the exterior is a good investment. Using tarps is not recommended, as the coarse texture of the tarp can cause wear on the surfaces of the motorhome. There are a number of commercially available RV covers that do a better job, and those with Tyvek tops allow moisture to escape, which prevents mold and mildew from forming underneath. Tires should be cleaned and covered while in storage, properly inflated, and parked on a surface other than the ground, like wood or plastic leveling blocks.

Winter Travel Can be Exhilarating

It's not uncommon for owners to automatically store their motorhomes during winter out of habit, thinking there's no practical option for traveling in cold weather, where temperatures and road conditions can change at a moment's notice. But, with proper planning, winter RVing can be a great adventure, even when the snow is flying.

One of the most important considerations is the water system. Some motorhomes are built to withstand the rigors of frigid weather and there are those that can be modified to protect the water system and be comfortable inside. Many new motorhomes are even marketed as four-season ready, which means the factory took additional steps to improve insulation and route heated air to areas where freeze-ups are likely when the temperatures plummet. Other considerations include a good-size battery bank for those off-the-grid adventures and dual-pane windows. Icy roads can



7



8



be difficult to navigate, so remember to pack some type of legal traction device for the tires.

When you return from any winter trip, be sure to rewinterize the motorhome before putting it back into storage. The process becomes easier after doing it a number of times.

By following the above steps, you can rest assured that you won't have any repair bills as a result of freezing or improper storage, and your motorhome will be ready to go for another travel season. **M**



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Staying warm inside a motorhome and the ability to take hot showers are two features that are inherent to any mobile environment designed to closely emulate the convenience of a stationary home. We're used to setting a wall thermostat for the furnace and flipping a switch to activate a separate water heater. To warm up the interior, a furnace that occupies a fair amount of space is mounted in a practical location and a network of ducting and registers is routed and connected to distribute heated air. The hot-water tank is usually mounted in another location, and it also takes up its share of real estate. Most owners pay little attention to where these appliances are located because there's usually plenty of space to go around in a typical motorhome.

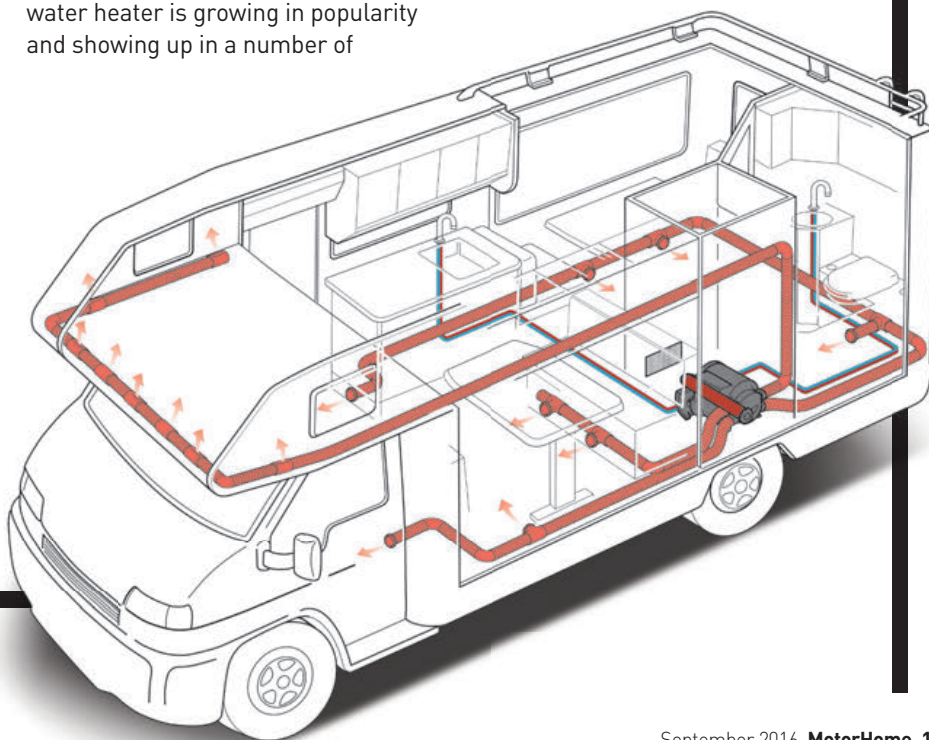
As motorhome profiles shrink, shoehorning appliances in becomes more of an art form, and our RV-builder friends from across the pond have become proficient in space management. Truma, one of the largest suppliers in Europe, has

offered a combination furnace and hot-water tank for these builders for eight years and has recently made that technology — and compact packaging — available to U.S. manufacturers who specialize in Class B and small Class C motorhomes. There are 80,000 Combi units put into service annually worldwide, and the track record for reliability is exemplary.

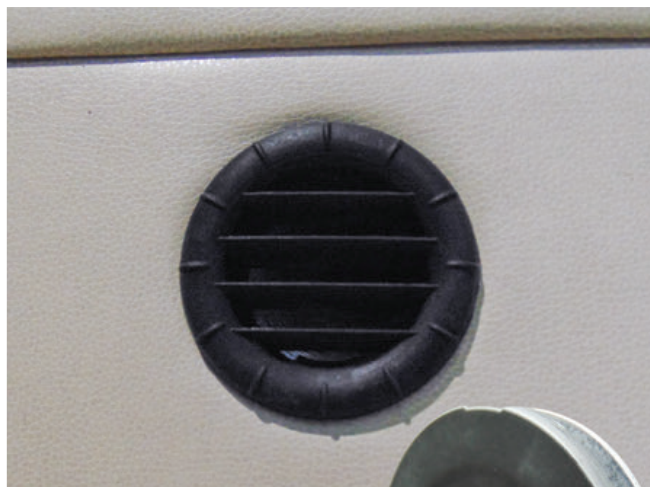
Called the Combi, which is apropos to its design and function, the Truma combination furnace and water heater is growing in popularity and showing up in a number of

motorhomes manufactured in the U.S. We've spent time in RVs with this system in Europe and have experienced its efficiency; recently we repeated our test in a Ford Transit-based Class C to see how our homeland builders are adapting to this technology.

Truma, a German company based in Munich, offers a number of Combi models, including the Comfort Plus (highest output), which is appropriate for motorhomes in the 24-foot



Routing of the air tubes is very specific and is planned with the guidance of Truma engineers for maximum efficiency.



range and is pretty much limited to RVs up to 30 feet. It's rated at 20,400 Btu, which provides good coverage in motorhomes similar to the test unit we lived in to further evaluate the Combi. Outside temperatures were in the low 40s, giving us parameters that were consistent with typical usage of motorhomes in colder weather.

Nuts and Bolts

The Combi is about the same size as a standard 6-gallon water heater found in the majority of RVs, and weighs only 37 pounds. It uses a combustion chamber and fan to produce and distribute heated air and a heat exchanger to make hot water; the two segments can be operated on LP-gas, 120-volt AC power or both. Inside the

Combi furnace/water heater is lightweight and occupies about the same space as a standard 6-gallon RV hot-water tank. Air-supply tubes (ducting) are affixed to four outlets in the housing. Wall-mounted registers are placed in strategic locations throughout the motorhome and can be rotated to adjust the direction of the heated airflow. Tube-in-tube exhaust and combustion air-intake system allows the Combi to be mounted in locations up to 6½ feet from an outside wall. The wall cowl is unobtrusive and requires little space.

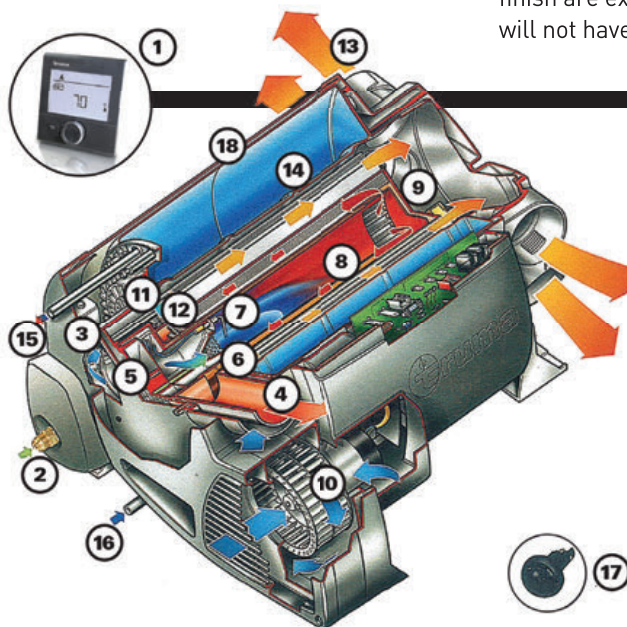


well-designed case are precision-placed components controlled by sophisticated electronics that also provide onboard diagnostics when hooked up to a computer with the company's service software. All the components are manufactured to very tight tolerances, must pass rigorous testing and are individually coded so they can be tracked in the event the furnace requires repair. The fit and finish are excellent, and technicians will not have to use Kevlar gloves

to prevent cuts to their hands when servicing the components.

Four outlets in the housing serve the network of ducting, which must be routed to Truma's specifications. The company plays an active role in designing the integration of the system so that efficiency is maintained. Truma claims that the Combi is 90 percent efficient, which allows its furnace to effectively perform like a 30,000-Btu standard-type unit commonly used in RVs.

The Combi is controlled by a mi-



➞ HOW IT WORKS

- | | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| 1 Control panel | 10 Circulation air fan |
| 2 Gas connection | 11 Heat exchanger |
| 3 Magnetic valve | 12 Electric heating element |
| 4 Combined inlet for combustion air/outlet for exhaust | 13 Four warm air outlets |
| 5 Combustion air motor | 14 Stainless-steel water container |
| 6 Gas burner | 15 Warm-water connection tube |
| 7 Ignition plugs | 16 Cold-water connection tube |
| 8 Combustion chamber | 17 Room temperature sensor |
| 9 Flame tube with baffle plate | 18 Casing HDF-Therm |

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croprocessor that adjusts the flame and fan speed. This eliminates the big swings in temperature experienced by most forced-air furnaces used in RVs. Fan speed is infinitely variable and, combined with a three-stage burner (Comfort Plus model) and temperature monitoring inside the unit, the Combi is able to provide precise heat that maintains a constant temperature inside the rig. And the unit is exceptionally quiet, so it can be mounted virtually anywhere without the fear of annoying residents who are trying to sleep or watch TV.

Installation flexibility is supported by a tube-in-tube exhaust and combustion air intake that can be used up to 6½ feet from the furnace. This configuration eliminates the need to mount the furnace against an outside wall, which gives the designers many options for locating the Combi. The unit we recently tested was mounted under a dinette seat that shared the structure with the galley.

Cold- and hot-water lines are routed in similar fashion to standard-type installations, and a drain line is provided for winterizing. The hot-water operation is virtually maintenance-free and uses no anode. Hot-water capacity is 2.64 gallons, which is obviously a limiting factor when showering, but the recovery process can be accelerated by operating the unit in the BOOST mode (more on that later).

The Combi modulates the use of power and its functions based on demand. For example, if the control is set on BOOST to speed up the water-heating process, the furnace portion will temporarily shut down and concentrate all the energy to making hot water. It takes around 20 minutes to reach 140 degrees Fahrenheit from 59 degrees F when in the HOT mode. When the control is placed in the BOOST mode, the temperature of the water will reach a point higher than 144 degrees F. This decreases the amount of hot water needed to mix with the cold and



The CP plus digital control panel uses icons to guide the user through the functions. Beyond the basics of setting temperature, the controls allow programming of time and duration for the furnace. Mobile-device operation will be available in the near future.

extends showering time.

Setting the heating and hot-water options is done by a very sophisticated digital control panel called the CP plus. It's a smart-looking panel with a single control knob that is turned and pushed to make adjustments. Although there



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are numerous options, the process to input desired settings is user-friendly, relying on icons to program the various functions. It allows the user to set temperature changes based on time of day and hours of operation, which is a versatile tool for those who want to maintain certain temperatures while away from the motorhome.

The CP plus will also be capable in the near future of being programmed via a mobile device tied to Truma's iNet system with software that can be loaded as an app. The iNet system is currently available in Europe.

Living With the Combi

We were able to confirm that the Combi was indeed as quiet as advertised by Truma after spending a number of nights in the Class C motorhome; the motor and combustion-chamber noise are barely perceptible. We enjoyed the fact that "what you see is what you get" on the readout allowed us to set the

temperature inside the motorhome at comfortable levels, without having to fiddle around with various settings to keep interior temperatures from fluctuating. At night we found that the desired temperature was maintained, and we didn't wake in the middle of the night or first thing in the morning because of drastic shifts in temperature and have to jump out of bed to adjust the thermostat.

Much of the even distribution of heated air can be attributed to Truma's aforementioned participation in the installation process. When a motorhome manufacturer decides to use the Combi, Truma experts work closely with the manufacturer engineers in establishing the most effective routing for the air tubes (ducting) and registers, and the result is telling.

Taking a shower takes some adjustments, especially if you're coming from an RV with the standard hot-water tank or an on-demand system. It's best to select the BOOST setting for water

heating, and to wait until the water heating-cycle icon stops flashing before showering, to ensure there's maximum hot water. We were able to mix the hot and cold water and use the shower-head-wand shut-off valve judiciously to get a full shower, which is still not very long. When we allowed the water to run, hot water ran out well before we were done showering. Back-to-back showers are not possible, but the wait time is only around 20 minutes to get full hot water again. Obviously, users of this system will have to modify their showering habits, but in reality it's easy to acclimate to the routine.

The Truma Combi is a jewel of a system that makes it possible to enjoy high-end features in more compact motorhomes. There's little doubt that manufacturers will jump on the bandwagon to bring this kind of luxury to motorhomes that are small in square footage but big on livability. **M**

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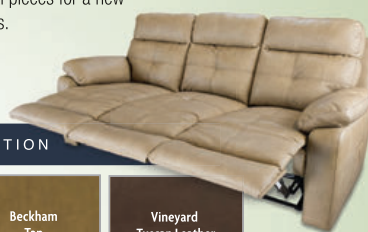
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By Ann Eichenmuller

LAZY DAZE 26.5

TWO COUPLES ENJOY THE SMOOTH HANDLING AND EASY LIVING OF THE CLASSIC AIRCRAFT-ALUMINUM CLASS C'S, WHICH CAN STILL BE PURCHASED NEW FROM THE FACTORY

This article is the third in a series looking at motorhomes that have stood the test of time. They may have miles under their wheels, but they can still make dreams come true. Each has earned the right to be called "the classic ride."

With its retro stripes and laid-back brand name reminiscent of a 1960s surfer movie, the Lazy Daze cannot possibly be mistaken for any other motorhome. Its manufacturer is widely credited with "discovering" the

Class C, and the RV itself has become something of a cult classic, with enthusiastic owners' groups from coast to coast. It was this one-of-a-kind design that first caught our attention in the Florida Keys, where we met owners Jay and Gwynne Carlson.

"We get that a lot," they laughed when we commented on the Lazy Daze's unique baby-blue-and-white exterior.

The couple had purchased their 2003 unit just over a year before we met, selling their Seattle, Washington, home in 2014 in favor of adventure on the road aboard the 26½-foot Class C.



▲ Jay and Gwynne Carlson chose the 26.5 primarily due to its convenient midbath and rear-lounge footprint.

The Classic Ride



Above: The galley makes good use of space, and the flip-up counter extension adds prep area. The floorplan is wide open despite not featuring a slideout. Far right: Opposing sofas in the lounge area open to form a California king-size bed; large wraparound windows offer a panoramic view.

"This had always been a pipe dream of mine," said Gwynne, adding that the transition to full-timing did not come overnight. It had taken nearly five years of planning, starting with a search for a livable and affordable high-quality RV.

"We had a 19-foot Islander Dodge van," Jay said. "That was just a weekend warrior. We knew we needed something bigger."

But not too big. While 26 feet may seem diminutive by many full-timers' standards, the Carlsons planned to circle the continental U.S. for a year by primarily staying in state and national parks, many of which cannot accommodate big rigs. They looked at trailers and Class A motorhomes, but decided a Class C fit their needs.

"We started doing online research,

going to RV shows, looking for the best Class C," Gwynne said. "Everything kept coming back to Lazy Daze."

Lazy Daze construction is unique in the Class C market. The exterior walls are covered with smooth aircraft-aluminum panels rather than fiberglass, and these can be individually replaced if damaged. The company uses a one-piece aluminum roof instead of rubber, resulting in better leak protection than many Class C motorhomes. The units are also painted with aircraft-type two-part polyurethane enamel, which is why a decades-old Lazy Daze often looks showroom new. All of this comes on a lifetime-warrantied frame.

Another unique feature of the Lazy Daze is that each new unit is ordered directly from the factory in Montclair,

California, and built specifically for its owner. As a result of this "high-end" approach, the company has developed a reputation for quality and superior workmanship. Certain that this was the best motorhome to fulfill their full-time dream, the Carlsons pored over classifieds on the internet and eventually decided on a unit with 70,000 miles on the odometer that included a tow package and dinghy vehicle (a 2005 Subaru Forrester), all for a total price of \$42,900.

As we have noted before in this series, any preowned motorhome purchase usually involves some trade-offs. This Lazy Daze had been customized with some features that were perfect for the boondocking that the Carlsons expected to be doing, including four 85-watt solar panels, a 4-kW Onan generator and double the standard battery capacity. However, the Carlsons had also wanted a midbath model with a separate rear

Photos: Jeanne Gaffney

A RARE SIGHT

If a preowned Lazy Daze fits your style, you may need to be patient; they are a popular brand on the preowned market and tend to go quickly. A Lazy Daze 26.5 from the early 2000s can be found for between \$22,000 and 35,000, while a mid-2000s model is priced between \$45,000 and \$60,000. Newer models are hard to come by, and are offered for upward of \$100,000. Of course, you can always custom order a brand-new unit directly from the manufacturer. One of the bonuses of the Lazy Daze is the support from other owners, who swap tips and DIY advice on user forums. Joining one of these groups is a good place to start your search for information on the model and options that will best suit your needs.

► The Gaffneys are proud owners of this 2006 50th Anniversary Edition 26.5 Lazy Daze; only 52 of the Anniversary Edition motorhomes were manufactured.





lounge/bedroom, but had been unable to find this layout on the used market. As happy as they were with their motorhome, they couldn't help but wonder what it would have been like to have gotten their dream motorhome directly from the manufacturer.

And, neither could we — which led us to Jeanne and Ed Gaffney of

Hoover, Alabama, Wagonmasters of the SE Lazy Daze Caravan Club. They are the original owners of a 2006 50th Anniversary Edition 26.5 Lazy Daze — one of only 52 manufactured. Like the Carlsons, they did extensive research before choosing a motorhome, both online and hands-on. As first-timers, they weren't sure exactly what they wanted, or even if they would both enjoy RVing.

"My husband wasn't as excited about camping as I was," said Jeanne. "He had done a lot of camping in Boy Scouts. He didn't have great memories because they always camped in the cold in Pennsylvania."

Their approach was to try it out before making the leap by renting motorhomes and RVing with their friends, who were Lazy Daze owners. Like the Carlsons, the Gaffneys found that they liked the ease of living in a smaller motorhome, and after comparing owners' reviews on the web, they came to the conclusion that

there was no better Class C than the Lazy Daze. They put in their order for a midbath with a rear lounge in late 2006 and took delivery in April of 2007. It has been happy trails ever since.

For one thing, the layout they chose has been perfect, offering lots of private sleeping area, a must for family trips.

"This past summer, we took our grandsons, ages 12 and 10, to Washington, D.C.," said Jeanne, noting that everyone had plenty of space.

The rear lounge converts to a California king or two twin beds, the cabover is a queen-size bed and the dinette converts to a single-size bed, providing comfortable accommodations for five. Like the Carlsons, the Gaffneys also do a fair amount of boondocking, and appreciate the 100-watt solar panel that is a standard feature on the Lazy Daze. They also upgraded to two 6-volt absorbed glass mat (AGM) batteries and went with all LED lighting and an Onan generator, so



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The Classic Ride

the Gaffneys are comfortable with or without hookups.

One of the Gaffneys' favorite features is the motorhome's large windows, a detail that was also praised by the Carlsons.

"You have a 360-degree view," said Gwynne. "Even though you're in the motorhome, you still feel like you're outside."

Jeanne agrees. "The windows in the lounge area are huge, and wrap around the entire back. When we backed up to the Kenai Lake in Cooper Landing, Alaska, we could watch eagles fish and pontoon planes land and take off."

In terms of modern technology, both couples installed hydraulic leveling systems, "a wonderful improvement from driving up on blocks," according to Jeanne. Both also installed new HD flat-screen TVs and rooftop satellite antennas.

Both couples gave the Lazy Daze high marks for livability and de-

pendability. In an era when many motorhomes are the size of luxury condos, these 26 ½-foot Class C's still feel roomy and comfortable, and their size makes them easy to maneuver and park. Both motorhomes also feature the Ford E-450 chassis with a 6.8-liter V-10 engine, a tried-and-true standard. When we met the Carlsons, they had just arrived in the Keys via Michigan, Niagara Falls, Maine and Cape Hatteras. They termed the experience "wonderful," and noted that the only repair in all of those miles had been a minor leak in a hydraulic-leveling-system hose. While the Gaffneys are not full-timers, they spend two to three months each summer in their RV, have been to Alaska twice and have spent at least one night in 40 of the 49 continental U.S. states. They, too, have nothing but praise for their Lazy Daze.

Perhaps the most inspiring thing about the experience of these Lazy Daze owners is their emphasis on the journey, not the destination. The

Carlsons jokingly suggested that their one-year odyssey might well turn into two, and the Gaffneys have a 2-2-2 rule: No more than 200 miles a day, stop by 2 p.m. every day and stay two nights wherever they go.

"If you are going to invest in a [motorhome], then use it," Ed Gaffney added. "This is a huge country with so much to see, and our bucket list is to see it all."

Maybe that's the Southern California surfer karma of the Lazy Daze — you don't need a big rig to take to the open road, but you do need to stop, check out the waves and smell the salt air along the way. Which is why the Lazy Daze 26.5 definitely makes the grade as a classic ride. **M**

Do you, or someone you know, have a classic motorhome that you'd like to see featured in MotorHome magazine? If so, email Ann Eichenmuller at aceichenm@gmail.com with your suggestion and a brief description. Please include "The Classic Ride" in your subject line.

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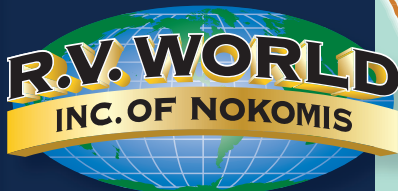
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Untroubled Waters

Investing in the right hoses and accessories keeps the water flowing at the right pressure and volume

Water hoses are certainly not a new invention, but selecting the wrong ones can not only make hooking up unpleasant but can even harm your health. That's why it is important to understand which water hoses and accessories to have on hand, and how to properly hook up your motorhome to a city-water source.

Water hoses intended for RV and marine use aren't just a ploy by manufacturers to get you to buy another hose. Unlike garden hoses, which are made of materials that contain lead, phthalates and BPA, and can leach lead and other chemicals into the water, especially when heated by the sun, RV/marine hoses are made of materials that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has declared safe for use with drinking water.

RV water hoses come in lengths from 4 to 75 feet with an inside diameter (ID) of $\frac{1}{2}$ or $\frac{3}{8}$ inch. The longer the length and the smaller the diameter, the greater the loss due to friction. All hoses and fittings exhibit what's known as friction loss. As water passes through a hose, the inner surface, including kinks and bends, creates turbulence in the water, which reduces flow and output pressure. While a $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch hose will work, it's best to use one with a $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch ID for more efficient flow, especially in larger motorhomes.

Having two shorter hoses on hand is better than having one longer one. A longer hose has greater friction loss, and having two hoses means you will have a backup if one fails.

As with other accessories, you get what you pay for with hoses. Inexpensive ones have a tendency to fail from high pressure, and the ends tend to get out of round and leak easily. In addition, they are likely to kink more easily and will grow mildew on the outside over time because they're not treated with Microban, an antimicrobial additive to the outer jacket that prevents mildew. Hoses with heavy-duty machined ends also tend to last longer. The male ends on cheap hoses crush or deform easily, and then leak. The ends get loose at

the crimp joint and then leak from there, too.

RV hoses get beat up more than household hoses because they're constantly under pressure for longer periods of time, and they're coupled and uncoupled frequently while traveling. They're also often stored in compartments with larger items where they can be damaged.

Besides having two lengths of supply hose, it's a good idea to have a couple of shorter-length hookup hoses in your motorhome. If you use a standalone water filter, for example, you will want a short length to feed the filter. Also, it's convenient to have a short utility hose for use with the black-tank flusher and to clean out the sewer hose — and dedicated for this purpose only.

RVers who brave cold weather during winter travel can opt for specialty hoses, like the Camco and Pirit heated hoses that are substantially more effective — and less problematic — than applying heat tape to a standard hose. These hoses come with the heating element built in, so abrasion damage is minimized, and the compounds used to make the hoses can withstand the heat. These hoses aren't inexpensive, but they're safe and convenient, and really are the best way to go in subfreezing temperatures.

Another specialty hose that's heavily advertised on TV is designed to retract for storage in small areas. While these

"RV/marine hoses are made of materials that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration has declared safe for use with drinking water."



Apex Neverkink Hose

The Teknor Apex Neverkink hose is a midgrade water hose with one metal and one plastic end for an easier grip. Note the nylon web visible on the outer jacket to increase burst resistance.



Teknor Apex zero-G

The latest hose on the market is the Apex zero-G. This ultra-high-end hose is lightweight, is designed to maintain a full $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch ID and is available in 25- and 50-foot lengths. It is burst-rated at 600 PSI and carries a 5-year warranty. This hose is ideal for storage in smaller compartments.



◀ Items to include in a typical RV freshwater kit include two good-quality drinking-water hoses, a utility hose for rinsing out the sewer hose or flushing the black tank, a pressure regulator (preferably an adjustable one with a gauge), a water-tank filler, a strain-relief connector, a spray nozzle, a Y adapter, a selection of elbows, shut-off valves and a water filter.

hoses are theoretically convenient, they have a reputation for failing after a short time in service. More importantly, these hoses are not designed for use with potable water.

Teknor Apex recently introduced an RV/marine hose called the zero-G. The hose is advertised as being 40 percent smaller than equivalent-size counterparts, so it can pack into smaller spaces. These hoses are more expensive (Camping World sells the 25-footer for \$29.99), but our initial experience with this product was very positive. This is not a shrinking hose. It's a compact, lightweight hose made of very durable materials, according to the manufacturer, and is backed with a 5-year warranty. The hose material is drinking-water safe and has a 600-PSI burst strength, which is greater than any other hose on the market. It has a full $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch ID, which gives maximum flow, and is available in 25- and 50-foot lengths.

The hose's ends are machined aluminum and have a 900 FT-LB crush rating, far above most of the competition, and a 4,600 FT-LB tensile strength. The smooth outer jacket is snag-free, according to the company. The hose can be put on a reel just like regular hoses, and won't kink, for uninterrupted flow, which we verified during testing.

Camco also makes a higher-quality water hose. Slightly less expensive than the zero-G, the Camco Premium Drinking Water hose has a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch ID and is available in 10- to 50-foot lengths. It is said to be 20 percent thicker than most hoses, with a 300-PSI burst rating, which is more than adequate for RV use. The Premium hose comes with machined ends that seal tightly and resist deformation. While not too bulky, the hose is best for RVers who have ample storage space.

One of the most important accessories when hooking up to a water faucet is the pressure regulator. Many RV parks have water systems with pressure upward of 98 PSI, which is well above the limiting pressure (45 PSI) specified by RV manufacturers. The issue with high pressure in the RV isn't so much the PEX piping, which

can take more than 100 PSI, but the fittings, faucets and appliances, which need lower pressure, especially on older rigs with polybutylene plumbing. Regulators are available in fixed-pressure units, fixed with a gauge, and adjustable-pressure with a gauge, which gives you the option of pushing the envelope without exposing your motorhome to line pressure that's guaranteed to break something.

Other accessories worth considering include a strain-relief hose (especially if you have an inline filter), various hose adapters, including those for hooking up multiple hoses, shut-off valves and a utility spray nozzle. A water-tank filler for gravity-feed systems makes filling your freshwater tank much easier, allowing better airflow around the inlet. Quick-release ends are a great convenience for connecting and disconnecting hoses and also to save the threads on the hoses. Filters are also necessary for managing water-system contaminants and for improving the taste.

A little thought and a wise investment in the right hoses and accessories ensure a trouble-free water-transfer experience in your motorhome. **M**



Camco TastePURE Heated Drinking Water Hose With Thermostat

The Camco TastePURE heated drinking-water hose with thermostat prevents freezing in cold weather. The hose has female couplings on both ends with a double-male coupler to allow the power cord to be closest to the power source.



Pirit Heated Hose

Another good choice for below-freezing temperatures, the Pirit Heated Hose has electrical-cord sets that activate the built-in heating element.



Camco Premium Drinking Water Hose

For RVers with ample storage space, Camco's line of Premium Drinking Water Hose products features robust ends, machined fittings and an anti-kink design.



Good Sam $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch hose

Good Sam-branded RV hoses, available at Camping World, are midgrade water hoses with standard ends, visible nylon mesh and $\frac{1}{2}$ - or $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch diameters.

Light the Way

We purchased a new motorhome that did not come with illuminated on/off control switches. When entering the RV in the dark we could not see the various control switches mounted low by the entry wall. Additionally, finding the bathroom-light or fan switches in the dark in the middle of the night was a big problem.

I came up with a simple, low-cost solution: small LED motion-sensing light bars. These \$10-\$15 lights run on AAA batteries, are very small and only turn on when it is dark and motion is detected. These can be found online, at home improvement stores or even RV-supply stores.

I mainly use sensor lights that turn on the LED lights for a limited time, and installed several in key areas where I



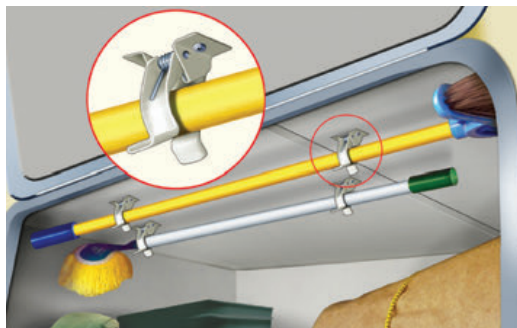
need to see other switches in the dark, and in hard-to-see dark areas of lower cabinets. I also installed a motion-sensor light/alarm near the entry, which is helpful not only for security but also to let us know should our grandson decide to bolt away in the night.

Greg and Marlena Colella | Rancho Cucamonga, California

Plethora of Plastic

To contain the plethora of plastic bags for recycling and repurposing uses that we usually have, we stuff them into empty facial-tissue boxes. We usually have at least two boxes at any given time: one wedged next to the microwave and the second in the interior of the microwave, on a couple of towels, to keep the glass turntable from bouncing around. They are both removed when the microwave is in use, and are very effective as bag dispensers.

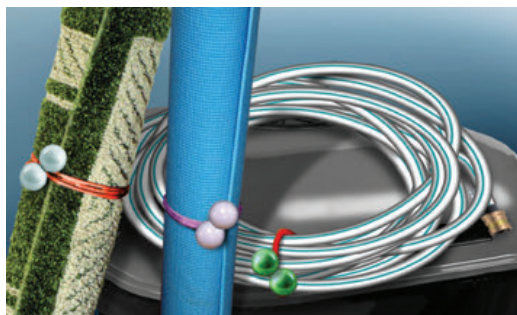
Larry Barrett | Deerfield, Illinois



RV Broom and Dust-Mop Storage

We travel for months at a time in our 25-foot Class C, and are always looking for efficiency and simplicity in storage and daily life in the motorhome. To stow our broom and dust mop when not in use, I mounted spring-loaded clips (\$2-\$3 each) to the ceiling of the outside storage compartment. The storage compartment is long enough to allow us to store the broom and dust mop with the heads of each on opposite ends of the compartment, so the handles can be mounted close together and are easily accessible.

Dennis Jauch | Tampa, Florida



Hair Do's

With space always at a premium in our motorhome, it's important to keep things neat and tidy. We use beaded hair ties to wrap up items, e.g., electric cords, flags, mats, etc. It is simple and inexpensive, and not only saves space, but makes it easy to find things when we need them.

Bernadette Berland | Fort Lauderdale, Florida



Have an Idea?

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



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Squeaky Clean

Say “goodbye” to hand-toweling after rinsing a motorhome with de-ionized water from a CR Spotless System

By Bob Livingston

EXTERIOR CARE

Cost: \$450

Time: 15 minutes

Difficulty: 1/10

When washing a motorhome, fighting water spotting is usually a losing battle. If you live in an area with hard water, and can't get the motorhome out of the sun, you'll typically spend an inordinate amount of time

removing these ugly spots from the surface. Using de-ionized water is a game changer, and that's what the pro detail people rely on. CR Spotless offers the same advantage of using high-quality de-ionized water, but from a portable unit.

The DIC-20 High Output Rolling System has two 20-inch cartridges filled with resin that are placed inside watertight housings and screwed into a head unit with the hose fittings. The components are attached to a wheeled cart that's powdercoated to resist rust and can be moved freely with little effort. From a practical standpoint, the Spotless unit is best used at home, but if you have an extra 36-by-18-by-16 inches of space in a compartment, you can take it along on trips.

Initial setup only takes minutes and all the components, except for the hose needed to wash the rig, are supplied with the kit. Inside the box are the rack, housings, cartridges filled with resin, a short length of braided water hookup hose, a housing wrench and a water nozzle. The cartridges are simply placed in the housings and a spacer ring is used to keep them centered. Tighten the housings with the wrench, screw on the inlet/outlet hose fittings using the supplied thread-sealer tape and the system is ready to go.

To use the system, the braided hose is connected to the water faucet, and a standard water hose with the provided nozzle is hooked up. A total dissolved solids (TDS) monitor that indicates water purity is integrated into the filter housing and as long as it reads lower than 020 ppm, the

Mounted on a powdercoated cart, the CR Spotless DIC-20 High Output Rolling System can be moved easily to the motorhome.

system will provide good-quality de-ionized water. While the system is anything but complicated, specific instructions must be followed when turning on the water, and the nozzle must be placed in the Fan Center or Flat position to control water flow to 2.5 gallons per minute.

The cartridges are good for about 300 gallons of de-ionized water before needing replacement or recharging, but that's heavily dependent on water-source quality and how the system is used. It's best to pre-rinse the area you're working on with tap water, wash with soap that's been mixed with the de-ionized water and then final rinse with the de-ionized water.

We tested the system with water that's so hard, it pegs our handheld TDS meter. At first we thought we were imagining that the dirt was coming off easier than normal, and we quickly realized that it was no illusion. Allowing the motorhome to dry naturally, even in the sun, resulted in a spot-free surface that looked clean and bright.

The convenience of de-ionized water is not inexpensive, but after amortizing time and effort, the \$449.99 price tag is easily worth the end result. Two replacement cartridges sell for \$120, but it's more economical to buy two bags of resin (\$90) and fill the cartridges yourself; it's an easy process.

Most people don't smile too much when washing their motorhomes, but using the CR Spotless System will change your demeanor in a hurry. **M**

CR Spotless Water Systems

866-350-9993, www.crsptless.com



[A] TDS monitor keeps tabs on cartridge condition. Meter will read 000 when the cartridges are new and as long as it stays below 020 ppm, the de-ionized water is safe for use.

[B, C] The front of this motorhome was rinsed with exceptionally hard water, which resulted in unsightly spotting when allowed to air dry. The same test using the de-ionized water produced a spot-free surface.

Photos: Bob Livingston

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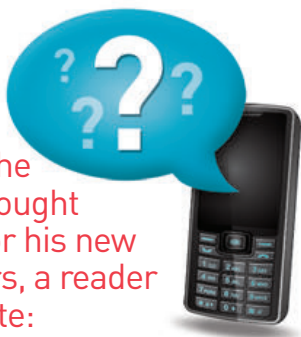
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Hello?

Frustrated that he could not reach the manufacturer to discuss what he thought was an inordinate amount of time for his new motorhome to be undergoing repairs, a reader asked Hot Line to intervene. He wrote:



“We purchased a new Itasca Sunstar 36Y in February 2015, with the hopes of full-timing and partial or full retirement. We have been continuous Winnebago owners and RVers for more than 20 years, but have found this purchase very discouraging. Good thing we didn’t quit our jobs or sell our home. The coach has been out of service for more than four months and in the shop six times for the same problem — the dash air doesn’t work.

We have made numerous calls and sent emails to Winnebago, none of which have been returned or responded to. We hope Hot Line can help us. We want to get back on the road!

Jeffery Buchman | Allentown, Pennsylvania

Not being able to get in contact with a manufacturer after the sale can be frustrating, but the last thing a manufacturer wants is for an owner to become disenchanted with a product or brand. Though many manufacturers, including Winnebago, do their best to keep in contact with new owners, particular cases can unfortunately simply fall through the cracks.

After we contacted Winnebago on Buchman’s behalf, the company quickly responded as follows:

Winnebago regrets any difficulties Mr. Buchman experienced with his 2015 Sunstar. We desire to provide quality products and service to all Winnebago owners.

The company is pleased to report that the problem with Buchman’s Sunstar has been resolved. The situation was resolved amicably and Buchman was compensated for the unnecessary amount of time and effort spent finding a solution to the problem.

We thank Mr. Buchman for being a Winnebago owner for the past 20-plus years and value his loyalty to our company and products.

Winnebago Industries | Forest City, Iowa

Lube-pump Problems

Experiencing the runaround after a lube-pump installation he thought would be covered under warranty, a reader contacted Hot Line for help getting reimbursed. He wrote:

“In May 2015 I had a Remco lube pump installed on my dinghy vehicle under what I thought was a warranty situation, but which turned out to be troublesome. I ended up paying for the entire process and then contacted

Remco for reimbursement. I spoke with Terry Rohloff of Remco, and he agreed to pay once the company that installed the lube pump, Torklift Central, contacted him. Jonny Couture with Torklift called Rohloff and explained the situation. Rohloff said he would be getting back to me to resolve the situation. That was in December, and I still haven’t received reimbursement (\$373.36 for the pump only).

Patrick Pintus | Tempe, Arizona

Before having any repairs or replacements performed under warranty, we strongly encourage readers to have the entire situation spelled out succinctly in writing. That way, there is hard evidence that the companies involved have agreed that a reimbursement will be issued. In this case, Pintus reached a positive resolution, but we continue to urge others to get authorization in writing so there are no hiccups.

We received the following note from Pintus:

“I recently contacted Hot Line for help getting reimbursed from Remco Industries. I have just received the full amount that I requested for the reimbursement. I appreciate Hot Line’s efforts to help me get the reimbursement. I have read about others who you have helped, and I was encouraged to see that Hot Line followed through. Hopefully, this unit will last longer than the previous one, thanks in part to the information that I was given by Remco about running the pump at least once every 30 days to keep the seals from drying out and causing the unit to fail.

P.P. M

Take Action

Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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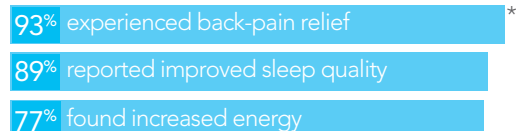
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CA047188

By Ken Freund

Tire Failures

Q I own a 26½-foot Class C motorhome that has been experiencing tire failures. I weighed it on a truck scale, and the front axle weighs 1,810 pounds on the left and 1,930 pounds on the right. The left rear weighs 4,000 pounds on the axle and the right weighs 4,050 pounds, for a total rear weight of 8,050 pounds. I have Michelin LT225/75R16 tires on it, which are dual rated for a total of 9,880 pounds, so the tires are actually 1,830 pounds under their limit. Why are these tires coming apart after just 4½ years? Is there a stronger tire I can put on this motorhome?

Kent Williams | Hesperia, California

A I don't think it's a matter of finding a "stronger" tire. Michelin makes good tires, and most owners have good experiences with them. First, we need to determine what caused the failure. You didn't mention what model tires you have, or which positions failed, or if you had multiple failures in the same position. Did you base the age on how long you had the tires, or on the dates embossed on the sidewalls? While you may have only had them for 4½ years, the tires may have sat in

a warehouse for years. The area of high desert where you live has very strong sunlight, a lot of extremely hot days and a high ozone concentration, a combination which is deadly for rubber. Most

tire failures are caused by under-inflation, which may be caused by a slow leak from a puncture, leaky valve stems, bead leaks, curb or pothole impacts, or simply from air escaping through the porosity of the rubber. Often the inner tires are low and are less likely to get noticed. If you still have the tires, I suggest you take them to a tire expert for examination. I also suggest you invest in a tire-pressure-monitoring system to keep an eye on tire pressure, and you should also carry a portable air compressor that will handle the pressure to top them off when needed.



Limp-Home-Mode Tip

This is regarding Terry Bush's "Workhorse Intermittent Limp Home Mode" letter in July. I am a retired trucker with more than a million miles of driving experience. On one of my highway runs, I suffered the same malady as Bush, where the unit would go to the limp-home mode, except in my case the unit went to idle. Luckily, I was going fast enough to safely move over to the shoulder of the interstate. The engine would idle but not accelerate despite stopping/starting the Cummins engine, turning everything off/on and the batteries being fully charged. After going through everything I could think of, the engine responded and I was able to continue on to our nearest terminal.

Then the accelerator pedal failed to respond. I discovered that I could

accelerate the engine by using the cruise +/- switch, though there was no response from the pedal. Thus I was able to drive to the nearest repair shop. At the shop, the diagnostic computer reported that the problem was a throttle position sensor (TPS) fault. The TPS is merely a roller assembly and thus nothing about that device can really go wrong. More sleuthing disclosed that the cable through which the TPS signaled the computer to respond to pedal input had worn through the insulation, grounding the TPS, and the computer determined that to be idle. While I do not recommend using the cruise control +/- in normal operation, this tidbit may help someone in a similar position when all else appears normal.

Doug Siskow | New Braunfels, Texas

Thanks for sharing your experience and tip. As the old saying goes, "If you

can't fix it with a rock or a hammer, you have an electrical problem." When electronics work, everything is great, but when they fail it can be frustrating. A lot of good parts get thrown away because trouble codes refer to the component, when it can also be the connections and wires going to it.

ABS Light On

I, too, had an ABS light that stayed on all the time ("ABS Malfunction," February). When I was at a Ford dealer for an oil change on my motorhome, they told me they had to replace a missing fuse for the ABS circuit. The mechanic noticed the light when he moved the vehicle. I had assumed that the constant light was telling me that it was active, not that it wasn't working. Apparently, someone forgot to install it at the factory.

Natalie Pope | Lakeland, Florida

Thanks for writing; this brings up several points I'd like to make. The automotive industry's standard for many years has been for warning lights to be in red, while normal indications are usually in green or not lighted at all except for test on start-up. Every RVer should become familiar with ALL of their vehicle's dash-panel functions, lights, gauges and warning systems, and their operation. The owner's manual covers this information in detail and is included in every vehicle when it comes from the factory. Many are also available online at the manufacturer's website for free.

Another important thing for owners to do is familiarize themselves with the actual operation of their ABS braking system during a "panic" stop. Many drivers become startled by the pulsing pedal and actually release it rather than continue pressing the pedal to allow the ABS to do its job. A good place to try this is in an empty, open dirt or sand-covered parking lot. Make sure everything is secured inside the motorhome (it always should be anyway when driving because you never know when fast braking or quick maneuvers may be required) so nothing goes flying. Try first at a low speed and perhaps build up to, say, 25 MPH or so if safe space allows.

Vinyl Flooring Tip

In the June issue, you had a letter about vinyl floor cracking while in storage ("Torn Vinyl Flooring"). The reader indicated that he had the problem when he changed parking areas. Speaking professionally as a wood technologist, I can offer the following explanation.

An RV is most likely built at 40 percent relative humidity (RH), so all the wood is at 8 percent moisture content (MC); this is also the typical interior environment when we are living in the RV, so it's a good choice for the manufacturer.

Now consider long-term storage of an RV. The outdoor environment in most of the United States and Canada is around 65 percent RH, so during long storage periods, the wood or

wood composite floor and the wood inside the RV will increase to about 12 percent MC, assuming the ground underneath is paved and well-drained, or the RV is stored in a windy location away from large bodies of water.

What this slightly higher (compared to 40 percent RH or 8 percent MC) moisture in storage means is that the wood flooring, wood cabinets and wood furniture will increase in MC and

therefore expand slightly.

However, we might notice that after storage, sometimes the cabinet doors are tight or molding pieces are slightly buckled because of this expansion. This expansion is tolerated by a new and warm floor, as new, warm vinyl is soft and pliable. This is for normal storage.

But consider what happens during storage of an RV if it is parked on grass or in a poorly drained site. At such a

LEGAL NOTICE

If You Own or Owned a Norcold 1200 Series, N6 Series, or N8 Series Gas-Absorption Refrigerator or Cooling Unit, You Could Get Benefits From a Class Action Settlement.

There is a proposed settlement in two class action lawsuits against Norcold, Inc., Thetford Corporation, and The Dyson-Kissner-Moran Corporation ("Defendants") concerning three models of gas absorption refrigerators (1200, N6 and N8 series) for use in recreational vehicles ("RVs"), such as motorhomes, travel trailers, and boats. Those persons included in the settlement have legal rights and options and deadlines by which they must exercise them.

The United States District Court for the Central District of California authorized this Notice. The Court will have a hearing at the Santa Ana courthouse on September 16, 2016 at 2:30 p.m. to consider whether to approve the settlement so that the benefits may be paid.

What Are The Lawsuits About? The lawsuits claim that Defendants' 1200, N6 and N8 series gas-absorption refrigerators share a safety related defect in the cooling unit which, in certain circumstances, causes the boiler tubes to corrode and leak flammable gas, exposing consumers to the risk of fire. The lawsuits seek compensation for economic losses related to the purchase of Norcold Gas Absorption Refrigerators or Cooling Units. The lawsuits do not allege class claims for personal injury, wrongful death or damage to property other than the allegedly defective Norcold Gas Absorption Refrigerators or Cooling Units themselves. Defendants deny any wrongdoing and have denied all allegations in the Complaint and asserted many defenses. The Court did not decide which side was right. Instead, the parties decided to settle the class claims.

Who Is Affected? Subject to certain limited exclusions, you are included in the settlement if you:

- **Currently own, or formerly owned, a Norcold 1200 Series Gas Absorption Refrigerator or Cooling Unit that was manufactured between January 1, 2002, and October 1, 2012; OR,**
- **Currently own a Norcold N6 Series Gas Absorption Refrigerator or Cooling Unit, or N8 Series Gas Absorption Refrigerator or Cooling Unit, that was manufactured between January 1, 2009, and December 31, 2013.**

This settlement does not involve class claims for personal injury, wrongful death or damage to property other than to the Norcold refrigerator they own, owned, or may own in the future. Such claims are reserved.

What Does The Settlement Provide? The proposed settlement provides for an "all-in" Common Fund totaling \$36,000,000 to resolve all eligible class claims of 1200 Series, 800 Series and 600 Series gas absorption refrigerator owners and to fund all administrative and legal costs associated with the proposed settlement. To receive a share of the Monetary Fund you must submit a Claim Form by August 26, 2016. Payments will vary depending upon several factors, such as the number of claims submitted and other adjustments and deductions in accordance with the Allocation Plan described more fully in the detailed Notice and Claim Form available at www.NorcoldClassAction.com. In addition, Defendants will provide, at Defendants' sole expense, a three-year extended warranty to class members who own N6 and N8 Series gas absorption refrigerators manufactured between January 1, 2009 and December 31, 2013, for a cooling unit that fails due to a leak.

What Are Your Options? Submit a Claim. If you don't exclude yourself, you may submit a Claim Form by August 26, 2016 to receive any benefits for which you are eligible. Do Nothing. You will remain in the Class and will not be able to sue Defendants about the issues in the lawsuit, but you may not receive certain benefits for which you may be eligible. Exclude Yourself. If you do not want to be part of the settlement, you must exclude yourself by August 26, 2016. You won't be able to get any settlement benefits, but you keep the right to sue Defendants about the class claims in the lawsuit. Object. You can object to all or part of the settlement by August 26, 2016, if you don't exclude yourself. Enter Appearance. Enter an appearance through your own lawyer at your own expense. Otherwise you will be represented by court-appointed Class Counsel, Zimmerman Reed LLP.

A detailed Notice and Claim Form containing everything you need is available online at www.NorcoldClassAction.com. You may also call 1-877-449-8550 to request a copy. The detailed notice describes how to exclude yourself, submit a Claim Form and/or object to the proposed settlement. We encourage you to read and review it in detail.

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location, the circulation of air beneath the RV is lower than normal and the humidity under the RV can often increase to nearly 100 percent RH. This high humidity encourages odors, mildew, mold and even rot and rusting. But even more importantly, especially in the wintertime, the wood floor will swell or try to swell as much as 2 percent. It does take time for this to happen, so that is why driving through rain does not cause an issue.

The wood cabinet doors will swell even more and potentially become tighter and perhaps misaligned. As the floor swells, the vinyl stays the same size, and in the cold, the flooring especially can be quite brittle. So as the floor expands in storage in a moist location and puts tension on the vinyl, cracks can develop, especially in older RVs where the vinyl has become brittle. Further, sometimes the frame of the RV restricts expansion, so the wood flooring will buckle slightly and, when it dries, may squeak. Also, when the floor dries and shrinks later in the year, the fasteners will often protrude and can be seen as a slight bump on the vinyl floor.

How can we prevent these types of problems? Avoid trapped air under the RV in storage (keep it ventilated), and avoid locations with damp soil underneath. Consider putting a sheet of plastic under the RV to block soil

moisture, and make sure that an RV cover is securely attached to the RV while still allowing the air beneath the RV to move freely. Finally, add a little heat (20 to 25 degrees Fahrenheit above the average outside temperature) to the inside of the RV during storage, as heat lowers the humidity.

Eugene Wengert, The Wood Doctors Rx Bishop, Georgia

Thanks for sharing your expertise with us, Eugene. This makes perfect sense in explaining what is happening to the materials in a motorhome. Your suggestions about storage are also useful for those in moist climates.

Jeep Cherokee Wobble Concern

Q I read with interest the July letter "Jeep Cherokee Wobble — Update." I had not heard of this issue, nor did I receive anything in the mail from Jeep. We bought a Jeep Cherokee with the off-road package and transmission specifically for flat towing. What are the next steps? Do we need to buy a special wiring harness?

Ron and Cheryl Simons | Via email

A In order to avoid a potential steering-wobble, you should have the new special power-steering wiring harness installed. It may cost several

New Scrub for Heavy Oxidation

Meguiar's has introduced the Heavy Oxidation Scrub to its line of RV products. Meguiar's developed the scrub as a first step in restoring heavy, chalky oxidation and for removing stains, mold and rust. According to the company, the scrub's less aggressive compounds work fast to bring gelcoat surfaces on RVs back to like-new condition. Meguiar's Heavy Oxidation Scrub has a long-lasting foam formula that is said to rinse easily with water on all surfaces, including nonskid textures.

The scrub is applied with a bead of product onto a damp, fine-to-medium scuff pad or soft-to-medium bristled brush. When applying, users should work one section at a time, scrubbing first up and down, then side to side, until the oxidation is removed. Immediately rinse the surface with fresh water and dry with a towel. Do not allow the product to dry on the surface, and make sure all remaining residue is removed. MSRP: \$34.99.



Meguiar's, 800-347-5700, www.meguiars.com

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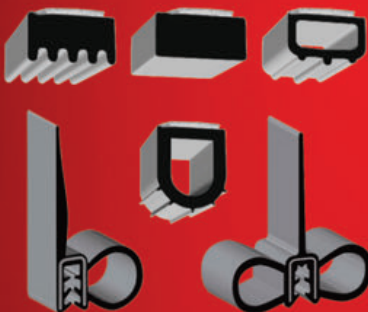
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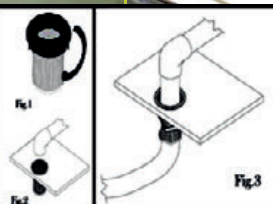
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hundred dollars, and I would try to get the factory to cover at least part of it. Be sure to contact the factory before having the harness installed to ask for help paying for it.

Rodent Rascals, Tip Too

Mice have always been a problem in my motorhome. I tried everything until I finally found something that works — mint oil or mint/lavender oil. I pour the liquid oil into Styrofoam bowls and place the bowls in areas where I know the varmints will enter. Also I put oil on cotton balls and seal them inside plastic bags, then poke holes in them and place them in linen drawers. My last-ditch effort is to buy dryer sheets and put them on the furniture, bed, floors and the entryway steps. Then on the outside apply mint spray to the engine by the air conditioner, radiator and tires.

Gail Bell | Towaco, New Jersey

Thanks for your solutions, Gail. There is also a product on the market called Mouse-Free (www.mouse-free.com) that is a lubricant infused with peppermint oil that is sprayed onto the undercarriage of the motorhome. According to the company, the mice don't like the smell or texture, and the lubricant is good for the vehicle.

Transfer-switch Issue?

Q Is there an alternative to those awful transfer switches they put in motorhomes? We had two of them fail on our previous Class A's. The one in our Fleetwood Bounder hasn't failed yet, but it sounds like it's about to. Recently we plugged into a site that was supposed to have 50-amp service. The box also had a 30-amp plug and two 20-amp plugs. We plugged into the 50-amp service and flipped on all the breakers. The transfer switch made a loud clanging sound, so we immediately unplugged. We finally got power by turning off all the breakers except the 30-amp breaker at the box. We don't know what caused the problem. We're wondering if somehow the breakers all being on caused a power surge and if maybe **(continued on page 128)**

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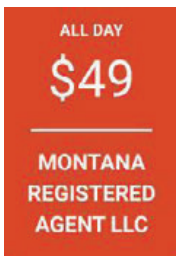
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COACH & POWERTRAIN

(continued from page 125)

the built-in surge protector was making the noise rather than the transfer switch. Why don't they just have a physical plug that can be plugged into either the generator or shorepower as needed instead of these transfer switches?

Diane Brush | Jackson, Michigan

A It's possible that voltage at a campground power post can be too high or too low at any given time, and it can change at any moment. That's especially true in hot weather when everyone has their air conditioners on (low voltage), or when lightning storms may be in the area (high voltage spikes and surges). The most common type of failure is the result of sticking contact points, and many times you can unstick them by banging on the case. Generally, a rapid chattering noise is an indication that a relay is not getting enough voltage to fully engage. That's what I would guess was at work here, or perhaps the sound came from the voltage protection device. I suggest you obtain a plug-in voltmeter, or better yet a digital line monitor, that will also tell you if polarity is correct. Then you can check the campground power before plugging in.

While transfer switches in motorhomes are common, many RVs use a simple receptacle in the compartment near the shorepower cord. The receptacle is wired to the generator. The user plugs the shorepower cord into the on-board receptacle to receive power from the generator, or the cord is plugged into the campground receptacle to receive power from the campground source. You can have an electrician convert your rig back to a manual transfer switch or an old-fashioned plug-in style system to route power. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

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Fountain of Youth

A trip to St. Augustine, Florida, leads me to focus on the one thing that never gets old

By Alan Rider

Sitting here in the turbulent wake of another passing birthday, buffeted by the annoying aches and ailments that come with growing older, I freely admit that I'm having some difficulty coming to terms with the aging process.

And judging by the number of anti-wrinkle creams and other youth-restoring potions I see advertised, I think it's safe to say that I'm not alone. In fact, I just read a mind-boggling report that projects spending on anti-aging products by us Baby Boomers — a group marketers have euphemistically dubbed the "Forever Young" generation — will amount to more than \$100 billion this year alone. Wow.

Of course, no one likes a complainer, so I smile and tell myself that there may actually be something to that counterintuitive notion about how things get better with age.

For proof of that adage, I look to the town of St. Augustine (800-653-2489, www.floridashistoriccoast.com). Located on the northeast coast of Florida, I'm here to tell you that the place looks pretty darn good for being more than 450 years old.

Founded in 1565, St. Augustine is the oldest continuously occupied European-established settlement in the continental United States. In fact, this Spanish outpost was a thriving settlement more than four decades before the English established their first successful colony

in Jamestown, Virginia.

Along with that history comes a bit of mystery. You see, Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de León sailed the waters offshore here in search of — if the widely circulated stories are to be believed — the legendary Fountain of Youth. But we'll get to that in a bit.

As for the town today, the best way to describe it is to say it's unexpectedly charming. While there's history nearly everywhere you turn, it seems somehow more authentic than the theme-park atmosphere you'll find in re-created settlements like Massachusetts' Plimoth Plantation or Virginia's Colonial Williamsburg.

Ultimately, St. Augustine is a perfect example of that old platitude about how you're only as old as you feel. For in spite of the timeworn buildings of Old Town, there's a very real sense of vibrancy to this place.

Shops and restaurants located

along narrow cobblestone streets, for example, offer more than the cheap trinkets and homogenized fare so common to tourist destinations. Much of the credit goes to St. Augustine's residents, who have managed to preserve the history of their town without allowing it to be transformed into either a musty museum or a gaudy attraction.

In my current age-obsessed state of mind, however, the biggest draw for me was the Fountain of Youth Archaeological Park (904-829-3168, www.fountainofyouthflorida.com). Besides being the location of the first Spanish settlement on the peninsula they called La Florida, it's also the site of the freshwater spring that Ponce de León was supposedly looking for.

In the park's on-site gift shop you can buy bottles of water taken directly from this source. Having sampled this rare elixir myself, I honestly can't say I feel any younger for it. Then again, like the physical exercise and mental workouts modern-day doctors tell us will moderate the aging process, I figure it couldn't have hurt.

In the end, my visit to St. Augustine didn't conclusively settle the question of whether or not I'd found the fabled Fountain of Youth. But I can tell you this with absolute certainty: The one thing I found that never gets old is looking forward to another year exploring the many wonders found along The Road Ahead. **M**

“...there may actually be something to that counterintuitive notion about how things get better with age.”

Living History ☞

Right: Numerous re-enactments celebrated St. Augustine's recent 450th anniversary. Far right: A statue of founder Pedro Menendez de Aviles welcomes visitors to Flagler College.



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