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Visitors to the Flagstaff, Arizona, area can explore a volcano, stargaze in an International Dark-Sky City or visit the nearby Grand Canyon (see page 38).



A tire-pressure monitoring system helps drivers keep an eye on tire conditions from the comfort of the cab.
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The Grand Coach CapeCod in front of Nauset Light in Eastham, Massachusetts (see test on page 49). Special thanks to the Nauset Light Preservation Society (www.nausetlight.org). Photo by Michael Gordon.



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By Kristopher Bunker

Keeping Watch

The other day, I watched my wife, Jennifer, drive away down the street ... on a completely flat rear tire. Thankfully, a quick phone call (hands-free, of course) brought her back to the driveway before any serious damage — or worse yet, injury — could occur. Turns out a drywall screw had nestled itself dead center in the tread of our 4-month-old tire. A call to Good Sam Roadside Assistance, a swap with the spare and a trip to the local tire shop, and all is well once again.

It is ironic that this potentially dangerous situation would happen during the editing cycle of *MotorHome's* tire issue (you really can't make this stuff up). But it serves as a stark reminder: Tires are an often-unappreciated component of RVing equipment, yet they can sometimes go overlooked. They are absolutely vital to the ride, handling and stopping power of your motorhome. At minimum, a visual inspection of any tires on any vehicle should be part of your predeparture checklist, whether you're headed cross-country in your luxury coach or to the grocery store in your dinghy vehicle. Driving on an improperly inflated tire can lead to decreased fuel economy at best, and potentially life-threatening results at worst.

As you'll read in "Tires 101" beginning on page 57, the dangers of riding on improperly inflated tires can be minimized by gaining some understanding of how the tires are made,

properly maintaining and cleaning them, and vigilant monitoring before and during trips. The problem with your vehicle's tires won't always be so evident as a flat-as-a-pancake profile and a telltale screw. Tires can, in fact, fail for a variety of reasons, and recognizing risk factors such as tread depth, date of manufacture and correct air pressure all lead to extended tire life.

Another way to keep a close watch on the tires is by way of a tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS). These systems utilize sensors on the tires to monitor the pressure and temperature of the tires, and then relay that information to a cab-mounted screen. If the pressure falls below (or above) a preset limit, or if the temperature rises too high, the operator will be notified via warning lights and an audible alarm that something is wrong and needs to be addressed immediately.

As of 2007, all passenger vehicles and light trucks (less than 10,000

pounds) manufactured for the United States market are required to include some sort of TPMS, and later-model motorhomes have followed suit. And as you'll read in "The Air in There," beginning on page 64, these systems continue to evolve, with increased accuracy, improved design and built-in anti-theft features. Some now even include smart technology that enables you to monitor the tires from your smartphone or tablet. And a TPMS is great for those hard-to-see inside duals. Add to all that the potential to monitor multiple vehicles — and up to 20-plus tires — and it's easy to see why these systems continue to gain in popularity, often even on vehicles that already have a system in place.

Now, back to the situation in my driveway. I'd be lying if I told you I haven't unknowingly driven on a flat tire, after failing to do a visual inspection before hitting the road. So, the current situation led to a discussion between Jennifer and me about the importance of such a task, mundane as it may seem. It's far too easy to take tires for granted, especially when you're just heading down the street to pick up a few things. But with regular inspections, and the proper equipment, getting the most from your vehicles' tires is easy. **M**



Photo: Mercedes Morgan Photography

Contributors | September



Ed Bolduc is an RV technician with 23 years of experience specializing in motorhome repair, maintenance and upgrades. A lifelong RVer, Ed and his family enjoy traveling and camping.



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Have your campground neighbors ever been so loud that you had to ask them to keep it down? What was causing the noise, and how was the request greeted? And, if you enjoy utilizing your outdoor entertainment system, what steps do you take to ensure you don't disturb others?

Those are the questions we asked in the June issue, and here are some of the replies we received.

Good Neighbors

I can only remember one time we had to address a radio noise issue. Both campsite power posts were located closer to our unit, our neighbors' four young adults camped in a tent pitched at the other side of their long site on the grass. After quiet hours they placed a radio on their power post and turned the volume up so they could hear it at the tent location. After 30 minutes of trying to sleep I asked them politely if they could turn the volume down, which they did with no complaints.

As for ourselves, we have always been conscious of our noise level

since most campsites are close to each other. If we play music or watch TV inside our unit I'll step outside and listen to determine if the noise level is too high. The same goes for watching the outside TV. If our campfire ring is close between sites I'll run an extension cord for our radio to our sitting area so we can control the volume. It's just being good neighbors.

Leonard Selvaggio | Via email

Private Listening

Throughout my travels I've encountered a fair number of times when it was hard to get a good night's sleep

at a campground because of a noisy neighbor or a late-night party. Usually a trip or two to the main office solves the problem, but there have been times when the office was closed and I had to visit the offending campsite myself to ask politely if they could tone down the music and lower their voices. I try to explain to them that I've been on the road all day and it's vital that I get a good night's sleep because first thing in the morning I'll be back on the road and I need my rest.

Most times this works, but there have been times when the people have been drinking and tell me to buzz off,

Featured Letter

Be Considerate

Although I prefer camping without music, my wife and kids like to occasionally have something playing, so I have been on both ends of the noise issue. If it's not during quiet hours I don't mind at all unless it's something excessive or, as in one case, a neighbor with a single "Van Halen — Best Of Volume 1" album left to play repeatedly all day long. If it gets to be too much I'll ask nicely if they can turn it down and have never had a problem.

One afternoon my son was playing music inside and not at a very high volume. I noticed a lady who kept walking in front of the motorhome glaring in my front window then walking away. After about the fourth time I went to her campsite and asked if there was a problem. She complained about the volume and I explained that it wasn't quiet time but I would have him turn it down anyway and that if she had a problem in the future to

please not stare in my windows, just come and talk to me. Everything was resolved peacefully and I had no further complaints.

I think most people are reasonable and a simple "Hello" and "Hey, would you mind ..." will solve most problems and you won't have to sit at your campsite unhappy. Everybody camps in their own way and we should all be able to enjoy our time at the campsite while letting others do the same ... within the campground rules.

Randy Springer | McHenry, Illinois





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so to avoid an unwanted confrontation with a bunch of rowdies, I happily oblige. That being said, I motor along in a 450-HP diesel motorhome and have been known to fire it up around 5 a.m. on high idle to return the favor.

However, over the years I have found that most, if not all, noisy campsites are usually from seasonal campers who use their RVs as summer cottages. To avoid situations like this, I ask not to be parked anywhere near a seasonal campsite when I check in at a campground; this has worked out very well for me as I travel throughout the country.

My motorhome is also equipped with an outside entertainment system and for \$35 I purchased a Bluetooth adapter and it's connected wirelessly to our headphones so my wife and I can sit outside and watch TV or listen to music without disturbing anyone. All it takes is a little consideration for your neighbors and all is well in the wonderful world of camping.

Steven Richards | Via email

Control

I've been embarrassed by some of the RV community. The responses, for the most part, to the question about pulling over for traffic were appalling. Regarding the question about campfire smoke, I have respiratory issues and smoke bothers me, but I don't impose myself on others. I would never go to another's campsite, as one response stated he had, and ask them to put out their fire. If it's too much I would change sites, or leave.

Now having said that, I can only imagine the responses coming in on this subject.

We just traded a Class A with an outside TV, which we may have used for three hours in four years. We did not find it satisfactory because we needed the volume too loud, we felt (considering other campers), to hear. We tried wired and Bluetooth speakers sitting on a table between our camp chairs; neither was enjoyable. Yes, our new Class A has an outside TV also; it

remains to be seen if we use it.

We have been in campgrounds where people are enjoying their TVs outside and yes, they are too loud. And being in the Deep South during any ball season, games will be on and people will be cheering/shouting, enjoying themselves. I'd never ask somebody to adjust his or her volume to suit me.

Let's be considerate of others by what we do and allow others to enjoy themselves. Don't let children playing or people enjoying their amenities bother us. If I'm that unsocial, I need to stay home, in an environment I can control.

Linda Houk | Melrose, Florida

Sonic Booms

Just last year we had several campers next to us who definitely broke the sound barrier. As the night wore on, their rap music got louder. Finally at midnight (quiet time is 10 p.m.-7 a.m.), my husband asked them to turn it down which, apologizing, they did.

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That lasted for five minutes, then it was back up and they were dancing on the picnic tables. This is a small, privately owned, remote park. The owners live off-site and no one monitors the park at night. They were fairly hung over in the morning and did come over and apologize. Just to be on the safe side, this year we reserved our family's spaces in a group where others can't get too close to us. It's one of the downsides of a park with fewer rules; gotta take the good with the bad!

Part of the problem is parks put four campsites in an area that used to fit two. There's no space or vegetation in between anymore; we're right on top of each other's smoke, music and conversations. It's just not what it used to be except for some of the county parks.

Sandi Whistler | Richland, Washington

A Dream Come True

One day in late November 2016, I woke up and decided I was tired of living in a one-bedroom apartment.

Being 71 years of age I wanted the freedom to be able to see as much of the country as possible and live on a modest income. After doing some research, I decided living full time in an RV would be my selection. Bear in mind I had never even walked through a motorhome, let alone terminate an apartment lease and downsize to an RV. I immediately became discouraged when I visited several RV dealers. That is until the day I walked into Camping World of Albuquerque and met Chuck Higgins. Chuck immediately sized up the situation and in a professional, caring way proceeded to help me with my mission. As you might guess, I had many questions and objections. Everything had to work together or it wouldn't work. Chuck and Chris Patton, a sales manager, politely helped me overcome all my fears and objections. They made it easy to make this lifetime decision in the affirmative. Then came the finance department. I knew that to get a 71-year-old senior

approved for a 20-year loan at a competitive interest rate would be next to impossible. Kris Pohl, the finance manager, had to have the right unit at the right price along with my good credit to have a chance. After talking to many companies, some that wouldn't even look at the deal, he was able to use his 20-plus years of experience to put the deal together.

I have dealt with the sales, parts and service departments, and have never been treated better in a professional, caring and customer-oriented manner. I thank them all. I have been living in my Camping World motorhome for almost three months, much to my delight, with no problems. It is a dream come true. If you are thinking about camping, you need to check out Camping World. They are the best!

John Reighard | Via email

Length Restrictions

Thanks for the article, "Where the Buffalo Still Roam," in the June edition.

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P.O. BOX

Regarding the National Bison Range, RVers should note that rigs longer than 30 feet are not allowed on Red Sleep Drive, and that trailers and towed units will need to be left at the visitor center. Mornings and evenings are the best times to view the abundant wildlife, as that's when they are most active.

Rick Sinclair | Ronan, Montana

Storm Shadows

My wife and I dream of some day getting a motorhome and taking off for months at a time wherever the wind takes us. My parents had a motorhome for several years and we just love hearing all of their stories and adventures.

Even though we do not yet have a motorhome, I have been a subscriber to *MotorHome* for at least five years. I have a special file full of articles that will be our starting point when this all becomes a reality. Based on our research it appears that a 40-foot diesel pusher would work best for us.

So my question is, in light of all

of the bad weather that I have been seeing on the news lately — not so much the winter weather, but the springtime and summer weather (thunderstorms, hail, etc.) — how do people protect their RVs when caught in some of these storms? One of my biggest concerns would be large hail.

I would love to hear the advice of experienced RVers so we can be a bit more prepared when we head on down the road.

Tom Fadell | San Diego, California 

Question of the Month

What steps do you take to protect your motorhome (and dinghy vehicle) from severe weather, both at the RV park and while on the road?

Send your comments to:

MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email letters@motorhomemagazine.com

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16 ROAD FOODIE | 18 WHEELS & GEAR | 20 CROSSROADS



Beyond the Beach

Northern California's Point Reyes National Seashore offers so much more than sand and surf

By Mary Zalmanek

Northern California's Point Reyes National Seashore covers more than 71,000 acres with 80 miles of wild, undeveloped coastline. It is home to a wide variety of mammals, birds, fish and reptiles, including 27 threatened and endangered species. More than 440 tule elk, which were nearly extinct by 1860, graze freely in the park. The pristine habitats and coastal location attracts nearly 490 bird species, making it one of the finest bird-watching destinations in the U.S. From mid-January to early May, the headland of the Point Reyes Peninsula is a good location to watch migrating gray whales.

Hikers can enjoy the 150 miles of trails in the park. Maps at the Bear Valley Visitor Center show which trails are open to bikers. We rode the 8.2-mile tree-lined Bear Valley Trail, the most popular in the park. If you want to continue on to the beach, the last part of the trail is open for hiking only.

Kayaking is permitted at Tomales Bay, Drakes Estero and Limantour Estero. We launched our tandem kayak in Schooner Bay, one of Drake Estero's five bays.

Point Reyes truly is a paradise for hiking, biking, kayaking, bird-watching and whale watching. For more information, call 415-464-5100 or go to www.nps.gov/pore.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Zucchini Zone

Last summer, I returned home from a 10-day motorhome trip to monster zucchinis growing in my garden. No matter how much I begged, I couldn't give them away. This prolific squash may be the least appreciated summer vegetable. That's perhaps because zucchini can quickly grow to 3 feet or longer.

While often maligned, zucchini — even large zucchini — is versatile, delicious and nutritious. In cooking, zucchini is usually used when it's 8 inches in length or less. It can be eaten raw or cooked in soups, salads, omelets and frittatas. It's also a great addition to marinara sauce.

Zucchini can be a side dish, like sautéed zucchini or, with dip, as appetizer "zucchini fries." Zucchini can also be the star. Cut it lengthwise, remove the seeds, and stuff with rice, meats, cheeses or just about anything and bake. It can be sliced or "spiralized" into no-grain, no-wheat, low-carb "pasta" topped with sauce. Large zucchinis can be peeled and shredded for zucchini bread, and the flowers can be stuffed and deep-fried.

Zucchini is low in calories (15 calories for 3 ounces) and contains folate, potassium, A and B complex vitamins, vitamin C, as well as zinc, magnesium and other minerals. It's high in fiber and has no cholesterol or unhealthy fats. Zucchini is also rich in antioxidants believed to slow aging and prevent disease with free-radical-zapping properties.

Typical North American varieties of zucchini came here during the late 19th century with Italian immigrants. The word comes from Italian *zucchina*, diminutive of *zucca*, meaning "gourd, marrow, pumpkin or squash."

Zucchini is really a fruit, a botanical berry called a pepo, the swollen ovary of the zucchini flower (zucchini plants have both male and female flowers; only female flowers produce zucchini). Zucchini is easy to grow in warm, frost-free weather and thrives in fertile, moisture-rich soil.

If you love zucchini, check out the zucchini festival held this August 24-27, in Obetz, Ohio.

Got a favorite zucchini recipe?

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



Salt, dried basil and fresh parsley complement zucchini's delicate flavor.

ZUCCHINI CHOWDER



This chowder is perfect for chilly fall days. While it's most delicious freshly made, you can also make the base and freeze for later. Then thaw and add the milk, tomatoes and cheese.

- 1½ pounds zucchini
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 2 tablespoons fresh parsley, chopped
- 1 teaspoon dried basil
- 2 tablespoons butter
- ½ cup flour
- 1½ teaspoons salt
- 1 pinch of cayenne pepper
- 1 tablespoon bouillon
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 3 cups water
- 10 ounces corn
- 14 ounces milk or half and half
- 6 medium-size tomatoes (or 15 ounces canned)
- 1 cup fontina cheese, shredded
- ¼ cup Romano cheese, grated

► Cut zucchini into ½-inch pieces. Sauté zucchini, onion, parsley and basil in butter for 8 minutes.

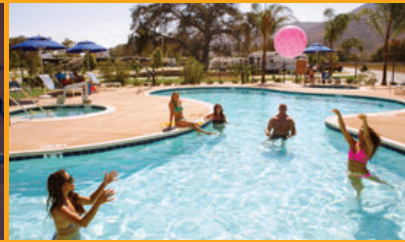
Stir flour, salt and cayenne into vegetables. Cook over low heat for 2 minutes, stirring constantly until thickened. Remove from heat.

Stir in bouillon,

lemon juice and water. Heat to boiling, stirring constantly. Add corn and heat again to boiling.

Reduce heat, cover and simmer for 8 minutes. (You can freeze this base.)

Stir in milk and tomatoes. Heat to boiling. Stir in cheeses and enjoy.



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Wonder Bras

Looking to help your motorhome stand out from the crowd, while adding a layer of protection to the front end of your coach? Active RV Upholstery offers more than 450 patterns of Class A motorhome bras. The bras are constructed with 22-ounce vinyl and fasten to the motorhome using twist fasteners across the top and along the sides. The bottom edge is secured with proprietary self-tensioning hooks. The bra is fortified by covering running lights (where possible) with marine-grade clear vinyl designed for full-time use on the open sea. Air intakes are protected with the same style bug screen used over radiators on big-rig trucks. By closing off and reinforcing these openings, the body of the bra is kept snug, greatly reducing vibrations and preventing debris from getting behind it. All Active RV Upholstery bras come with a five-year warranty against defects in material and workmanship. MSRP: \$649.

Active RV Upholstery | 800-393-2169, www.rvbras.com

Wireless Security

For additional peace of mind when you leave the RV site, the Larry Alert system creates an invisible barrier around your belongings and, well, alerts you via cellphone when that barrier is broken. The Larry Alert system is comprised of a downloadable app and a small sending unit that pairs with your smartphone using long-range wireless technology. The sensor can be set for small (18 square feet), medium (54 square feet) or large (300 square feet) areas, offering protection for your personal belongings, vehicle or even the entire campsite. The sending unit features a wide-angle camera and flash to help you nab potential perps, or to verify that the breach was merely the result of local wildlife. A one-way microphone is included in the app, allowing users to speak to whatever has triggered the alarm. In the event you leave the Larry Alert's range, the unit will save a triggered alarm event with date/time stamps and photos until you return within range. MSRP: \$149.

Larry Alert | 805-275-0190, www.larryalert.com



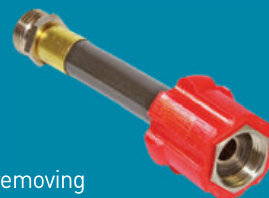
Super Ride, Super Handling

Owners of motorhomes built on the popular Ford F-53 chassis are always looking to improve the ride (and who isn't, really?). Now owners can enjoy improved handling and reduced body roll on the F-53 chassis with SuperSteer's Ultimate Dual Rear Auxiliary Sway Bar system. Designed to be used in conjunction with the factory 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -inch rear sway bar, the new system consists of a forward-facing 1 $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch-diameter sway bar and rear-facing 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-diameter sway bar, both of which are made from chrome moly steel and powder coated for long-lasting corrosion resistance. SuperSteer claims its Ultimate Dual Rear Auxiliary Sway Bar system is easy to install and is available for three separate chassis ratings from 16,000-18,000 GVWR, 20,000-22,000 GVWR and 24,000-26,000 GVWR. All systems come with longer end links, spacers, urethane bushings, mounting hardware and instructions. MSRP: \$1,998 for the 24,000-26,000 GVWR version pictured.

SuperSteer | 888-898 3281, www.supersteerparts.com



Great Grip



Connecting and removing the freshwater hose to the RV park connection is a simple task, but the hose can sometimes be difficult to screw on to the bib due to decreased grip or adverse (read: cold, wet) conditions. J Wright Concepts has introduced the Hose-Grip, which is an assembly that attaches easily to any RV water hose. The ergonomic design of the grip makes attaching and removal of the hose at the faucet a breeze for anyone with limited hand dexterity. The grip features nickel-plated male and female fittings, along with a length of hydraulically crimped Water Right polyurethane hose. The assembly exceeds pressure standards, with up to a 300-PSI burst pressure rating, according to the company. MSRP: \$22.99 (plus \$4 shipping).

RV Cable Grip | 916-955-0048, www.rvcablegrip.com



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Chattanooga, Tennessee

House of 21 Tows

The International Towing and Recovery Hall of Fame and Museum in Chattanooga, Tennessee, is the only museum in the world that celebrates the towing industry. Opened in 1995, it now displays 21 tow trucks plus towing equipment dating back to 1916, in addition to other memorabilia from the industry's extensive history.

The museum grounds contain the Wall of the Fallen memorial, which is dedicated to workers who died in the line of service, and a Hall of Fame that honors individuals who have made significant contributions to the industry.

Chattanooga was chosen for the museum because the local Ernest Holmes Co. built the first wreckers in the early 1900s. The museum also has a theater, a library and a gift shop selling souvenirs related to the towing and recovery industry. Admission is \$10 for adults and \$6 for children ages 6-14; discounts are available for seniors, AAA members and military personnel.

For more information, call 423-267-3132 or visit <http://internationaltowingmuseum.org> — James Richardson



Photo: Chattanooga CVB

Abiquiu, New Mexico

The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum

In late 1945, famous artist Georgia O'Keeffe purchased a Spanish colonial-era structure (circa 1796) in the village of Abiquiu, New Mexico. She then completely restored the 5,000-square-foot structure as her home and studio. At the time, she was visiting the Ghost Ranch just down the road, but decided to rebuild this particular home for her winter quarters. Her new Abiquiu home would also become a place where she could have a garden to grow fresh fruit and vegetables, and have a variety of subjects for painting.

This Abiquiu house in the heart of her beloved country was a great source of inspiration, and RVers can visit that source today. The Georgia O'Keeffe Museum sits on a mesa overlooking the Chama River. Here,

O'Keeffe created some of her most famous paintings: Nearby cottonwood trees on the Chama River, the White Place and the flat-top mountain to the south, Pedernal, all became some of her favorite subjects to paint.

The Home and Studio tour is organized by the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum in Santa Fe. O'Keeffe's home remains as she left it in 1984 with the minimalist furnishings, kitchen appliances and the garden, and most importantly, the views that were her inspiration. Tours run from early March to late November. Check for the current days and times on the museum's website or call 505-946-1098.

Abiquiu is located 50 miles north of Santa Fe. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has a campground with hookups on Abiquiu Lake, less than 10 miles northwest on U.S. Highway 84.

For more information, call 505-946-1000, or visit www.okeeffe-museum.org — Morey Edelman **M**

Photo: Morey Edelman

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Fifty-one years have passed since the launch of the Good Sam Club, and the halo-topped mascot still has a lot to smile about, including 10 percent off the nightly rate at 2,189 Good Sam Parks. The 10 percent discount saves members on RV vacations across North America — from Alaska, with 30 Good Sam Parks, to Florida, with a whopping 205 Good Sam Parks.

Getting the Good Sam Park discount is practically effortless. Members show their Good Sam Club membership card at the park's registration desk, and 10 percent is deducted from the regular nightly RV rate right on the spot.

Of course, the Good Sam Park logo signifies more than the 10 percent discount. The familiar symbol is members' assurance that these destinations have met or exceeded the stringent quality standards established by the Good Sam Club.

► To locate Good Sam Parks, go to www.goodsam.com/travel, use the Find a Campground search tool and click on the Good Sam Parks Only box.



HAVE A SAFE TRIP

How to protect your home when you're on the roam



Homeowners tend to put off installing a home-security system for two reasons: it's too expensive and too much trouble.

The hardware can be costly, installation typically requires drilling holes and snaking wires throughout the house, and most monitoring plans come with a long-term contract. Consequently, many people postpone installing a system or decide not to do it at all.

In response, SimpliSafe introduced an affordable system that can be set up in less than an hour without hardwiring. The cost for 24/7 alarm monitoring with police dispatch is a reasonable \$15 a month, and the plan can be canceled at any time. The system is ideal for RVers and other frequent travelers who want to make sure their home is safe while they're away without spending a fortune to do so.

To encourage Good Sam members to give it a try, SimpliSafe is offering two months of free monitoring with the purchase of the system, and shipping is free. Members who aren't satisfied can return the hardware within 60 days for a full refund.

► To learn more about the SimpliSafe home-security system and the Good Sam Club offer for 60 days of free monitoring, go to www.simplisafe.com/motorhome.

More Ways to Save

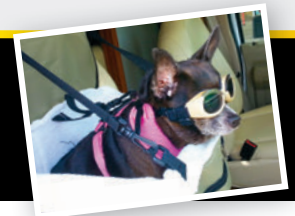


September Savings: Camping World hosts its annual U-Bag-it Sale on **September 8 and 9** this year. Members can find deals and details in the Camping World flyer delivered in the mail.

Save the Dates: Mark your calendars for Good Sam Days at Camping World, **November 2 through 5**, when members enjoy exclusive deals on RV supplies and outdoor gear.

More Club Perks: Members can save even more with coupon offers on dining, hotels, shopping and attractions wherever they go. Visit www.goodsamclub.com/perks to find available offers, plus Camping World Hot Deals and additional coupon savings.

CANINE COPILOT When Good Sam Club members Larry and Clarice Marty hit the road in their Winnebago Aspect, they buckle up their pooch, Pippi, in grand style. The black Chihuahua wears sporty Doggles sunglasses to protect her eyes and snuggles up in a faux-sheepskin-lined booster seat that the Grovetown, Georgia, couple calls Pippi's Palace.





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Campers can rent kayaks and paddleboards to explore the river.

Westmoreland County

A motorhome trip along Virginia's King's Highway mixes history with a little wine — and shark teeth

By Ann Eichenmuller

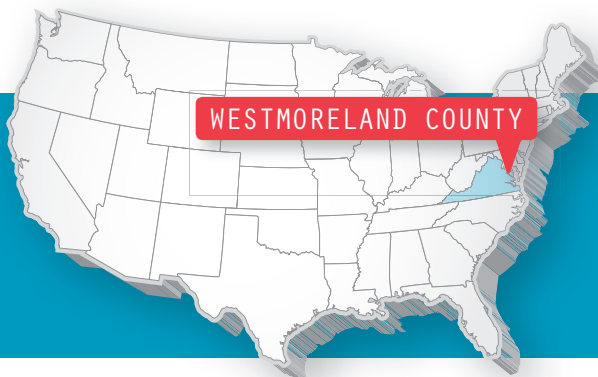
It is little wonder Westmoreland County is in the state that is often referred to as “The Birthplace of a Nation.” Take a trip through the area along Virginia's King's Highway, and you can visit the spot where George Washington was born or tour Stratford Hall, the early childhood home of Robert E. Lee. If U.S. history alone is not enough to entice you, you can spend the day hunting for prehistoric shark teeth and fossils along the cliffs, explore the river by paddle, or spend a day tasting local wines at more than a half-dozen nearby vineyards. With its natural beauty and wealth of activities, Westmoreland has become a popular destination for mid-Atlantic RVers and a worthwhile detour

for snowbirds on their migration up and down the East Coast.

Our own trip to Westmoreland started as a last-minute trial run. We had just gotten a new tow bar system for our Class C motorhome, and we wanted to try it out before embarking on a longer, more involved trip to Maine. Westmoreland State Park was the perfect choice — not too far away, but close to a number of attractions that we had never quite gotten around to visiting since moving to Virginia. We practiced hooking and unhooking our Tracker a few times in the sweltering late-summer heat and then headed for the grocery store to provision on the way. One advantage of shorter trips is that they don't require much planning; it seemed like only a few hours had passed between making the decision

Getting There ➔

Westmoreland State Park is located 23 miles from U.S. Highway 301 and approximately 43 miles from Interstate 95 in Fredericksburg, Virginia. Generators may not be used in the park, so be sure to make reservations early to secure a site if you want to have water and electric (www.reserveamerica.com). RV parking is available at the George Washington Birthplace National Monument and at Stratford Hall, but we recommend piloting a dinghy vehicle to visit Montross, as the streets are very narrow and parking is limited.



and snuggling our Minnie Winnie into a shady site. Then it was off to the water and a much-needed cool down.

Though Westmoreland State Park is open for camping March through early December (cabins are available year-round), summer and fall are probably the best times to visit this jewel of the Virginia parks system. Perched on Horsehead Cliffs overlooking the Potomac River, the park comprises 1,321 wooded acres and includes seven hiking trails. The most popular of these is Big Meadow Trail, which ends at Fossil Beach, where adults and children alike scour the sand for the prehistoric shark teeth that can be found along shore. A second, larger beach area can be reached via road or trail and includes several wading areas protected by rock jetties as well as a fishing pier. This was our first stop, and we had



The view of the Potomac from Horsehead Cliffs is breathtaking.

barely parked our bikes when our attention was drawn by the shrill cries of four eagles swooping and diving overhead, intent on stealing an osprey's catch of fish. These majestic birds are a common sight here; despite its proximity to urban areas upriver, Westmoreland's waterfront is miraculously unspoiled. On this visit, the small flounder were so plentiful in the shallow water that we could scoop them up in our hands, and it was all we could do not to step on baby crabs that skittered near the rocks. In fact, crabbing is a serious pastime at Westmoreland — we saw several campers armed with dip nets and chicken legs on strings in search of large jimmies (male crabs) for a seafood dinner. The midafternoon temperatures put an end to our wanderings, and we spent the rest of the day blissfully floating in the campground's Olympic-size swimming pool.

The following morning we got an early start and took our dinghy vehicle for the 10-minute drive to the George Washington Birthplace National Monument. Our first sight was the memorial obelisk, a 50-foot stone shaft of Vermont granite that is a one-tenth replica of the Washington Monument in the nation's capital.

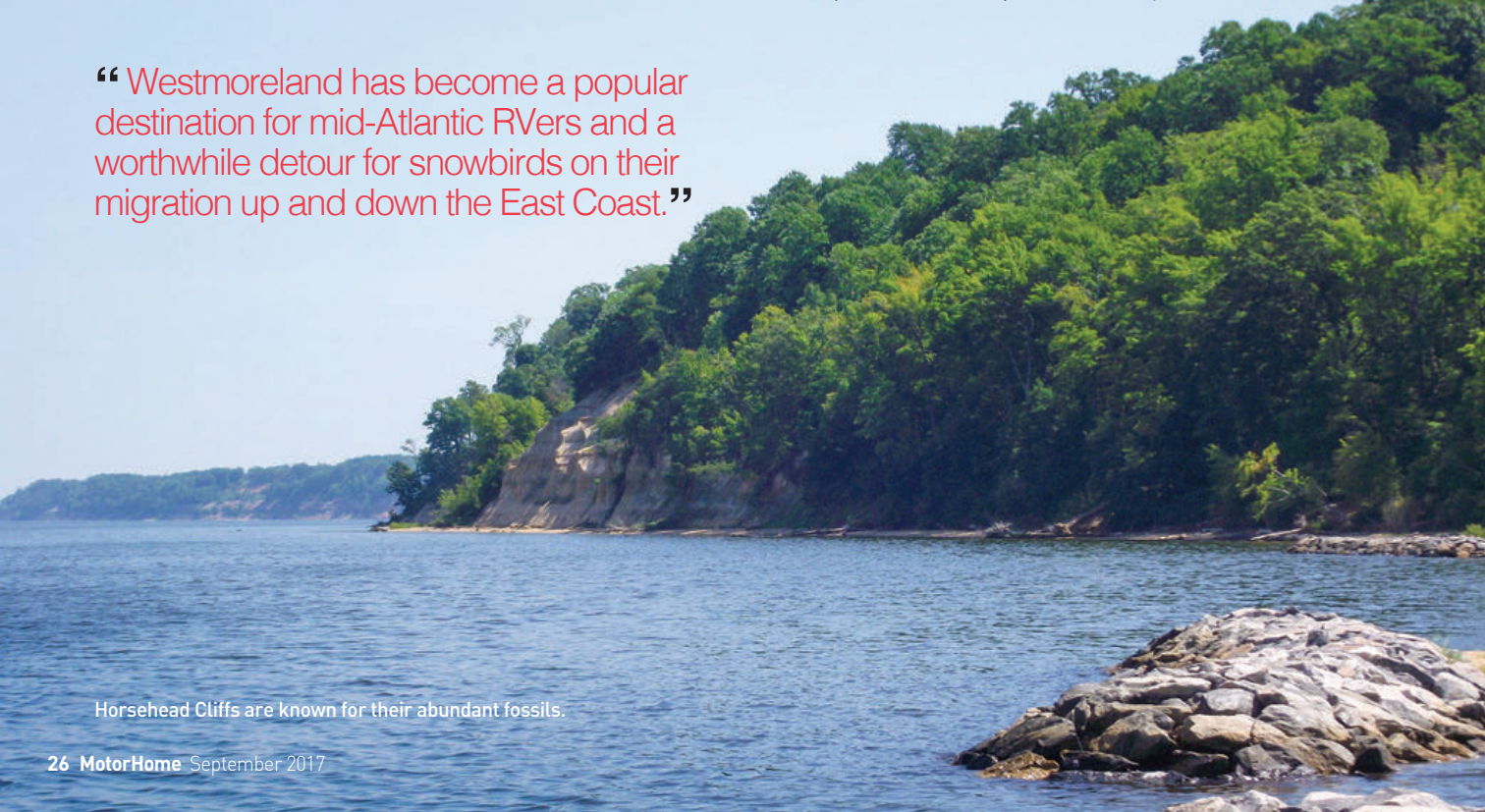


All of the outbuildings at Popes Creek are used on this working farm. A park employee hangs tobacco to dry, just as they did in the 18th century. The blacksmith's shop also served as a tool shop on this Colonial farm.

From there we followed the signs to the visitors center, where we were immediately sidetracked by the view of Popes Creek. Cattle grazed in the shady grass by the water's edge and a heron perched on a nearby log, and all around us was stillness. It was easy to imagine what this place was like in 1732 when the child who would become America's first president was born.

The buildings in this national park, like many historic sites, are

“ Westmoreland has become a popular destination for mid-Atlantic RVers and a worthwhile detour for snowbirds on their migration up and down the East Coast. ”



Horsehead Cliffs are known for their abundant fossils.



replicas of structures, in this case those typical of the 18th century. The original house burned down in 1779, and none of the outbuildings remained when the state of Virginia first purchased the land for a memorial in 1858. Yet true to its billing as a "living memorial," the park has constantly changed and developed as modern archaeological methods have led to an increased understanding of the period.

The site now includes a memorial house built of handmade bricks, a Colonial kitchen, a weaving room, farm workshop/blacksmith's shop and a barn. Crops are grown in the same fields that Washington roamed as a young man, and heritage breeds of livestock are raised here. Tours are provided by park rangers and include history of the site as well as interesting tidbits about its most famous

occupant. (Did you know George loved to dance? Or that he had a fondness for Madeira?) Our trip was made especially memorable by the large Amish family visiting the park that morning. It was a reminder to us that our nation was founded on individual freedom, to live and believe as we choose.

Having developed an appetite from our long walk around Popes Creek, we

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GETAWAY

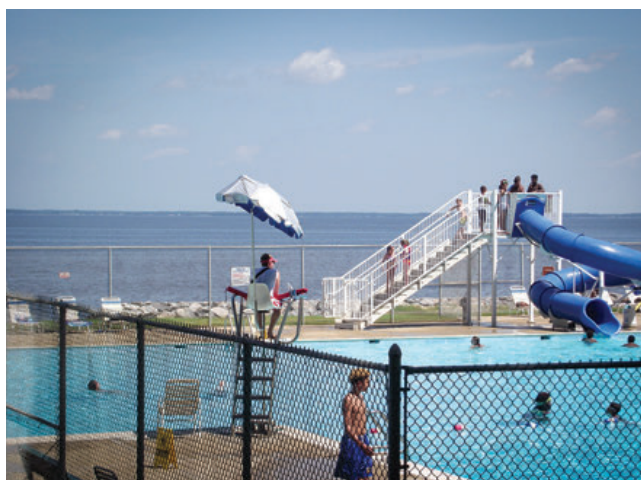
WESTMORELAND COUNTY

headed for lunch in Montross. Murals decorate the outside walls of many of the businesses of this quaint little town, and we spent an hour walking the main street, enjoying them and visiting the local shops. We had a filling lasagna at Angelo's, a local favorite, and were only sorry that we did not save room for coffee and dessert at The Art of Coffee, a funky little art gallery/restaurant just up the street. The Westmoreland County Museum was established in 1941 and is a valuable stop to learn more about the area.

We rounded out the afternoon with a visit to Stratford Hall, about five minutes from our campsite. Built in the 1730s by Thomas Lee, who served as an acting governor of Virginia, it is an H-shaped, Georgian-style brick house surrounded on four corners by attending outbuildings. Two of Lee's sons who grew up here went on to become signers of the Declaration of Independence, and the future Confederate general, Robert E. Lee, was born on the estate in 1807. The visitors center is free and open to the public, but there is a fee to enter the grounds and tour the historic sites. The Great House itself is beautifully restored and is home to a range of educational and recreational events, including a popular wine and oyster festival each September (this year's



Photo: Ingleside Vineyards



Top right: Ingleside Vineyards is one of the largest and oldest vineyards in Virginia. Right: Westmoreland offers an Olympic-size swimming pool with a waterslide and an amazing view of the river.

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WESTMORELAND COUNTY

event runs September 16-17).

Grapes were on the itinerary for the final day of our trip. The Tidewater Virginia region is home to the Chesapeake Bay Wine Trail, a group of eight vineyards all within easy driving distance of Westmoreland State Park. Unfortunately, shortened Sunday hours meant that we would not have time to do the entire circuit of wineries (definitely poor planning on our part), but if you can only squeeze one wine trail stop into your vacation, Ingleside Vineyards is an excellent choice. Like everything else in this area, Ingleside has a long and colorful history. Built in 1834, it first served as a boys' school known as Washington Academy. During the Civil War, it was used as a garrison for Union troops and later a courthouse. It became a winery in 1980 when it was discovered that the soil and climate of this part of Virginia were perfect for growing high-quality grapes.

Tours of the vineyard, which are free of charge, take visitors through

The memorial obelisk is a scale replica of the Washington Monument in the nation's capital.

everything from harvesting to aging, and even include a bit of history on the making of labels. The tasting room feels more like an upscale pub, with dark wood beams, scattered small tables and a long wooden bar. Here wine enthusiasts can receive a souvenir glass and sample eight different wines for only \$8. In addition to purchasing wine, the gift shop also sells gourmet cheeses and a variety of whimsical and creative wine-related items as well as local crafts and décor.

We ended the day with a hike down to Fossil Beach, uncrowded now as evening approached. We were rewarded with two shark teeth, a cool breeze and beautiful pink sky. Our trip to Westmoreland reminded us that you don't have to travel a thousand miles to get away from it all. Sometimes the best destinations are right in your own backyard. **M**



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Westmoreland State Park
804-493-8821, http://www.dcr.virginia.gov/state-parks/westmoreland#general_information



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FALL IN (LOVE WITH) CA

With shoreline, shopping and the namesake architecture, the jewel lives up to its billing as one of the most beautiful destin

Like many RVers, I've long wanted to visit Cape Cod. Tell someone you're going to "the Cape" and they know it's Cape Cod, one of the most beautiful places on the Atlantic coast. Cape Cod serves up miles of beaches and quaint villages filled with vintage clapboard houses and picturesque lighthouses. The 160-mile Cape makes a perfect RV getaway — except that in summer the roads can be clogged with tourists. So, we decide to take an RV road trip to this gorgeous part of the world during October, when the weather is still lovely, yet the crowds have gone home.

We've driven the RV to Cape Cod from Washington state and, frankly, it's been a LONG journey, and not one without challenges. A fridge on the fritz in our motorhome necessitates stops at two RV repair shops and a massive accident on Interstate 80 causes an hours-long detour. When we finally arrive and cross the Sagamore Bridge

on Cape Cod's state Route 6A, we're shocked at the traffic slowly snaking along. It's October. Isn't this supposed to be the off-season?

Columbus Day Hustle

It is the Cape's "quiet season," but we've arrived on Columbus Day weekend, a huge, last-ditch holiday

on the East Coast. In the West, we don't much celebrate Christopher Columbus, but on the Atlantic coast, Columbus Day means parades and late-season escapes to the Cape. When we finally stumble into the Bay View Campground in Bourne, the sun has set and we're spent. We're too tired to take advantage of Bay View's three pools, ice cream parlor or coffee shop. Instead we walk the pup around this large RV park and then, despite some road noise, sleep soundly in our full-hookup site.

We wake to cool temps and cloudy skies. We study a map we picked up from Bay View and see that the Cape has two main roads: state Route 28



CAPE COD

popular Atlantic coast
attractions in the region

that angles along the south shore; and U.S. Highway 6 (and SR 6A) that cuts through the heart of the Cape (Mid Cape) and north to Outer Cape. Between the highways there's a maze of roads that connect a couple dozen towns and villages and we're grateful for our GPS.

We head to the cute-as-a-button burg of Sandwich and realize that while the villages are postcard-quaint, the roads to them are windy and narrow. Best advice? Park the motorhome and use the dinghy vehicle for exploring. And that's exactly what we do.

By the time we



A maple tree displays the Cape's brilliant fall color.

cruise into Sandwich, rain spatters the windshield so we decide to make this a museum day. We drive to Heritage Museums & Gardens, a historic 100-acre estate that showcases the collections and gardens of the wealthy family that owns pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly. The sprawling property, open mid-April through early October, offers an impressive antique auto museum, rotating art exhibits, a labyrinth and maze, a working 1908 Looff carousel and multiple gardens, including The North American Hydrangea Test Garden.

We dash from the parking lot to the massive, two-story Shaker barn that houses Josiah K. Lilly III's incredible 40-car collection. In 1926, Lilly began collecting and preserving cars and his treasures include a 1915 Milburn Light Electric (top speed 20 MPH), a 1932 Auburn Boattail Speedster driven by playboys like Errol Flynn, a 1927 Lincoln Sport Touring car and a flashy 1931 Duesenberg Model J

Derham Tourster driven by actor Gary Cooper. The Duesenberg can go 100 MPH in second gear and gave us the saying, "It's a Duesie." There's also the 1909 White Steamer that belonged to President William Howard Taft that helped make the automobile an everyday American necessity.

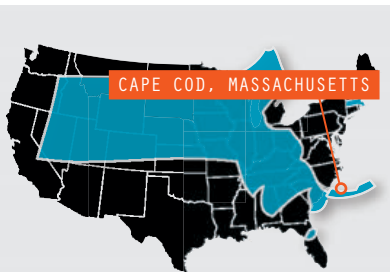
With the rain coming down hard, we forgo strolling the gardens and take an electric guest train to the carousel. Like kids, we scramble aboard the tallest, most bejeweled horses and enjoy the round-and-round ride. Afterward, we explore diverse exhibits — old toys, antique weather vanes, New England earthenware, military miniatures, historic guns, bird and duck molds, and more.

It's late afternoon when we cruise back into town and we head for Café Chew, a popular breakfast and lunch spot, where we feast on thick pastrami and smoky barbecue brisket sandwiches. Then we're off to the Sandwich Glass Museum, an expansive glass exhibition that tells the story of glassmaking in Sandwich. We stroll through rooms filled floor to ceiling with glass cups, saucers, bottles, pitchers, plates, figurines, lamps and more in a rainbow of colors. We learn that Deming Jarves (1790-1869), "the man who turned Sandwich into glass," revolutionized glassmaking by inventing a machine to inexpensively produce glass.

JFK, Chatham and Cranberries
The next morning, we wake to better



Fall paints the marshes near Chatham in golden hues.



Getting There

Cape Cod is approximately 90 minutes southeast of Boston. From Boston, take Interstate 93 south to MA-3 S toward Cape Cod. Continue for approximately 40 miles, and take Exit 6 for MA-132 toward Barnstable/Hyannis.



Clockwise from above: The view from the top of the 252-foot Pilgrim Monument in Provincetown shows off the Cape's iconic curve. From Coastal Acres Campground, downtown Provincetown is just a short walk. The author paddles on Popponneset Bay near Mashpee in the fall sunshine.

weather and head to Hyannis, the town the Kennedys made famous. For anyone who experienced John F. Kennedy's presidency, the John F. Kennedy Hyannis Museum is a must-see. This impressive brick building is filled with photos and artifacts that tell the story of the Kennedy family and "how they lived like locals here," John Allen, the museum's executive director, tells us. The museum gives a highly personal look into America's first royal family,

including the special relationship between brothers John and Bobby and an in-depth look at Rose Kennedy, the family's matriarch.

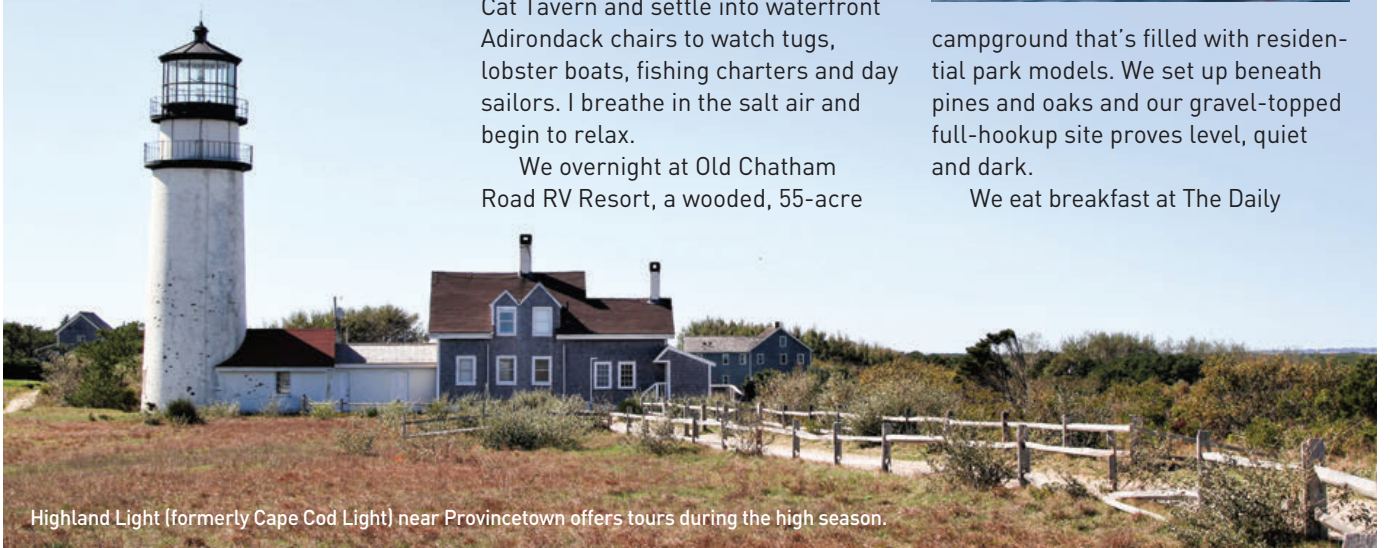
The JFK museum leaves me feeling both proud and sad, so we walk downtown Hyannis, poking through boutiques, including the dog's favorite, Pupcakes! pet boutique. Then we head to the harbor and explore the Hyannis HyArts Artist Shanties, colorful, art-filled shacks. We buy cups of chowder from Black Cat Tavern and settle into waterfront Adirondack chairs to watch tugs, lobster boats, fishing charters and day sailors. I breathe in the salt air and begin to relax.

We overnight at Old Chatham Road RV Resort, a wooded, 55-acre



campground that's filled with residential park models. We set up beneath pines and oaks and our gravel-topped full-hookup site proves level, quiet and dark.

We eat breakfast at The Daily



Highland Light (formerly Cape Cod Light) near Provincetown offers tours during the high season.

Paper, a popular spot in Hyannis. My lobster-stuffed omelet, chunky home fries and locally roasted coffee hit the spot. Today, we're exploring Chatham, one of the prettiest villages on the Cape. We meet our friends Celeste and Lou, who own a second home here, and they enthusiastically lead us through their favorite shops — Monomoy Salvage, Maps of Antiquity, Blue Water Fish Rubbings, Yankee Ingenuity for Cape Cod gifts, Cuffys of Cape Cod for inexpensive T-shirts and sweatshirts, and my favorite, Chatham Candy Manor.

Then we hike backroads filled with Cape Cod-style homes, fishing docks, a historic gristmill, and the Atwood House & Museum/Chatham Historical Society, a surprisingly impressive collection of nautical artifacts and historical memorabilia from early Chatham. At the Chatham Light, we check out a plaque and the propeller from the boat made famous in the movie "The Finest Hours" about heroic

Coast Guard efforts to save shipwrecked fishermen from the area.

Columbus Day crowds have thinned and, the following day, we head to Orleans to meet farmer Dave Ross for a half-day cranberry tour. Since the 1800s when whalers kept cranberries fresh in water-filled barrels, the fruit has been an important economic engine for the Cape. A dozen of us stroll Dave's 40-acre Little Scoop Cranberry Farm, walking between bogs, low-lying fields surrounded by dikes. During harvest, they fill the bogs with water and scoop up the floating fruit with machines.

National Seashore and Provincetown

We bid Dave goodbye and, munching on chocolate-covered cranberries, head north on U.S. 6 to the Cape Cod National Seashore, 40 miles of seashore and 40,000 acres of dune-filled beaches, salt marshes, and hiking and cycling paths. At the visitors

center, we pick up a map and learn it was President Kennedy who preserved this exquisite area. On Nauset Beach, despite the cool temperatures, dozens of hearty New Englanders walk, fish and even nap, and we take the dog for a long, waterside walk.

Continuing north on U.S. 6, we're treated to expansive views of beach and water along Cape Cod Bay and the Atlantic Ocean. In Provincetown, the farthest village on the Cape, we check in at Coastal Acres Campground, a 1970s-style campground with grass and sand-topped sites under the pines. The campground may lack modern amenities, but the friendly and generous managers, and the camp's walking-distance location, make it one of our favorite RV parks.

For dinner, we head to The Mews, an upscale restaurant offering delights like seared scallops with house-made fettuccine and, for me, creamy lobster risotto. Back at Coastal Acres, we sleep deeply, lulled

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FALL IN (LOVE WITH) CAPE COD

by the sound of waves.

We're up early to explore Provincetown. The narrow streets are busy with visitors, especially women, and we learn that we've arrived during Women's Week, a celebration of all things female. Comedian Lily Tomlin is in town, but, alas, tickets have long been sold out.

Provincetown's outstanding landmark is the Pilgrim Monument and Provincetown Museum, a 252-foot spire that's the country's tallest, all-granite structure. Pilgrim Monument was completed in 1910 to honor the first landing of pilgrims in North America. We've all heard about Plymouth Rock, but, in fact, the 102 pilgrims landed here first in 1620. Five weeks later, probably in response to the Cape's fierce winter weather, they sailed on to Plymouth Rock and into the textbooks.

We explore displays about the town's whaling, sailing and fishing history and then set out to climb the monument. I'm pleasantly surprised

that it's a relatively easy jaunt since the builders added 60 short ramps amid the 116 steps. At the top, we're treated to stunning views of town and Cape Cod Bay's deep-blue water.

We spend the next two days enjoying Provincetown — sipping waterside cocktails at Aqua Bar; buying warm fleece at one of the many boutiques; eating salt-water taffy while strolling the dock and marina. By the time we leave this beautiful, beachy town, we're feeling relaxed.

Our last day, we meander back down the Cape, stopping at Truro Vineyards in North Truro for lunchtime wine tasting. Then we drop the rig at Cape Cod Campresort & Cabins, a 10/10*/10-rated Good Sam Park in East Falmouth with paved big-rig sites, private patios with fire rings and Adirondack chairs under shady pines. I'm tempted to hang out in this gorgeous RV park, but we've got reservations with Mike Morrison of Scorton Creek Kayak.

At New Seabury Marina, we haul our one-person kayaks to the beach and slip into glass-still water. The day is glorious — sunny with bright blue skies, but the chill in the air lets us know that fall has officially arrived. For the next two hours, we paddle tree-lined Mashpee River and beautiful Popponesset Bay, circumnavigating a small island filled with herons and egrets. As I gaze at the setting sun, I breathe deeply and grin like a kid. I've succumbed to the magic of Cape Cod. **M**

For More Information

Bay View Campground

508-759-7610, www.bayviewcampground.com

Cape Cod Campresort & Cabins

508-548-1458, www.capecampresort.com

Coastal Acres Campground

508-487-1700,
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FINDING FLAGSTAFF

Science, history and natural wonders delight in northern Arizona

If you come to Flagstaff, the largest city in northern Arizona, expecting a quintessential Arizonan experience, you may be in for a surprise. You'll see more mountains than desert, more ponderosa pine forests than cacti. At nearly 7,000 feet in elevation, the average high temperature in July is a balmy 82 degrees compared to a sizzling 106 in Phoenix. Snowbirds fleeing the wintry conditions in northern states can find snow at the nearby Arizona Snowbowl, which delights skiers with an average annual snowfall exceeding 240 inches. Flagstaff is a popular year-round destination.

Little did my husband, Jim, and I know when we arrived in late September that we were just in time for "The Best 10 Days of the Year," otherwise known as the Flagstaff Festival of Science. The theme for 2016 was "The Science of Change." More than 100 free activities are offered, including

guided hikes, tours of archaeological sites, lectures, family-friendly events and the Flagstaff Star Party. This year's Festival of Science runs September 22-October 1.

The Star Party was held for three evenings at Buffalo Park, with more than 25 amateur and professional astronomers sharing their telescopes with the public. We looked at the Hercules Globular Cluster, with its more than 300,000 stars, through a 20-inch telescope. Flagstaff is famous for its dark, starry skies. In 2001, it was named the world's first "International Dark-Sky City." The International Dark-Sky Association gives this designation to cities "with exceptional commitment to and success in implementing the ideals of dark-sky preservation and/or restoration, and their promotion through quality outdoor lighting."

The skies were even darker in 1894 when Percival Lowell established the now-famous Lowell Observatory to



Mather Point, a short walk from the Grand Canyon Visitor Center on the South Rim, is a popular overlook.



Get Your Kicks

Flagstaff is a popular stop along Historic Route 66. Brochures for self-guided walking tours are available at the city's visitor center, or to download at http://www.flagstaffarizona.org/wp-content/uploads/route66_walking.pdf.



Above from left: The Wupatki Ruins Complex at Wupatki National Monument includes a dwelling with more than 100 rooms, a community room, a ball court and two kivalike structures. The paved 1-mile Island Trail in Walnut Canyon National Monument passes by 25 cliff dwellings that were inhabited more than 700 years ago by the Sinagua.

search for evidence of life on Mars. Jim and I took a tour and learned about several notable discoveries at the observatory. In 1912, Vesto Slipher was the first to provide an empirical basis for the notion of an expanding universe. In the late 1960s, Vera Rubin provided evidence that “dark matter” makes up the bulk of the universe. Lowell Observatory’s most famous discovery occurred in 1930 when Clyde Tombaugh discovered Pluto, originally thought to be the ninth planet in our

solar system. He spent thousands of hours comparing photos of the night sky looking for an unidentified moving point of light that might be a planet. Pluto was downgraded to a dwarf planet in 2006. Our tour guide and Flagstaff native, Kevin, noted that he was torn between “the hometown pride of locals who didn’t want Pluto to be demoted” and his desire to see scientific advancements. NASA paid a unique tribute to Pluto’s discoverer when it launched the New Horizons

spacecraft in 2006 with a portion of Tombaugh’s ashes aboard. After traveling 4.67 billion miles, New Horizons flew within 7,800 miles of Pluto in 2015.

Three national monuments are less than 45 miles from Flagstaff. All of them were hosting open houses as part of the Festival of Science. We started the day at Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument. This volcano erupted less than 1,000 years ago (between 1040 and 1100), making

Photos: Mary and Jim Zalmanek



it one of the youngest lava flows in northern Arizona. I was disappointed that we couldn't get reservations for the guided hike, but then we met a young woman at the trailhead whose keen interest in volcanoes made me happy to have missed the official hike. Cassie Lentz was in the middle of a solo five-month, 22-state, 38,000-mile road trip to travel the U.S. and hike as much as possible. She's been obsessed with volcanoes since middle school. A highlight of her adventure was the eight volcanic sites she hiked. Because of her infectious enthusiasm about volcanoes, we saw this marvel of nature in a new light as we hiked the trails in the park with her.

From Sunset Crater Volcano, Jim and I drove the 34-mile scenic loop to Wupatki National Monument. Leaving the ponderosa pine forests, we dropped nearly 2,000 feet into the high desert. In the century following the Sunset Crater eruption, an estimated 2,000 people moved into this area. The land was covered with a thin layer of volcanic ash, which improved the soil's



ability to retain water and grow maize and squash. By 1180, Wupatki Pueblo was home to as many as 100 Ancestral Puebloans, with several thousand more living within a day's walk. By 1250, the area had been abandoned, perhaps due to an extensive drought or overutilization of natural resources. The Wupatki Ruins Complex includes a dwelling with more than 100 rooms, a community room, a ball court and two kivalike structures. Wupatki Pueblo is the largest of the five pueblos on the national monument, which covers more than 55 square miles.

Walnut Canyon National Monument was our last stop of the day, located less than 10 miles from our RV park. We descended 185 vertical feet into the canyon on several sets of stairs to hike the paved 1-mile Island Trail. This led us past 25 cliff dwellings that were inhabited more than 700 years ago by the Sinagua (The name translates to "without water."). Walnut Creek flowed intermittently, requiring them to become adept at conserving water and dealing with drought. They grew crops of corn, squash and beans on the canyon rim. We walked through this area on the Rim Trail, an easy 0.7-mile round trip. From two canyon overlooks, we could see several ruins.

We devoted an entire day to exploring Grand Canyon National Park, less than 80 miles from Flagstaff. In that one day, we saw only a fraction

Above: The Grand Canyon Visitor Center at the South Rim offers exhibits about the park and activities, a 20-minute movie, gift shop and coffee bar. Below: A chance encounter with volcano enthusiast Cassie Lentz made our hike through Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument even more enjoyable.





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FINDING FLAGSTAFF



Above: Riordan Mansion, now part of a state historic park, was built in 1904 for two brothers, Timothy and Michael Riordan, who made their fortune in the lumber business. Below: The Arboretum at Flagstaff is located on 200 acres in the Coconino National Forest.

of the park that covers 1,900 square miles. The canyon itself is 277 miles long, up to 18 miles wide and more than a mile deep at its deepest point. The Colorado River carved the canyon through erosion over 5 to 6 million years. Near the East Entrance, we climbed to the top of the Desert View Watchtower for an even more spectacular view of the canyon. The 70-foot-high circular building designed by architect Mary Colter was completed in 1932. Interior murals painted by Hopi artist Fred Kabotie tell Hopi history through images of their mythology and religious ceremonies and pre-historic pictographs and petroglyphs. From there we drove to the Grand Canyon Visitor Center, stopping at several overlooks en route. At the visitor center, we watched a short

film about the Grand Canyon and studied the exhibits. Mather Point, an overlook with spectacular views of the immense canyon, was crowded with American and international visitors. We overheard many conversations in languages we couldn't understand. To some English-speaking tourists I commented about the overwhelming beauty of the colorful, steep canyon; to everyone else I offered a welcome-to-the-U.S. smile.

Our remaining days were spent exploring attractions in or near Flagstaff. The Museum of Northern





Above from left: At Walnut Canyon National Monument, natural vegetation replaces crops of corn, squash and beans grown by the Sinagua 700 years ago on the rim of the canyon. The Desert View Watchtower, a 70-foot-high circular building designed by architect Mary Colter and completed in 1932, offers spectacular views of Grand Canyon National Park.

Arizona sits on 200 acres. In addition to the exhibit building, there are research labs and collection facilities. Their collection includes Native American artifacts, natural science specimens and fine-art pieces. The mission of the museum, founded in 1928, is "to inspire a sense of love and responsibility for the beauty and diversity of the Colorado Plateau through collecting, studying, interpreting, and preserving the region's natural and cultural heritage." The Colorado Plateau covers 130,000 square miles in Arizona, Utah, New Mexico and Colorado. Permanent exhibit galleries include items as diverse as skeletal casts of dinosaurs, pottery, jewelry, textiles, sculptures and paintings. The museum also hosts an interesting assortment of temporary exhibitions. We were fortunate to see "Curt Walters: A Retrospective." More than 30 realistic landscape paintings on display made it clear why Art of the West magazine declared Walters the "Greatest Living Grand Canyon Artist." After visiting the galleries, we hiked the Rio de Flag Nature Trail on the museum's property, carefully avoiding the poison ivy that grows along the creek.

Riordan Mansion was built in 1904 for two brothers, Timothy and Michael Riordan, who married sisters, Caroline and Elizabeth Metz. The Arts

and Crafts-style 13,000-square-foot mansion is actually two nearly identical homes connected by a rendezvous room. In 1983, the Riordan Mansion and the 5 acres surrounding it became a state historic park. We took a guided tour of the East House, which contains handcrafted furniture, original artifacts and personal items belonging to the Riordan families. When our tour ended, we explored the exhibits on the first floor in the West House. The Riordans owned a successful lumber mill, and were instrumental in the development of Flagstaff. They were also involved with railroads, cattle, banking and politics.

On Sunday, Jim stayed in the motorhome to watch a football game while I explored The Arboretum at Flagstaff, located on 200 acres in the Coconino National Forest. Initially founded as a nonprofit research facility, the arboretum specializes in plants native to the Colorado Plateau and northern Arizona. More than 750 species of plants are grown here in greenhouses, gardens and natural habitats. Free docent-led tours are offered at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. Since I missed both tours, I wandered the grounds on my own. In late September, most of the gardens were no longer in bloom, but I thoroughly enjoyed my visit to the Butterfly House and a hike

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FINDING FLAGSTAFF



Photo: Flagstaff Dark Skies Coalition

on the Nature Trail in a ponderosa pine forest. The Arboretum at Flagstaff is open daily (except Tuesdays) from April 15 to October 31, and on weekends from mid-November to early December for the Festival of Trees. The best time to see flowers in bloom is the first week of August. Butterflies are at their peak in June and July. Special events throughout the season include concerts and festivals.

After picking up the Flagstaff Urban Trails and Bikeways Map, Jim and I were eager to do a bike ride before we left town. The Flagstaff Urban Trails Systems (FUTS) is a citywide network of nonmotorized, shared-use pathways that are used by bicyclists, walkers, hikers, runners and other users for both recreation and transportation. There are currently 55 miles of trails, with plans for 80 more. We parked our dinghy on Ponderosa Parkway and rode our bikes north on the Arizona Trail to Buffalo Park. We enjoyed returning to the site of the Star Party, and seeing the open terrain in daylight.

We stayed at the J & H RV Park, just a few miles northeast of Flagstaff on U.S. Highway 89. It had everything its website promised: level sites, beautiful landscaping and a quiet location away from railroad and traffic noise. I was curious about its claim that, "Our warm hospitality and humor have helped us attain the prestigious 'National RV Park of the Year' award."

Above: At the Flagstaff Star Party, more than 25 amateur and professional astronomers share their telescopes with the public.

Harvey was friendly and helpful when we checked in, but it wasn't until we were leaving that I understood how they got that award. For the first time in 14 years of RVing, we got a thank-you note from our hosts taped to our door. Thanks, Jo Ann and Harvey. We look forward to coming back. **M**

For More Information

Flagstaff Festival of Science
www.scifest.org

Flagstaff Star Party
www.flagstaffstarparty.org

Flagstaff Urban Trails and Bikeways Map
www.flagstaff.az.gov/index.aspx?nid=1379

Grand Canyon National Park
928-638-7888, www.nps.gov/grca

J & H RV Park
928-526-1829, <http://flagstaffrvparks.com>

Lowell Observatory
<https://lowell.edu>

Museum of Northern Arizona
<https://musnaz.org>

Riordan Mansion State Historic Park
<http://azstateparks.com/parks/rima/>

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument
928-526-0502, www.nps.gov/sucr

Walnut Canyon National Monument
928-526-3367, www.nps.gov/waca

Wupatki National Monument
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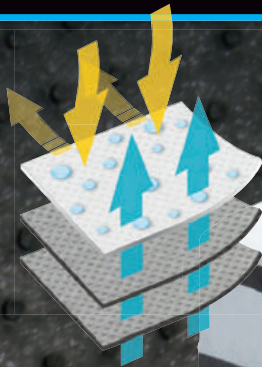
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Day in and day out, intense UV rays can silently cause irreparable damage to your RV. The rubber roof can crack, sidewalls can yellow, and inside surfaces near windows can fade. Relentless bombardment by UV rays breaks down all of your RV's exterior surfaces, causing paint, plastic, vinyl and graphics to fade, crack and peel; caulking and seals begin to fail, allowing water to find a way in around windows, vents, rooftop air conditioners—even around the lights mounted on the RV exterior.

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Camco has put its 50+ years of experience in the RV industry to good use with the design and construction of its durable, all-season Ultra Shield RV Covers. They offer the top features for best fit and most effective protection of your RV. Elasticized corners help hold the cover in place. Front and rear cinching straps as well as an under-coach buckle strapping system give the cover a semi-custom, secure fit that results in less movement over the surface of the RV. Other features that make this cover stand out are extra reinforcement in corners and other high-wear areas for ultra-durability, zipper entry doors for easy access during covered storage, and 100% breathable polypropylene plus covered air vents to help keep the RV cooler in the summer, deter mold and mildew formation, and protect against billowing in high winds. Each of these premium covers also includes a ladder cover and gutter protectors to help prevent accelerated wear at these key friction points, a patch kit and a storage bag. As an added bonus, the contemporary two-tone design mirrors the paint and graphics of today's RVs for a custom look.

Camco Ultra Shield RV Covers are available for Class A and Class C motorhomes, travel trailers, toy haulers and fifth wheels. You'll find them exclusively at Camping World SuperCenters nationwide and online at CampingWorld.com.



Headquartered in Greensboro, North Carolina with three manufacturing facilities in the U.S., Camco takes pride in listening to its customers and meeting the ever-changing needs of RVing families while maintaining its strong reputation of quality products and customer satisfaction. For more information about Camco Manufacturing Inc., visit camco.net or call 336-668-7661. Look for a wide assortment of quality Camco RV accessories at Camping World and other leading RV accessory retailers.

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A Grand Debut

Luxury-appointed CapeCod Class B from a new Elkhart, Indiana-based manufacturer makes a big splash By Chris Dougherty

Class B motorhomes have become increasingly popular among newer enthusiasts looking for a nimble, go-anywhere touring vehicle with all the amenities and features for on-the-road comfort, and for seasoned owners looking to downsize to a smaller, easier-to-manuever motorhome. Class B's are also popular as second household vehicles, and are sometimes used primarily for touring.

Brand-new manufacturer, Grand Coach, of Elkhart, Indiana, has begun production with a line of Class B motorhomes that Darryl Connors, founder and CEO, says brings the concept of quality control and design to a higher level. To prove it, they sent *MotorHome* coach No. 001, a 2017 Grand Coach CapeCod, to test. Sending your very first prototype to a magazine for a test and review is bold no

matter how you slice it. But Connors, whose infant company bought the rights to some well-established brands in the RV world like CapeCod, Dolphin, Honey, Sea View, Tropical Breeze and Marlin, was confident of the outcome.

Looking at the names the company has acquired, the ocean resort theme isn't hard to miss and is intentional, according to Connors. The CapeCod, with its sophisticated New England seaside theme, is identical to the Dolphin in every way, except the colors and décor theme. The Dolphin is more Southeast and West Coast-themed — a Margaritaville on wheels, if you will. A future model in development, called the Aztec, will have a Western theme.

On viewing the CapeCod for the first time it's clear this is no ordinary motorhome. There are times when you can judge a vehicle, and indeed a motorhome, by its cover, which

ABOVE: The Grand Coach CapeCod, in front of the Nauset Light, Eastham, Massachusetts. Nauset Light appears in the logo of Cape Cod Potato Chips.



With the bed folded down (far left) there is plenty of room for two people with dual twin beds. Add the center section and cushions to make a queen bed. The galley (left) is compact but well-equipped, with a single-basin sink, induction cooktop, microwave and refrigerator/freezer.

in this case is the paint and exterior trim that stops people in their tracks. During the test and photoshoot we were approached at least five times by people asking questions and asking to take pictures.

The exterior of the motorhome has a custom paint job that fades from silver at the top to a lagoon blue at the bottom, and is quite well-done. Speaking of the bottom, the motorhome is surrounded by fiberglass, ground-effect running boards and a custom spoiler on the front that gives it a low-to-the-ground, sleek appearance. Alcoa cast-aluminum wheels with Mercedes-Benz logos in the center are a sharp touch.

The paint and color theme transition to the inside where, again, no detail has been left undone. The cockpit of the CapeCod is a thing of beauty and comfort. Most of the surfaces are clad in ultraleather, a soft, supple vinyl fabric that is well-known for its comfort and durability.

The dashboard and side door panels were removed and painted

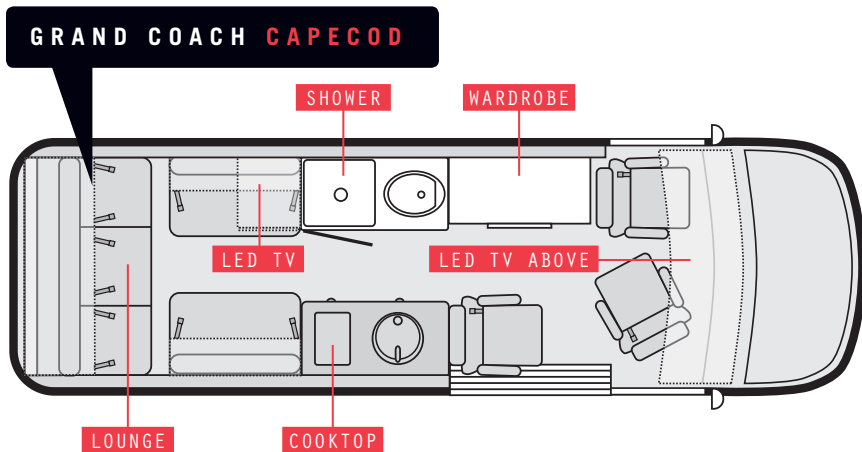
to match the theme colors. Custom-embroidered ultraleather panels with the CapeCod logo were integrated into the doors; the front rotating Mercedes-Benz multiposition seats were reupholstered in the same fabric and theme with the logo again embroidered into the headrests. The dash has a Mercedes-Benz-like wood trim, and eight cup holders for the folks who like to have coffee and pop at the ready all the time they're driving. The top of the dash is divided into three open storage cubbies with cup holders and above the sun visors are two more storage spaces, plus huge pockets in the doors, which all adds up to a ton of storage.

The cockpit is well-laid-out and everything is within easy reach. The smart steering wheel is comfortable to grip with stereo controls on the front, and various control stalks for the cruise control, wipers and turn signals. The big chrome Mercedes-Benz badge in the center of the steering wheel is a not-so-subtle reminder that you're driving a \$150,000 vehicle.

There are a lot of switches on the dash, some of which are part of the

American Technology Components multiplex switching system found throughout the interior. This motorhome has six control panels that are programmed to operate many of the functions, including all the interior and exterior LED lighting, front fog lights, power for the integrated entertainment components, Carefree power box awning with LED lighting and more. One of the panels is on the dashboard to the left of the steering column, giving the driver convenient control of some of these functions.

The dashboard center pod contains the Mercedes-Benz HVAC controls for the dash air and heat, which allow for a high degree of adjustability. The Fusion RV-IN801 A Class infotainment stereo system, installed at the top of the pod, is a multifeature stereo that any electronics geek will want to play with. The stereo features USB, HDMI and audio inputs either on the front of the stereo unit, or via an access point built onto the top of the dash on the driver's-side dashboard. Features include DVD/CD playback, Bluetooth connectivity, AM/FM stereo, Sirius/XM satellite radio, Wi-Fi connectivity with an internet browser with various apps and, most notably, an integrated Garmin RV GPS program. This system has great functionality, with full campground and RV services listings, and the Android-powered internet browser will allow users to look up anything on the net, including weather forecasts and tourism sites. We connected our iPhone 6 to the system, and the stereo sound was quite good, vigorously belting out Beach Boys tunes. The steering-wheel controls are mated with the stereo, and the multicolor LED touch panel is



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THETFORD
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within easy reach, although somewhat difficult to see during a sunny day due to glare and reflections.

We enjoyed the CapeCod's driving and handling, and seized the opportunity to tour the famous region after which the motorhome has been named. The motorhome is built on a Mercedes-Benz 3500, 170-inch wheelbase, dual rear-wheel van, featuring the BlueTEC 3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel, which delivers 188 HP and 325 LB-FT of torque through its five-speed automatic transmission with manual-shift capability. Acceleration, even going up hills, was decent. While there was some sway, especially at low speeds — which is to be expected of a heavy, high-profile van — it was minimal, and otherwise the handling was tight and responsive. One of the benefits is fuel economy and while many motorhomes will only see 5-7 MPG, we recorded 15.5 MPG on the highway, which is pretty respectable.

The CapeCod as built on the Mercedes-Benz platform comes with safety features not often seen in motorhomes. First, there's a four-camera safety system with two primary monitors, and the backup camera also displays on the Fusion stereo screen. There are forward-facing, backup and side cameras, all visible through the dual monitor system: one on the top of the dashboard on the driver's side, and one in the rear mounted below the TV. There are driver and passenger side curtain, steering wheel and dashboard air bags, which provide nearly full-coverage protection in the event of a collision. However, the likelihood of a collision has been greatly reduced, thanks to the lane keeping, the collision prevention and the blind

spot assist features. The lane keeping assist system automatically detects the striping on the road and gives visual and audible warnings if the driver strays out of his or her lane. The collision prevention assist is a radar-based proximity warning system that gives similar warnings if the vehicle ahead is too close, and in the event of an emergency, provides boosted braking to avoid a rear-end collision. Lastly, the blind spot assist uses radar on the sides to monitor approaching vehicles hidden in a blind spot. Colored LEDs in the mirrors indicate if the coast is clear, and if you use the turn signal when a vehicle is in the blind spot, an alarm also goes off, in addition to an LED for a visual alert.

From a livability standpoint, many of the features you'd expect in a high-end coach can be found in the CapeCod in a compact form. The interior is nicely appointed. Seating is clad in the aforementioned ultra-leather, and is quite comfortable. This includes a captain's chair by the side door, and an electrically folding jackknife sofa bed across the rear. Two smaller seats, one on each side, sit immediately in front of the sofa, and while less than ideal for sitting, add to the bed surface when the separate bed-board is positioned and the back cushions are tucked into the center. A tabletop, stored in one of the two closets, locks into a special post that attaches to the floor. This post allows the table to turn freely to make it easier for people to navigate the table while trying to sit. The table is secure and stable but polished so finely that things slide on the surface. Also, it's a bit of a reach to the table from the

WHAT'S HOT

Build quality, attention to detail, drivability, exterior appearance, impressive set of features

WHAT'S NOT

No door catch for sewer access, closet door contacts middle seat, AC generator too small to run roof air and any other loads



couch, and while we could set the table in a more formal style, we'd be comfortable having a more informal setting for convenience.

Next to the captain's chair is a closet with drawers, neatly hidden behind two cabinet doors. One of the doors wouldn't open all the way, as it made contact with the armrest on the chair, but this is easily remedied. Above the captain's chair toward the front is a 27-inch Samsung smart LED TV built into the headliner and connected to the DVD and Apple TV systems. In addition, a smaller 19-inch flat-screen TV is located in the rear (in front of the sofa) for close-up viewing. The Grand Coach also has a central Cradlepoint cellular-based Wi-Fi router system, which provides Wi-Fi internet connectivity (from a cellular subscription) to the TV, Apple TV, the Fusion Infotainment system and any other internet-ready device, including tablets and phones.

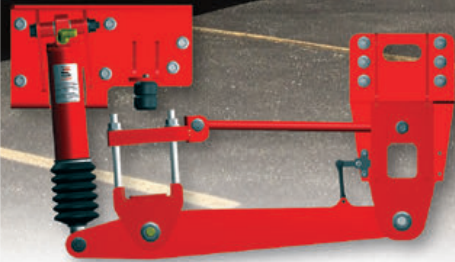
The interior lighting is all LED with ceiling fixtures and accent lighting hidden in the valances. Each cabinet is lit and also lined in ultraleather, and the doors have flush-mounted push-button latches.

The entire floor is covered by a high-end textured vinyl sheet material, in a light gray wood pattern, which makes for easy care. There are



Sewage disposal and tank flushing (left) is easy with the macerator system with electric reel. The driver's compartment (right) is luxurious and comfortable. Note the matching painted panels.

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Specifications

Chassis

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| Manufacturer | Mercedes-Benz |
| Model | Sprinter 3500 |
| Engine | BlueTEC 3.0-L V-6 turbodiesel |
| SAE Hp | 188 @ 3,800 rpm |
| Torque | 325 lb-ft @ 1,400-2,400 rpm |
| Transmission | Five-speed automatic |
| Tires | LT215/85R16 |
| Wheelbase | 170.3" |
| Brakes, Front/Rear | Ventilated disc/disc |
| Suspension, Front/Rear | Strut/leaf |
| Fuel Capacity | 24.5 gal |
| Warranty | 5 year/60,000 mile limited warranty on upfit with a nontransferable lifetime powertrain warranty (third party), plus the factory warranty from Mercedes-Benz, Basic 3 year/36,000 mile plus 5 year/100,000 mile powertrain |

Coach

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Exterior Length | 24' 6" |
| Exterior Width | 6' 6" |
| Exterior Height | 9' 6" |
| Interior Width | 5' 4" |
| Interior Height | 6' 4" |
| Construction | Steel van body, composite floor, foil roof insulation |
| Freshwater Capacity | 30 gal |
| Black-Water Capacity | 12 gal |
| Gray-Water Capacity | 20 gal |
| Hot-Water Capacity | 2.6 gal |
| Air Conditioner | 13,500 Btu |
| Furnace | Truma Combi |
| Refrigerator | 3.1 cu-ft AC/DC |
| Inverter/Charger | 2,000 watt |
| Batteries | (1) 12-volt chassis, (2) 12-volt AGM coach |
| AC Generator | Onan 2.8 kW LP-gas |
| MSRP | \$149,900 |
| MSRP as Tested | \$149,900 |
| Warranty | Limited 5 years/60,000 miles |

Wet Weight

(Water, heater and fuel tanks full; no supplies or passengers)

| | |
|------------|-----------|
| Front Axle | 3,500 lbs |
| Rear Axle | 6,100 lbs |
| Total | 9,600 lbs |

Chassis Ratings

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| GAWR, F/R | 4,080 lbs/7,720 lbs |
| GVWR/GCWR | 11,030 lbs/15,250 lbs |
| ROCCC | 1,430 lbs |

| | |
|-------|--|
| GAWR | Gross Axle Weight Rating |
| GVWR | Gross Vehicle Weight Rating |
| GCWR | Gross Combined Weight Rating |
| ROCCC | Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity (full water, no passengers) |

removable, color-coordinated floor mats for the cockpit and the aisle floor.

The galley is, as you'd expect, tiny, and simple cooking chores can be handled adequately. It features a solid-surface 20-by-48-inch countertop with a Dometic glass-top sink with fold-down faucet, a single-burner induction cooktop and beneath, a Norcold 3.1-cubic-foot AC/DC refrigerator/freezer. Above are a small cabinet and a High Pointe 0.9-cubic-foot microwave oven. Below, three drawers with flush-mount push-button locks allow for ample storage of cooking utensils.

The wet bath is a bit cramped but well-appointed with a chrome shower, Thetford ceramic toilet and a heavy textured-glass shower door with chrome hinges and latch. A small exhaust fan built into the roof makes ventilation a breeze, though head and shoulder room will be an issue for those standing 6 feet and taller.

Grand Coach has packed in the utility systems to cover every situation. AC power is provided by either the 30-amp shorepower cord or 15-amp shorepower cord adapter (which requires your own extension cord), but is ideal for a quick plug-in at home to charge batteries and keep the fridge cold; a 2-kW inverter; or an Onan LP-gas-powered 2.5-kW genset. DC power is provided by two Kinetik 3,800-watt AGM batteries, mounted under the rear floor, and tied in to the GoPower IC 2000 inverter/charger. The system is also fed by a 160-watt rooftop GoPower solar charging system.

The water system is designed for all-season, all-location use. The freshwater, gray- and black-water holding tanks are protected from freezing with Ultra-Heat holding-tank heaters. These heaters are powered by 12-volt DC so, if you're dry camping, you'll need to ensure the batteries are conditioned properly. The holding tanks drain through a built-in Thetford Sani-Con macerator system with an electric hose reel and electrically operated holding-tank valves, all controlled from an outside panel. Both holding tanks also have built-in tank flushers to make sure they're completely clean.

Grand Coach motorhomes have what the company calls SmartCamp Technology, which includes a water system that, according to Connors, will filter the water into bottled-water quality at the tap. This special system includes a fine-particulate filter and an ozone treatment process, and features a special antimicrobial freshwater tank. Additionally, the motorhome can be configured for dry-camping capabilities for up to seven days with the optional lithium-ion generator system.

Heat and hot water are provided by a Truma Combi unit, which combines a 2.6-gallon water heater and furnace in one, all controlled by a digital control panel. Further, the rear of the coach is served by a Dometic 13,500-Btu rooftop air conditioner with digital thermostat, as well as a rear, limo-style automotive air-conditioning system to use while on the road for the comfort of rear passengers. The digital control panel for this system is in the rear by the couch, and we'd love to see an additional panel up front so the driver can also have control of the system. Once the engine is turned off, the system shuts down and defaults to off, requiring a trip to the back to turn it on again on a hot day. The Dometic roof air conditioner will run from the standard 2.8-kW Onan LP-gas-powered generator; however, the energy management system cuts off AC power to the rest of the motorhome when the air conditioner is running.

We found the overall quality of the new CapeCod to be excellent, backed up by an extended lifetime, nontransferable powertrain warranty and a five-year, 60,000-mile limited coach warranty. Driving the CapeCod is comfortable and relaxing, with plenty of power to handle most driving conditions, and livability is great, considering its size limitations. It was a perfect fit for a visit to its namesake, and if you're looking for a Class B touring motorhome of this caliber and price, the Grand Coach CapeCod may be a perfect fit for you. **M**

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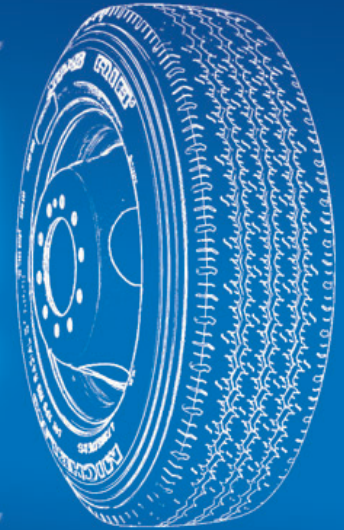
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TIRES 101

GETTING BACK TO THE BASICS IS CRITICAL FOR PROPER SELECTION, INSPECTION, MAINTENANCE AND PERFORMANCE

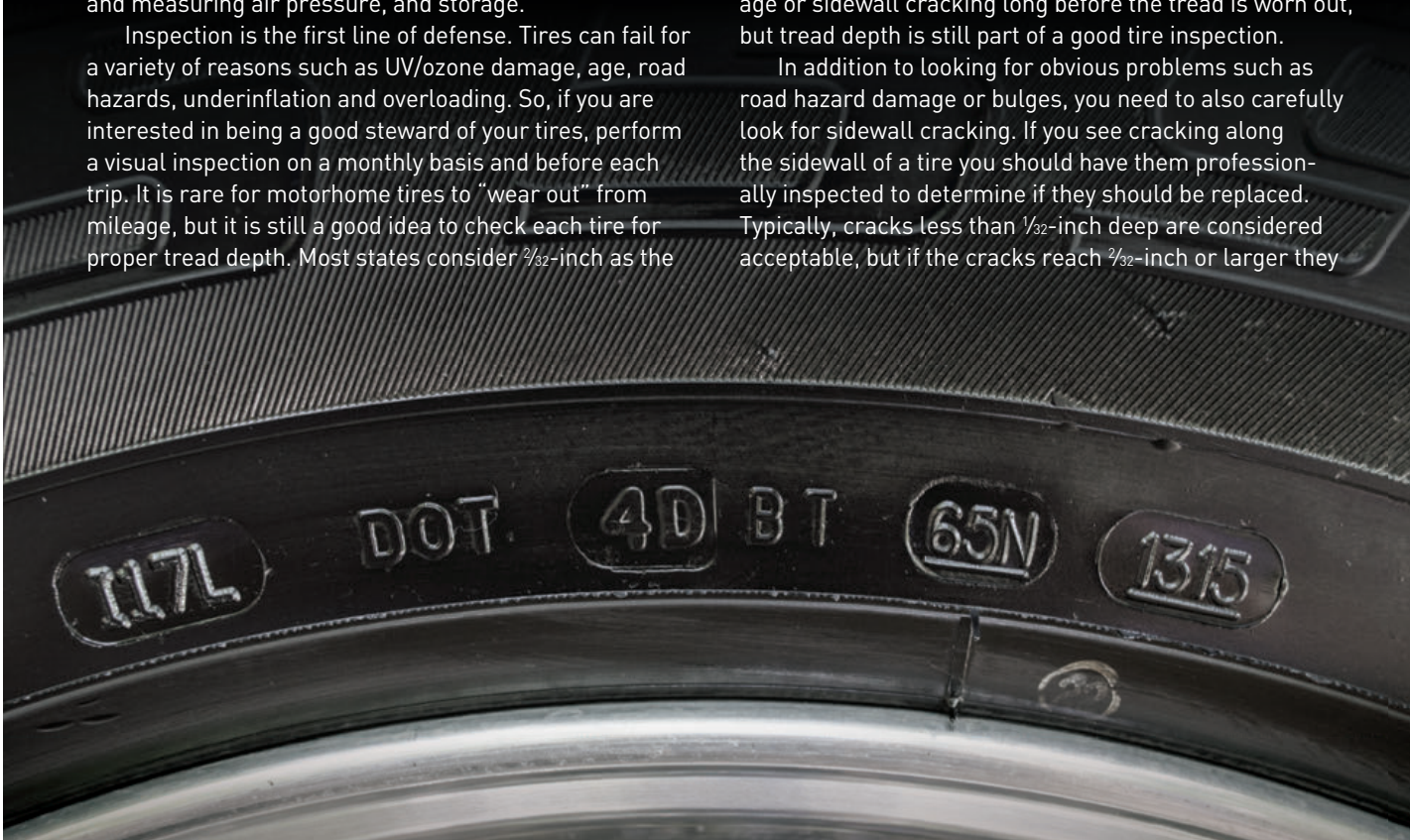


Big tires, as on a motorhome, mean big money. Understanding your motorhome's tires and taking care of them can save you a lot of cash in the short and long runs, and minimize problems on the road. There are several aspects of tires that owners need to understand. Tire knowledge can be broken into several categories such as, inspection, DOT date codes, load ranges, sizes, care/cleaning, determining and measuring air pressure, and storage.

Inspection is the first line of defense. Tires can fail for a variety of reasons such as UV/ozone damage, age, road hazards, underinflation and overloading. So, if you are interested in being a good steward of your tires, perform a visual inspection on a monthly basis and before each trip. It is rare for motorhome tires to "wear out" from mileage, but it is still a good idea to check each tire for proper tread depth. Most states consider $\frac{2}{32}$ -inch as the

very bottom of acceptable for tread depth, but on heavy vehicles with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of more than 10,000 pounds, many states require replacement at $\frac{4}{32}$ -inch on the front axle (steer) tires. Frankly, $\frac{4}{32}$ -inch is safer to use as the replacement point on all tire positions for motorhomes. The risk and cost of tire failure is just too high to drive around on old or worn-out tires. For 95 percent of motorhome owners, tires will be replaced from age or sidewall cracking long before the tread is worn out, but tread depth is still part of a good tire inspection.

In addition to looking for obvious problems such as road hazard damage or bulges, you need to also carefully look for sidewall cracking. If you see cracking along the sidewall of a tire you should have them professionally inspected to determine if they should be replaced. Typically, cracks less than $\frac{1}{32}$ -inch deep are considered acceptable, but if the cracks reach $\frac{2}{32}$ -inch or larger they



need to be replaced. Also, if you are able to see the belts or plies of the tires through the cracks, the tires should be replaced. Sidewall cracking can be caused by many factors such as UV damage, improper cleaning chemicals and improper use of tire dressings that contain petroleum distillates, as well as due to environmental ozone and inactivity/improper storage.

While we are on the topic of tire life and inspection, another important aspect is the DOT date code on the tire. Most manufacturers state that 10 years is the absolute maximum that a tire should be in use, as long as it has been properly maintained, and preferably covered while in storage. This time limit is from the date of manufacture of the tire, not the date you installed them or purchased the coach. There is a DOT date code on each tire but it could be on the inside or the outside sidewall, so you may have to look on both sides to find it. When buying new tires, personally check the date codes to make sure they are the newest possible. If you allow tires that are already 1 or 2 years old due to sitting in a warehouse to be installed on your motorhome, you have basically bought tires that are already 10-20 percent used up in terms of their useful life. With the expense of tires, that is a costly mistake that can be avoided.

Proper cleaning and caring for your tires are other important parts of making tires last as long as possible. Most tire manufacturers suggest that tires be cleaned with a mild soap. If you are going to use a tire dressing, use one that does not contain petroleum distillates, alcohol or silicone, all of which can be harmful to the rubber used in tires. You would think that all tire dressings would be free of chemicals that can lead to deterioration, but that's not the case. Many commercially available tire dressings are aimed specifically at the automotive industry, where tires quickly wear out in a few years due to tread wear. Motorhome tires usually fail from sidewall damage, overloading/underinflation or age. Sidewall damage can be caused by improper chemicals being used on the tires. So when selecting cleaners and tire dressings make sure they do not contain the chemicals mentioned above. Proper cleaners and tire dressings may be a little more difficult to locate at the local auto parts store but the extra effort will lead to better longevity.

The next facet of tire ownership is determining the correct air pressure for the load and size of the tires and then maintaining it. Tires are made to support a maximum specified load at a given tire pressure and it is important to maintain that pressure in order to achieve the best tire life and ride/handling of your motorhome. The first step in this process is determining the load range of the tires and then obtaining the load/inflation chart from the tire manufacturer. Motorhome tires are usually sold in load ranges

We downloaded a load/inflation chart for these tires — which are 295/75R22.5 load range G, Firestone FS591s — and, using the weight of the coach and size of the tires, were able to determine the ideal inflation pressure.



Above: In order to determine the correct inflation pressure for a motorhome's tires, you need to know the size and load range of tires installed on the coach. That info is shown here on the sidewall of the tire.

such as E, F, G, H, J or L. The load range is molded into the sidewall so it should be easy to find. Once you have the tire brand, size and load range, you can then go to the tire manufacturer's website and obtain the load/inflation chart. When looking at the tire pressure chart make sure you note that tire information on the chart is listed according to the load range of the tire and the wheel size, as well as the position of the tire. Tires used in a dual configuration are automatically downgraded on weight capacity compared to the same tire used in a single tire position.

When shopping for new tires it's also important to select a tire size that's matched to the pressure rating of the wheel

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Tire Load Limits (kg./lb.) at various Cold Inflation Pressures (Pressures Listed in the Minimum for the Load)

| TIRE SIZE DESIGNATION | CONFIGURATION | S.P.A. (PSI) | Tire Load Limits (kg./lb.) at various Cold Inflation Pressures (Pressures Listed in the Minimum for the Load) | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------|---|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | | | 480 | 520 | 560 | 600 | 620 | 660 | 690 | 730 | 760 | 790 | 820 | 860 |
| 275/70R18.5 | DUAL | 70 | 1800 | 1920 | 2040 | 2160 | 2280 | 2400 | 2520 | 2640 | 2760 | 2880 | 3000 | 3120 |
| | SINGLE | 70 | 900 | 960 | 1020 | 1080 | 1140 | 1200 | 1260 | 1320 | 1380 | 1440 | 1500 | 1560 |
| 275/70R18.5 | DUAL | 75 | 1920 | 2040 | 2160 | 2280 | 2400 | 2520 | 2640 | 2760 | 2880 | 3000 | 3120 | 3240 |
| | SINGLE | 75 | 960 | 1020 | 1080 | 1140 | 1200 | 1260 | 1320 | 1380 | 1440 | 1500 | 1560 | 1620 |
| 295/75R22.5 | DUAL | 70 | 2700 | 2820 | 2940 | 3060 | 3180 | 3300 | 3420 | 3540 | 3660 | 3780 | 3900 | 4020 |
| | SINGLE | 70 | 1350 | 1410 | 1470 | 1530 | 1590 | 1650 | 1710 | 1770 | 1830 | 1890 | 1950 | 2010 |
| 295/75R22.5 | DUAL | 75 | 2820 | 2940 | 3060 | 3180 | 3300 | 3420 | 3540 | 3660 | 3780 | 3900 | 4020 | 4140 |
| | SINGLE | 75 | 1410 | 1470 | 1530 | 1590 | 1650 | 1710 | 1770 | 1830 | 1890 | 1950 | 2010 | 2070 |
| 295/75R22.5 | DUAL | 80 | 3060 | 3180 | 3300 | 3420 | 3540 | 3660 | 3780 | 3900 | 4020 | 4140 | 4260 | 4380 |
| | SINGLE | 80 | 1530 | 1590 | 1650 | 1710 | 1770 | 1830 | 1890 | 1950 | 2010 | 2070 | 2130 | 2190 |

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Before departing on a trip it is always a good idea to check the pressure in each tire with a high-quality tire gauge. This is a Milton S-976 pressure gauge and has been verified to be accurate (above, left). On each wheel there should be a stamp showing the MAXIMUM weight and pressure that is allowed by the manufacturer (above, right). Never exceed this pressure or the maximum pressure stamped on the sidewall of the tire.

and wheel width. Not all wheels are rated to the maximum pressure that some tires are built to carry. Also, some big motorhome tires such as 315/80R22.5 require an oversize wheel width (9 inches versus a more typical 7.5-8.25 inches found on most diesel pushers).

Once you know the load range and tire size, and have the manufacturer's load/inflation chart, it's time to weigh the motorhome. Obtaining a "four-corner" weight by measuring the weight on each wheel position is best. On a standard single rear axle

motorhome this means you would obtain weights for left and right front axle positions independently, then do the same for the left and right rear axle. If you have a tag rear axle, then you need all six tire positions weighed. Not every scale can provide wheel position weights and there is a certain technique to determine this weight even at a scale that accommodates this process. See the article "Weigh To Go" in the January 2016 issue, or go online to <http://www.motorhome.com/rv-how-to/rv-tech-tips/weigh-to-go>, for the exact weighing procedures.

Alternatively, the motorhome can be weighed professionally at most large RV rallies where vendors will be there offering this service. If it's not possible to obtain the weight for each wheel position, then measure the axle weights, preferably with the coach loaded, fueled and ready for a trip, and add a 5 percent safety margin. Then select the proper pressure for your tire and weight from the manufacturer's load/inflation chart.

If you don't already have an accurate tire gauge for measuring pressure, make it a priority to buy one. If you have an old gauge and you are not sure of its accuracy, take it to a large commercial tire dealer and have it checked against a master gauge. Usually this can be done at no charge.

It may seem obvious, but be sure your motorhome tires are balanced. Some tire shops think it's not

IF YOU DON'T ALREADY HAVE AN ACCURATE TIRE GAUGE FOR MEASURING PRESSURE, MAKE IT A PRIORITY TO BUY ONE.



[1] In order to clean the tire, first completely wet it, then spray thoroughly with a mild cleaner made specifically for tires such as this one from Griot's Garage. Some cleaners can damage rubber so be careful and don't use something that can harm your expensive tires. [2] Next you should use a medium-to-soft-bristle brush to scrub the tires to help remove all the dirt and road grime, then rinse thoroughly. [3] The next step is to dry the tires. We suggest that you use a towel or microfiber cloth. [4] In order to protect the rubber from UV rays use a high-quality tire dressing such as 303 Aerospace Protectant. Many tire dressings contain ingredients such as silicone or petroleum distillates that are not suitable for motorhome tires. So be careful and don't assume that all products sold at the local auto parts store are suitable. [5] After spraying on the 303 protectant, wipe off the excess with a microfiber towel to reveal a beautiful matte finish that is protected from UV damage for many weeks.

necessary on a larger vehicle, such as a motorhome or commercial truck, but balancing your coach tires reaps the same benefits as having your family car tires balanced. These benefits include, for example, a smoother ride, reduced bearing and suspension wear and tear, and longer tire tread life.

Storage of a motorhome is necessary for many of us who are not able to travel in our motorhomes all year. If you store your motorhome, there are procedures to help preserve the tires while not in use. If you are a full-timer and park your coach for three or more months, consider that your tires are in storage. The first element of defense for tires in storage is to protect them from UV damage. This is easily done by using tire covers. If you are traveling and only stopping for a few days, then it is not necessary to cover the tires, but using a dressing (without petroleum distillates) with a UV inhibitor is suggested. If you are stopping for a few weeks or months, the tires should be completely covered.

Most manufacturers also suggest that the tires be inflated to the maximum rating when stored. Just make sure you reset the pressure before you travel again. The maximum pressure information is usually stamped on the wheel and molded on the sidewall of the tire, so use the lower of the two. When storing your coach, it's best to park on a level surface that's free of standing water. If you decide to use something to separate the tires from the parking surface (Michelin suggests plastic or wood), make sure the separator is wider than the tire footprint in both directions so that the tires are completely supported. This is necessary if you have a poor parking surface or if there's standing water that needs to be kept away from the tire.

Understanding and maintaining tires may seem like a lot of work but if you have ever had a blowout or a flat tire you may have a better appreciation of the importance of tires and their effect on motorhome travel. Take care of them and they will provide many years of service. **M**



Left: If you plan on keeping your tires in top condition, then you should always cover them with a tire cover anytime you are parked. Not only will this shield the rubber from UV damage, it helps keep the tires and wheels clean.



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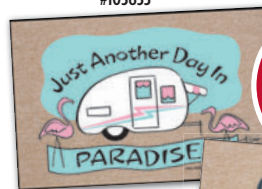
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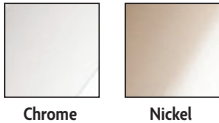
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THE AIR IN THERE

MONITORING TIRE PRESSURE AND TEMPERATURE IS EASY USING ONE OF THESE AFTERMARKET SYSTEMS

Though tires may seem to be little more than round rubber shapes surrounding the wheels on our motorhomes and dinghy vehicles, careful measurements and quite a bit of science go into their manufacture. Tires must meet vehicle-specific sizes, shape, structure and materials in order to help provide the road grip necessary for safe handling, operation and stopping distances, in addition to achieving the optimum fuel economy. But all the planning from all the engineers in white lab coats in the world can be for naught if those tires are improperly inflated.

An underinflated tire, especially, can cause a variety of problems, as it can quickly heat up and fail, causing loss of control, potentially leading to expensive repairs or dangerous situations for the driver and the others on the road.

Checking the tire pressure as part of your predeparture checklist is of paramount importance, as the

very nature of the rubber compounds used in their construction means the pressure will fluctuate. This, in addition to weather conditions, potholes, road debris, curb collisions and the occasional workshop nail in the driveway, means tires can be susceptible to damage; the problem is, we usually notice only after it's too late (especially in the case of inner-mounted duals).

But apart from a visual inspection in camp, tire pressure should also be monitored while on the road. The best way to do that, naturally, is using a tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS). Chances are your later-model motorhome has some sort of sensor system in place (and, as of September 2007, all new light motor vehicles are required to have one). But for those motorhomes or dinghies that aren't so equipped, monitoring the tires on your vehicle is easy to achieve from the cab using one of the aftermarket systems detailed in the pages that follow.



Advantage PressurePro

Advantage PressurePro has provided TPMS solutions for more than 26 years. PressurePro's stand-alone units utilize valve-stem-mounted sensors on each tire and an easy-to-read display that's powered in-cab via a 12-volt DC source. The PULSE TPMS provides audible and visual alerts for low pressure, high pressure, high temperature and a cross-axle alert. The PULSE also arms users with fully customizable alert options, allowing customers to adjust alert levels and triggers to fit their specific needs. The PULSE can monitor up to 80 tires on up to five stored vehicles, and offers data logging via an SD card storage. It also allows tethering to other communication devices and integration to original equipment screen options. MSRP: \$550 (four-sensor system). Additional sensors are \$50 each.

Advantage PressurePro
800-959-3505, www.pressurepro.us



Doran

Doran's 360RV Tire Pressure Monitoring System provides at-a-glance tire status updates with a Green Means Good indicator light. As long as the light is green, users are assured the system is working properly and all the tires are at the specified pressures. The valve-stem-mounted system monitors up to 36 tires, and the driver is also alerted through multiple alarms (audible, location, pressure, fast leak and warning symbol) so that low-tire-pressure problems can be addressed. Doran says installation can be accomplished without any special tools in about an hour, leaving no external antennas or exposed wires. An easy-to-use LCD screen display comes prewired with a 12-volt DC plug and is equipped with four-way navigational buttons. The 360RV system also features a sleep mode during which tire pressure is monitored, but potential warnings are withheld until the ignition is turned on, leading to an increase in battery life. MSRP: \$199.99-\$799.99 (two- to 14-sensor system).

Doran Manufacturing
866-816-7233, www.doranmfg.com



Dill Air Controls

Dill's TPMS provides real-time monitoring of temperature and air pressure readings from inside the tire using a valve and sensor design to transmit to a simple dashboard display. A flashing and audible alarm on the display alerts the driver in the event of an air pressure loss or an increase in temperature. The system also allows users to set their own pressure baseline for custom user interface, enabling the driver to take preventive action should he/she see their tire pressure declining. Dill's sensors can be utilized in all vehicles that are not equipped with TPMS as original equipment, up to as many as 10 wheels. The Dill TPMS is installed inside the tires, which the company says eliminates the worry of the cap being stolen or damaged by road hazards. MSRP: \$340 (four-wheel system); \$440 (six-sensor system).

Dill Air Control Products
919-692-2300, www.dillaircontrols.com

EEZ RV Products

The EezTire TPMS 515 System features a large 3½-inch monitor for improved at-a-glance use. The monitor is capable of



handling up to 22 tires and up to a robust 189 PSI for each position. The flow-through sensors are screwed into the valve stems and are powered by rechargeable lithium-ion batteries capable of holding a charge for up to 60 hours of continued use. The sensors are constructed with a theft-resistant

outer housing. Alerts can be set for low pressure, high pressure, rapid air loss and high temperature. In the event a tire pressure strays too far from the customizable preset baselines, an audible alarm, flashing red light and corresponding flashing icon on the monitor alert the driver of an

unsafe situation. An optional booster is available to increase the transmitting range to up to 53 feet. MSRP ranges from \$249 (four-sensor system) to \$499 (12-sensor system).

EEZ RV Products
928-317-8888, www.eezrvproducts.com

HawksHead Systems Inc.

HawksHead's Talon TPMS lineup offers valve-stem-mounted (cap or flow-through) monitoring for a variety of wheel configurations. The new Talon 6 Bi-Mode system is designed to monitor up to a maximum of six wheels on one screen in real time. The Talon 6 Bi-Mode does not scroll through each wheel; rather, it remains a static screen giving instant readings of both pressure and temperature visible to the operator. The system can be customized to preset tire readings, and alarms for high pressure, low pressure and high temperature alert drivers in the event of an incident. HawksHead also offers the Talon 22 for motorhome owners needing to monitor more than six tires (as with a tag-axle or dinghy-towing situation). All HawksHead systems offer Eco Sensors with replaceable batteries and do not require a special tool for installation. The monitors each have their own rechargeable battery packs for easy removal, or can be hardwired. MSRP for a base system (Talon 6 Bi-Mode or Talon 22) with four sensors is \$339.

Hawkshead Systems Inc.
888-321-8767, www.tpms.ca



Minder Research

TireMinder TPMS offer the choice of a smart-device-based tire monitor (TireMinder Smart TPMS) and a stand-alone system (TireMinder TM-77). The systems come with lightweight transmitters that check every six seconds for high pressure (20 percent above baseline), low pressure (15 percent below baseline), rapid pressure loss (3 PSI or more in two minutes or less), slow leak (loss of 6 PSI or more in 10 minutes or less) and high temperature (at or above 167 degrees Fahrenheit). TireMinder units also feature optional flow-through adapters and optional aluminum transmitters to prevent corrosion on aluminum valve stems. Included Rhino Signal Booster features clip-on connectors to be quickly attached to any 12-volt DC power source. Installation for a 10-tire system should take around 10 minutes, according to the company. TireMinder also offers an annual Battery Replacement Program for transmitter maintenance, through which customers can request batteries and O-rings directly from the company's website at no charge. And with local customer support and multiple service agents available, owners can rest assured that TireMinder will be there to help. MSRP: \$259-\$499.

Minder Research Inc.
772-463-6522, www.minderresearch.com

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RVi

Danko Manufacturing's RVi Tire Patrol TPMS offers a giant 7-inch display for a quick view of tire pressures, as well as pre-assigned sensors for each tire to ease in pairing and setup. Along with monitoring real-time pressure in the tires, Tire Patrol will alert users of a flat tire, low pressure and high tire temperature. Tire Patrol can monitor up to two vehicles, with up to 10 tires on each. The sensors are constructed using composite brass threads for increased durability and corrosion resistance. To help prolong battery life, the sensors can be set to a sleep mode (unless pressure is detected and the wheels are rotating). Tire Patrol is part of RVi's unique "Works with Command Center" line, which allows users virtually unlimited product expansion and currently is compatible with an RVibrake 3 supplemental braking system for a dinghy vehicle (sold separately) and RV Level app, plus the Command Center features a built-in travel checklist and Wi-Fi connectivity. MSRP: \$305-845.

RVi, a division of Danko Manufacturing
 800-815-2159, www.tirepatrol.com

Tire-SafeGuard

The Tire-SafeGuard TPMS continuously monitors vehicle tires and displays the pressure readings on the cab-mounted monitor. The system uses both visual and audio alarms to alert the drivers of low tire pressure, slow leaks, high tire pressure and high temperatures. Tire-SafeGuard can also monitor a dinghy vehicle's tires, a function that is accessible on a separate screen to help eliminate confusion. The flow-through valve-stem cap sensors are said to be waterproof and feature a replaceable battery. The large LCD monitor screen offers backlighting for easier viewing, and the company says no signal booster is required. Tire-SafeGuard offers technical support seven days a week. MSRP: \$279 (six-sensor system).

Tire-SafeGuard
 562-926-7123, www.tiresafeguard.com



TireTraker

The TireTraker TT-500 TPMS is equipped with a large, easy-to-read display that alerts the driver with both an audible and a visual alert of three different stages of low tire pressure, high pressure, high temperature and rapid leak situations in up to 22 wheel positions and pressures up to 232 PSI. No special tools are required for installation; setup is as simple as programming the monitor and screwing on the sensors to the valve stems, according to the company. The sensors are powered by replaceable batteries. Systems come complete with sensors, monitor, power cord, mounting bracket and locks. The TT-500 features a lifetime warranty and seven-day-per-week sales and technical support. MSRP: \$289 (four-sensor system); additional sensors can be purchased for \$35 each.

TireTraker
 866-200-9773, www.tiretraker.com



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^{**}Important Terms and Conditions: All prices, fees, charges, packages, programming, features, functionality and offers subject to change without notice.

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real-time pressure (from 10 PSI up to 175 PSI) and temperature, and notifies drivers of high or low pressure, a fast leak, high tire temperature and a low battery. The TST system utilizes a valve-stem-mounted sensor with internal technology similar to that of TPMS found on passenger cars and trucks. The system comes complete with two installation wrenches, four theft-proof sensors, a short antenna, a dashboard mounting bracket, a suction cup bracket, a 12-volt DC charger, a hardwire kit, detailed users manual and the on-board monitor display. TST offers a three-year warranty on all its monitoring systems. MSRP: \$259 (four-sensor system); extra sensors are available for \$100/pair.

Truck System Technologies
770-889-9102, <https://tsstruck.com>



Valor

Valor's TPMS displays individual tire and axle position for ease of use, and the internally mounted sensors measure temperature and pressure every four seconds and update the display every 10. The sensors are powered by a long-lasting battery and are installed on the wheel rims, keeping them safe from damage and theft. The Valor System has several warning alarms; temperature and pressure thresholds are set based on the vehicle and tire manufacturer's standards, and programmed into the display. The Valor TPMS can work with various OEM displays, or the included display that comes with a mounting bracket. MSRP starts around \$1,100 for a motorhome, plus installation.

Valor
800-568-9188, www.valortpms.com

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DIESEL CHASSIS MAINTENANCE

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YOUR MOTORHOME'S CHASSIS HAS BEEN DESIGNED TO LAST 450,000 MILES, BUT ONLY WITH PROPER, REGULAR MAINTENANCE

This article is the first in a two-part series on diesel motorhome chassis maintenance. For this series, we visited the plants to get firsthand information direct from the source. While we can't cover all the required maintenance in this article, we'll explain how easy it is to find the information and become knowledgeable about the procedures. We'll also give you a sneak peek into new technology coming down the pike for Freightliner Chassis that will revolutionize the motorhome owning and driving experience.

You just fell in love with — and bought or are considering buying — a beautiful diesel coach. The floorplan is amazing, the colors are stunning and there's storage galore. You're ready to hit the road, but you pause while looking at the cockpit instrumentation; you see more gauges and switches than you've ever seen before. And then you look at the center of the steering wheel, and there it is: the Freightliner logo. Gulp ... that's what those big truckers drive. How am I going to handle this? What am I going to have to do to take care of this?

Hundreds of motorhome enthusiasts have asked the same questions, and still manage to get out on the road and make wonderful memories with a big rig. In this case, Freightliner Custom Chassis has gone to extremes to make the ownership experience as easy and carlike as possible.

MotorHome recently traveled to Gaffney, South Carolina, to visit the headquarters and service center for Freightliner Custom Chassis Corp. (FCCC). We were greeted by Bryan Henke, the manager of product marketing, and Mike Cody, FCCC's senior service trainer.

We met at the company's state-of-the-art service and training center where the staff, dealership technicians and the personnel from some of its more than 450 branded service

centers throughout North America are kept up to date. In addition, the company's exclusive Camp Freightliner owner training courses are offered, supported by several service bays to work on the chassis, and campsites with hookups next to the building.

In conjunction with parent company Daimler (Mercedes-Benz), the company has been able to work diligently on instituting resources and technologies to make owning its chassis-equipped motorhomes easier and better. This relates not just to drivability, but also to maintenance, an essential part of the motorhome ownership experience. "We want

to make as many connections to service as possible, so the owner can enjoy the lifestyle, not servicing the motorhome," said Cody. To do this, the company has invested greatly in providing detailed resources to FCCC owners, so that their questions and concerns are addressed as quickly as possible. These include:

1. Owners can call Freightliner 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The company does not outsource calls. The phones are staffed by seasoned Freightliner Chassis technicians with an average tenure of 18 years.

2. When a customer purchases an FCCC coach, they are sent a welcome kit in the form of a custom-programmed, credit card-sized 24/7 Direct USB card. The card has the owner's name and VIN on it, and when they're plugged into a computer, all the manuals, diagrams and any other resources applicable to the individual chassis are provided. Included is an

FCCC'S PREMIUM DIESEL CHASSIS

Designed for high-end motorhomes, the SL series chassis' custom frame allows Class A manufacturers to choose nearly any floorplan and length. The chassis are available with a GVWR up to 54,000 pounds and either a Cummins ISX or a Detroit DD13 engine.





Far left: An abused air filter, blocked by an animal nest, caused severe engine damage. Left: Ignoring the air dryer can also have catastrophic consequences. Here's an air dryer cartridge that has failed, and the desiccant has come out of the element. This allowed excessive moisture to collect in the air system, requiring replacement of most of the system, costing thousands of dollars. Below: An FCCC-certified factory technician checks the ride height on a customer's motorhome.

FREIGHTLINER CUSTOM CHASSIS HAS GONE TO EXTREMES TO MAKE THE OWNERSHIP EXPERIENCE AS EASY AND CARLIKE AS POSSIBLE.



electronic service log to record the chassis maintenance. Pages for each maintenance interval are also included and easy to print out to hand to the service center.

3. Online resources are included, like access to Freightliner's DTNA Connect dealer data system which, when you're registered, will have all the technical data for your chassis. In fact, between DTNA and www.fccrv.com, all the data on your card is available.

4. Camp Freightliner courses 1 and 2 are available at the training center. Camp Freightliner is an in-depth classroom diesel-chassis training program. Cody, the company's senior trainer, offers a wealth of knowledge and experience, and shares information you'd be hard-pressed to find elsewhere. You'll leave after a few days with a big three-ring binder full of information, and a hat to hold all you've learned in your noggin!

5. Fireside Chats, which you'll find at various shows and rallies around the country, are mini-versions of the camp, which cover a lot of information in 90 minutes. Can't go to the seminar? The PowerPoint presentation PDF is available in the owner's section of FCCRV, and is also on your 24/7 card.

6. The 24/7 iPhone and Android apps are a quick resource to get you connected to FCCC in the event you have a question or problem, and include directions to the nearest Freightliner and Oasis service center.

The bread and butter of the maintenance program for Freightliner chassis was simplified beginning in 2007. The company and its vendors developed

and agreed to an annual maintenance schedule. The first visit to a service center is after six months or 6,000 miles, then 12 months or 12,000 miles, then annually thereafter, with specifically prescribed maintenance forms and procedures the technicians or the owner need to follow.

"Look, we have a warranty [the basic warranty is three years, 50,000 miles, but components of the chassis have different warranties, some much longer] and, sure, you need to do stuff for the warranty. But this is not my \$250,000-\$900,000 coach, it's yours. The chassis is designed to run 450,000-500,000 miles. If you do the maintenance we outline for you, you can keep that goal in mind," Cody says. "You don't have to do the maintenance yourself. You have to know when to have it done."

The company makes access to the service charts very simple. Not only are they included in the printed manual provided with the coach, they are on your 24/7 card, and are available in the owner's section of the www.fccrv.com website. If that is filled out, and you keep your receipts, you're all set. "There's lots of extra space on the 24/7 card, so we recommend owners log their service in the online maintenance log on the card, then create a folder called Maintenance Records where they can scan all their receipts and keep them in case they need them in the future," Henke says. "The paper receipts nowadays fade," Cody adds, "so be sure to scan them and put them in there."

Here's a list of top-10 items Freightliner Chassis owners commonly miss

or don't do, which can dramatically shorten the life of the coach, lead to breakdowns and cost thousands of dollars:

1. Tires. Henke and Cody heavily emphasize the importance of weighing the coach and adjusting the tire pressure according to the tire pressure chart. Follow the tire manufacturer's care guides precisely to get the best handling and longest life from the tires. (The charts are also on the 24/7 card.) Inside dual tires are often ignored and cause problems. Consider an aftermarket tire-pressure monitoring system (TPMS) if your FCCC chassis doesn't have the optional integrated one.

2. Fluids. Obviously, engine oil is important, but change all the fluids on the schedule as recommended, including coolant, transmission oil, rear differential fluid, etc. Fuel filters should be changed with the oil and filter.

3. Air cleaner. This is a big one. An air cleaner element for these engines is expensive, as Cody points out, but it is made of paper and glue, which will degrade over time. Then there's the critters that nest in them. "Failure to monitor and change the air filter can dust an engine," Cody says, while pointing to what he calls a "\$30,000 air filter."

4. Transmission fluid and filter changes. Allison transmissions often



Above: Changing the fuel filters (above left) should be done at every oil change, according to Cody. The Allison transmission has two circular filter cartridges — shown here on the bottom of the transmission pan. Follow the maintenance schedule for service intervals based on your particular model transmission. An important element in maintaining the air system is bleeding air from the system. Pictured here are two halyards (above right) that when pulled, open valves in the air tanks to release accumulated moisture. These should be pulled open daily for 15 seconds while traveling, unless your coach is equipped with automatic bleeders, in which case once per month should suffice. A third halyard should be at the rear of the chassis.

have two elements, and plenty of fluid. This service will greatly extend the life of the transmission.

5. Coolant. Changing the coolant is essential. In the old days, testing could extend coolant life, but today's coolants have changed that paradigm and testing isn't as helpful. Color is immaterial, as contaminants and acids can still be in the coolant, eating at the engine and cooling system.

6. Air brakes and air dryer. People commonly don't pull the drain halyards to remove excess moisture from the tanks, and if they don't change the desiccant filter, they can find themselves in a pickle trying to stop. Brake pads today are designed for much heavier loads, and while they and the slack adjusters require inspection, changing them will be much less frequent than required by commercial vehicles.

7. Chassis lubrication. FCCC has a diagram of all the lube points on the chassis, and these points all need to be hit according to the maintenance schedule.

8. Batteries. Motorhome batteries, especially when stored in freezing conditions, are often abused, and can freeze and crack. Batteries need to be properly conditioned and maintained in storage or be removed from the coach for the winter and kept in a climate-controlled space.

9. Hoses/leaks. Many owners ignore the hoses and other leaks on their engines instead of getting them fixed, provided they even know about them. Again, these are covered in the prescribed maintenance charts.

10. Towing. Have the FCCC towing guide available in the event your coach needs to be towed because of a breakdown. If you don't have it, call FCCC's 24/7 hotline, and operators can walk the tow-truck personnel through the process.

While the company has worked to make ownership as simple and convenient as possible, it's not resting on its laurels. Henke talked about some of the new technology that is coming down the road for FCCC.

"Mercedes-Benz is part of Daimler, our parent company, and I own one. I drive the car, but I don't worry about it. The car tells me, 'In 10,000 miles you'll need a Schedule A.' I don't know what a Schedule A is, but the car and my dealer do. The car is automated and tells me what it needs, and when. I can even get a text and email, which is becoming



WANT TO KNOW MORE?

Many resources on maintenance procedures and tech support are available to Freightliner owners. These include the original owner's manuals, the exclusive 24/7 data card, the Camp Freightliner service book, www.fccrv.com, DTNA Connect and the company's 24/7/365 factory-staffed customer service center.



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a customer expectation, and that's where I want to go," Henke explains.

To that end, Freightliner is introducing some new technologies. The OptiView is a computer-based, fully digital dashboard system, introduced at the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA) trade show last December in Louisville, Kentucky. This information system, reminiscent of the system on an Airbus

A380 passenger jet, incorporates all the live data during the operation of the coach, multiview cameras and diagnostic data. Further, the system can contain all coach documentation and display it on the screen, in addition to instructional videos, and so on. The goal, according to Henke, is to be easy to use and interactive, and again, to allow the owner to enjoy the RV lifestyle and not be concerned with

the servicing of the motorhome.

Further development of the 24/7 smartphone app is also in the works, according to Henke. The app can utilize the device's GPS to contact an owner with a problem and allow customer service personnel to know the exact location and send help, if needed. The company is also considering adding a "Top 50 Questions" list that will be a regularly updated list of technical concerns and solutions, which owners can review on the road. Obviously, the company is quite comfortable integrating new technologies to improve the motorhome owning experience.

One last thing Henke and Cody emphasize focuses on the use of aftermarket components. "RVers are bombarded with lots of aftermarket products — like filters and suspension parts — for their RVs to correct performance and handling issues, improve longevity, or be a lower-cost option to OEM parts," Henke says. "Before buying into one of these products, call us. We have put a lot of effort and investment into our parts for our chassis, and they're usually the best option for several reasons. If there's an operational issue, it may be a simple fix that doesn't require a big aftermarket investment, and we can help you with that."

Purchasing and owning a big diesel-pusher motorhome is different, but doesn't have to be difficult or intimidating, especially with the support of a company like FCCC, and by following the simple annual chassis maintenance schedules. **M**



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By Ed Bolduc

YOUR OWN OASIS

Maintaining your motorhome's hydronic heating system will help keep the interior warm on chilly nights

Many luxury diesel coaches are equipped with diesel hydronic heating systems that provide interior heating and on-demand hot water. Diesel hydronic heating systems are often used in all-electric motorhomes helping to eliminate the need for LP-gas. One such system, the Oasis CH50M hydronic componentry, manufactured by International Thermal Research (ITR), is standard in the test Newmar Dutch Star we used to dissect how the system works.

Oasis heating systems are offered in six models with burner outputs of up to 85,000 Btu. The CH50M's diesel burner is rated at 50,000 Btu. The system works by drawing diesel fuel from the motorhome's tank and igniting it in a sealed burner to heat a solution of boiler antifreeze and water. The heated coolant is pumped into the coach's interior and through several small radiators. Electric fans are used to blow air through the radiators, heating the motorhome. The fan-assisted radiators are referred to as cabin fan heaters.

The CH50M is designed with modular components that are easier to install than a larger single heating unit. The Oasis heating module is responsible for heating the coolant. The module uses two sources of heat: the diesel burner (the primary heat source) and two 120-volt AC, 1,500-watt immersion electric heating elements that provide up to 10,000 Btu of supplemental heat

while saving fuel when the coach is connected to shorepower. The heating module in this Dutch Star is located in a driver's-side exterior compartment.

The heating module is connected to the DM12 distribution module with two circulating hoses. The distribution module contains two loop pumps that circulate heated coolant through two heating loops to the cabin fan heaters. Domestic hot water is also provided by the distribution module. Heated coolant is circulated through a heat exchanger to heat the water. The coolant and water travel through separate passages in the heat exchanger, transferring heat from the coolant to the water without the two fluids mixing.

A third set of passages in the heat exchanger are connected to the motorhome engine's cooling system, allowing waste heat from the engine to provide a third heating source. The distribution module in this Dutch Star is on the

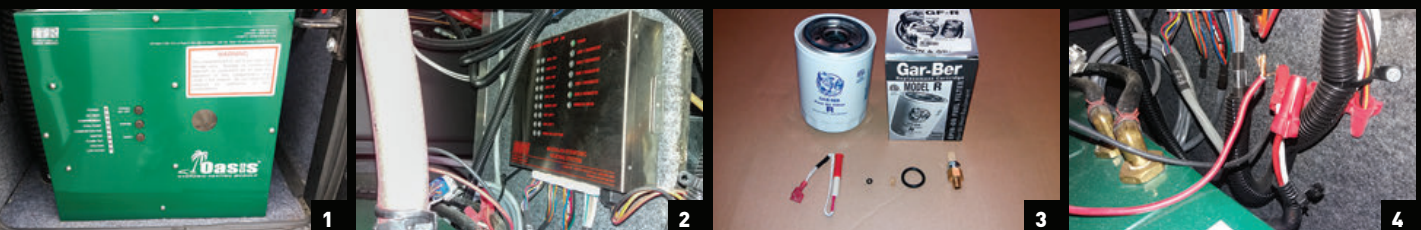
driver's side, located behind the exterior compartment that holds the shorepower cord reel. There is a wall behind the reel and the distribution module is located on the other side of the wall.

The distribution module's electrical components are controlled by the Oasis zone board. The zone board has several green LEDs that indicate which components are activated. Red LEDs indicate if a fuse powering a component has blown.

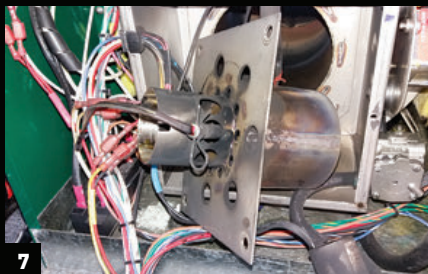
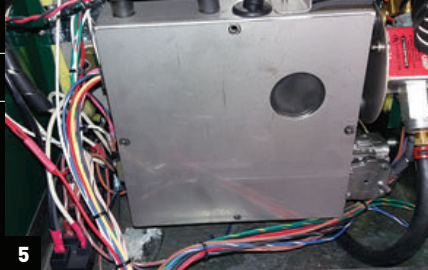
A unique low-fuel-pressure system helps reduce the smoke and odor that diesel boilers can produce. The boiler houses several components responsible for the combustion process. The fuel pump draws fuel from the coach's fuel tank and pumps it to a pressure regulator. Pressurized air, supplied by a compressor, enters the fuel nozzle and passes over the tip, where it produces negative pressure, allowing fuel from the regulator to be drawn through the fuel solenoid and into the fuel nozzle. The air pressure combines with the fuel, forming a cone-shaped spray of fuel that enters the combustion chamber.

The fuel spray then comes in contact with the igniter. The igniter

[1] The Oasis heating module power button and status LEDs are located on its front cover. The sight glass is used to check the burner's flame. [2] LEDs on the distribution module zone board indicate which components are operating and if any fuses are blown. [3] The annual kit includes filters, O-rings and an igniter. [4] The red power wire to the heating module was disconnected. The feed wire was capped with a wire nut to prevent blowing a fuse.

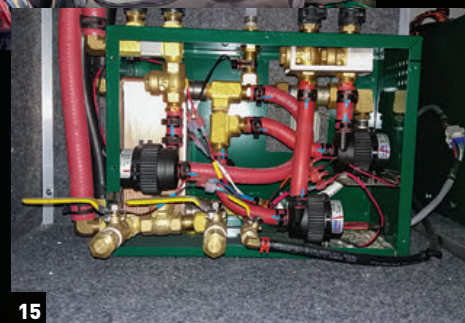
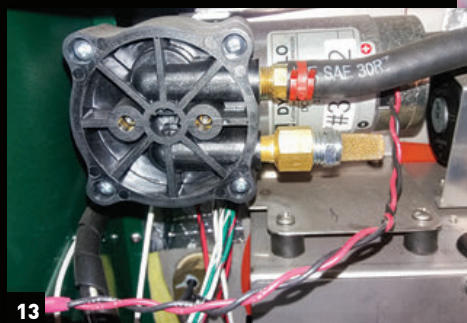


[5] The burner box cover is held in place with four screws. The fuel pump and fuel regulator are located on the right side of the burner box. [6] With the cover removed, the fuel solenoid, fuel block, igniter, burner and digital flame sensor can be seen. [7] The burner is removed for cleaning and to give access to the combustion chamber. A small amount of buildup was easily removed. [8] The fuel block was removed from the burner and cleaned. The nozzle can now be removed from the fuel block. [9] The nozzle is disassembled and cleaned with carburetor cleaner. The stem is on the left, the distribution orifice is in the middle and the cone is on the right. [10] Looking down the opening in the fuel block, the stone filter can be seen. [11] The igniter is secured to the burner with a spring clip. [12] All components are cleaned or replaced, and the burner is reassembled.



glows red-hot when electricity passes through it, igniting the fuel. A fan blows air into the combustion chamber, ensuring complete burning of the diesel and the exhausting of combustion gases. The CH50M heating module holds an 8.2-gallon 50/50 coolant mixture of nontoxic propylene-glycol-based antifreeze and water. The coolant is heated by the burning diesel and circulated to the DM12 distribution module to provide heat and hot water.

Like any heating appliance, the



Oasis system requires periodic maintenance. Monthly, annual, three-year and five-year maintenance intervals are recommended. Monthly maintenance consists of simple checks that the owner can perform. Inspect all hoses, tubing and fittings for cracking, splitting or coolant leaks. The overflow bottle, located behind the rear hood on the Dutch Star, should be checked for sufficient coolant. A line on the overflow bottle indicates the minimum and maximum fluid levels when the coolant is cold. If the coolant level is checked when it's hot, the bottle

should be three-quarters full. If it's necessary to add coolant, do so only when the system is cold, without exceeding the maximum coolant line. Because different brands of boiler antifreeze have different chemical compositions, use only the brand specified by the manufacturer when topping off. The heating module had a label indicating Century antifreeze was used by Newmar. If you are unsure of the antifreeze brand

in your heating system, contact the dealer or the coach's manufacturer. The exhaust, fuel system and flexible air-intake systems should be thoroughly checked for damage and wear. An annual service should be performed regardless of how many hours the heating system was used the previous year. Before performing any service, verify that the heating system is functioning properly. Turn the burner switch on the remote panel to the ON

in your heating system, contact the dealer or the coach's manufacturer. The exhaust, fuel system and flexible air-intake systems should be thoroughly checked for damage and wear. An annual service should be performed regardless of how many hours the heating system was used the previous year. Before performing any service, verify that the heating system is functioning properly. Turn the burner switch on the remote panel to the ON

position and make sure the boiler ignites by looking through the sight glass in the heating module cover to check for a flame. On the remote panel, the heating module fault and zone fault LEDs should be off. If the module fault LED is illuminated, check the LED indicators on the front of the heating module. If the zone fault LED is on, check the front of the zone control board for fault indications.

The heating module status indicators will identify problems detected during the ignition cycle. The LEDs for the compressor, fuel pump, combustion fan and igniter are a steady green when the component is on and flash when an electrical fault is detected. The flame out, voltage and low water LEDs will turn a steady red color in the event of a fault. If no faults are found, the service can be started.

Service kits are available from retailers or directly from ITR. The one-year service kit for the CH50M in the Newmar (MSRP \$100.85) includes an igniter, a Gerber fuel filter and O-ring, a nozzle filter, a compressor filter and an O-ring for the nozzle. A three-year kit includes all of the above plus a digital flame sensor (MSRP \$240.85). The five-year kit is the same as the three-year kit, but includes a nozzle (MSRP \$330.85).

First, verify that the burner switch on the remote panel and the power switch on the heating module are off. For safety reasons, 12-volt DC power should be shut off to the module by disconnecting the red power wire. This eliminates the chance of the heating module powering on during servicing. Remove the front cover of the heating module by unscrewing the Phillips-head screws located along the edge of the top, bottom and sides of the cover. Once the cover is removed, the air filter attached to the air compressor can be replaced using an open-ended wrench.

Then remove the burner box cover by unscrewing the four screws that hold it in place. We removed the fuel block by loosening the thumb lock with pliers and then pulling it straight out. The nozzle can be removed from the fuel

block with a $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch wrench. Once the nozzle is removed, a stone filter in the fuel block's nozzle hole can be removed by turning the fuel block upside down and tapping it with a wrench.

Cleaning the nozzle requires two wrenches. A $\frac{5}{8}$ -inch wrench is placed on the nozzle's cone and an adjustable wrench on the stem. The stem is unscrewed from the cone with the stem pointed up. Once the stem is removed, the cone is turned upside down, allowing the distributor orifice to come out. After disassembling the nozzle clean it with carburetor or brake cleaner. A cotton swab can be used to clean interior surfaces. The small opening in the distributor orifice is precisely machined to control the amount of fuel passing through it. Anything placed in the hole, including thin wire, welding tip cleaners or small drill bits, could enlarge or distort the opening, causing a rich fuel mixture or an ignition failure.

After the nozzle is cleaned, reassemble it. The easiest method is to hold the stem with the opening for the distributor orifice facing up, then place the orifice in the opening and screw the cone onto the stem. The O-ring on the stem will need to be replaced. A pick-tool will help remove and install the O-rings. Before reinstalling the nozzle in the fuel block, install the new stone filter included with the service kit. A pick-tool or small screwdriver is helpful to properly seat the filter. Lubricate the O-ring with diesel before reinstalling the nozzle in the fuel block.

Now see if the combustion chamber needs to be cleaned. Using a flashlight, look through the holes in the burner to check for dirt and debris in the chamber. If cleaning is necessary, use a $\frac{7}{16}$ -inch driver to remove the four nuts holding the burner in and disconnect the two igniter wires. Then pull the burner out. Clean the combustion chamber with a Scotch-Brite pad or steel wool to loosen built-up dirt, and vacuum up any debris. The burner and fuel block can be cleaned with carburetor or brake cleaner. Once clean, reinstall

the burner.

The igniter is replaced by pulling the pin clip out and removing the igniter. The new igniter comes with a red safety cap on the tip that should be pulled straight out when it's removed to avoid damaging the igniter. Disconnect the igniter wires and install the new igniter. The igniter wires have a female connection on one wire and a male connector on the other so the wires can't be incorrectly connected. The orientation of the igniter is important. While looking through the opening in the burner, the igniter loop should be facing toward you. If the igniter is turned sideways, it will not function properly.

Then the fuel block is ready to be reinstalled in the burner and the burner box cover reinstalled, making sure the sight glass is in the upper right corner. The final step is to replace the diesel fuel filter. The fuel filter in the Dutch Star was located under the front hood, to the right of the generator.

Remove the filter with a filter wrench. Once the filter is removed, the O-ring on the threaded stem of the filter housing can be replaced. The new filter should be filled with diesel and the seal lubricated before installation. Write the date on the filter for a quick reference of when the next annual service is due.

ITR recommends saving the old igniter and digital flame sensor if they were functioning properly before being removed; in the event of a failure, these parts could be used temporarily.

The Oasis system should be started periodically when the motorhome is not in use. ITR recommends running the system at least every four to six weeks allowing the diesel burner to reach operating temperature.

Maintaining the CH50M Oasis heating system in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations will help to ensure reliable operation when it's time to hit the road. **M**

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By Bob Livingston

AN ILLUMINATING IDEA

NEW NIGHTHAWK TOW BAR FROM ROADMASTER ADDS A NEATLY EMBEDDED LED STRIP TO EACH ARM FOR BETTER VISIBILITY AFTER DARK

Towing a dinghy vehicle behind a motorhome has become rather commonplace these days, and doing so with a hitch receiver-mounted tow bar has been adopted as the method of choice among owners. Tow bars connected to the motorhome's receiver are the most convenient to hook up to the dinghy's baseplate bracket and store when not in use. And the big side benefit is the ability to remove the hardware from the dinghy.

Roadmaster, a leading provider of dinghy-towing equipment for more than 35 years, has been marketing motorhome-mounted tow bars since 1989 and has recently upped the ante a notch with its new Nighthawk, the first illuminated tow bar. While initial impressions might garner a few why-do-I-need-that sighs, there was actually a method to Roadmaster's madness and not just an opportunity to provide a

sexy LED in a place never seen before. Safety was the primary consideration when designing the Nighthawk, especially when towing at night.

Standard dinghy-vehicle wiring protocol calls for the use of one-way diodes or independent sockets and bulbs to isolate the electronics between the car and the motorhome — avoiding feedback issues. When this is done, the clearance lights on

the dinghy vehicle will not illuminate in concert with the motorhome's clearance/taillights, and the entire front of the car is dark. In real-world driving conditions at night, approaching drivers in adjacent lanes can only see the dinghy's taillights and the motorhome's clearance and taillights, leaving a dark void between the rear portion of the car and that of the motorhome. Illumination on the tow bar provides a better view of the entire length of the dinghy and motorhome, giving approaching drivers an improved perspective and a warning that the coast is not clear to change lanes. The lighting also makes it easier to hook up and disconnect at night.



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[1] EZ5 mounting bracket has round receivers that accept the side arms used to connect the tow bar. [2] Older style (top bracket) utilizes square receivers and arms that accept a crossbar. [3] Crossbar on previous-style baseplate was used to provide additional support, but is not needed in the new mounting kit. Its large size had an obvious presence after the tow bar was removed.



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There are a number of exclusive design features that were incorporated into the Nighthawk, along with certain cues taken from the other popular tow bars in the Roadmaster line, including the Sterling. The result is a next-generation tow bar that's rated at 8,000 pounds, relatively lightweight and a jewel to use.

Embedded along each arm of the tow bar are LED lights that are well-integrated, so there's no feeling that

[4] Faceplate on former arm connected to the baseplate was larger but incorporated a network of slots for attaching the safety cables. [5] Screw gun was used to remove fasteners from wheel-well shroud in preparation to free the front clip from the CR-V body. [6] Lower plastic shroud also had to be removed. [7] A number of pushpins must be removed before the plastic shroud can be freed from the front clip. These pushpins are easy to damage, [8] especially when trying to pull out with a tool not specifically designed for this job. [9] Once all the fasteners are removed, the entire front clip on the CR-V can be pulled away to gain access to the baseplate.

[10] Original baseplate used to connect the Sterling tow bar via the crossbar mounted to the side arms has the same mounting positions as the new EZ5. Removal of the original baseplate was uneventful, except for the need to use a crowfoot tool to remove a bolt partially obstructed by a gusset (arrow). [11] New baseplate went on with only a couple of minor glitches. [12] A grinding bit was used to open the slot in the bracket to help line up with existing hole in frame. Hole in frame was also opened [13] to complete the install. [14] A 10-inch length of wiring split loom was wrapped around the power-steering fluid cooling line and cable tied to an existing hole in main receiver brace. [15] Once the new baseplate is installed and the front clip back in place, the round arm receivers are barely visible. [16] Side arms are rotated as they are positioned into the receivers. [17] Once placed properly in the receiver detents, the arms lock in securely. Spring-loaded safety pins prevent the arms from being removed unintentionally. Even in place, the arms are not very obtrusive.



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EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

this feature was an afterthought. The arms are built from steel and aluminum and exude modern styling and industry-leading function. For example, the arms are the longest ever produced and, according to the company, provide superior stability and the longest hookup radius available to users.

Nonbinding, proprietary Freedom Latch technology makes it easy to disconnect the tow bar regardless of the topography and angle, which defuses any unpleasant surprises. This is accomplished with a patented cam that transforms linear motion into a rotary motion, supported by a 400:1 ratio actuating lever, making it possible to release the lock without adverse effort. To put this feature into perspective, using 5 pounds of pressure on the latch equals 2,000 pounds of force against the lock. With this design, it's not necessary to straighten the tow bar before attempting to release the arms for removal from the baseplate. In areas where pulling ahead to align the dinghy vehicle and motorhome is not possible, this feature becomes a godsend.

While the eggshell design of the outer arms may seem like a pretty face, the configuration is inherently strong because it distributes pressure throughout the tow bar. This is not a product of happenstance. Roadmaster prides itself in claiming to be the first towing products company to employ computerized Finite Element Analysis (FEA), which establishes guidelines to ensure superior product longevity, quality and safety. It's the same type of testing used by NASA and many engineering companies when prototyping new designs.

When the Nighthawk was in the development stages, it was displayed as a full-scale, three-dimensional product on a computer monitor. Company engineers were able to rotate the tow bar on the screen and apply thousands of pounds of pressure to the load-bearing components. Subjecting the Nighthawk under simulated high-stress conditions well above failure



[18] The same process is used to hook the tow bar to the dinghy vehicle. Patented Freedom Latch system prevents tow-bar arm binding, regardless of terrain, making the process simple and effortless. Ends of tow bar [19] connect to arms in similar fashion as other Roadmaster products; the Nighthawk will work with any of the company's baseplates. Safety cables are attached to loops in baseplate using quick connectors; hooks are also supplied. [20] LEDs embedded in the arms provide significant illumination between the dinghy vehicle and motorhome, an area that was typically dark and hard to decipher by passing motorists. [21] Cover for the tow bar stowed on the motorhome is one of the best investments an owner can make.

points during actual towing assures optimum safety and longevity of the materials.

Beyond the technical safety attributes, the Nighthawk is the beneficiary of a number of other features that not only contribute to good looks, but also provide operational convenience. Corrosion resistance is afforded by the use of aluminum for the outer arms with a powder-coated finish, and the stainless-steel inner arms. Nylatron bushings are said to eliminate metal-on-metal friction and result in a smoother ride for a longer period of time. An enclosed channel houses the power cord and safety cables, which prevents tangling, and they are long enough to use with drop receivers and extensions. The partially coiled power cord and safety cables help control placement when towing, and the straight ends on the dinghy end facilitate the connection.

Another nice feature of the Nighthawk is its ability to interchange-

ably attach to the company's EZ5, MX and MS baseplates — a Roadmaster first. The new baseplates, which the company also refers to as "mounting brackets," do not need the quick-disconnect crossbar that has been a common component in Roadmaster systems. The crossbar was incorporated to provide superior strength and safety, but the design technology used for the new baseplates has made it possible to retain or surpass the strength formerly afforded by this extra piece of hardware. Also, the connection points for the tow bar are better concealed in the front of the dinghy vehicle, which not only improves aesthetics, but because there is no crossbar, there's little chance of damaging external hardware from drivers who have less-than-stellar parking skills — both the owner and others who share the parking lots.

To employ the Nighthawk, we installed the mounting bracket (kit

No. 521559-5) on a 2009 Honda CR-V that already had the previous model baseplate in place to work with an older Roadmaster Sterling tow bar. Attachment points were identical, and since we previously removed the front clip to install the old hardware, the process was relatively uneventful. Nevertheless, in typical install fashion, we had to open a couple of holes in the frame and baseplate to make everything line up. We expected that because even though the company takes great pains in designing the mounting points of the baseplates, it seems that no two vehicles are exactly alike, and modifications are usually needed for a precision fit. Also, be prepared to replace a few of the pushpins used to secure the plastic wheel-well and front shrouds. They are easy to damage when removing, especially if a makeshift tool is used. Fortunately, pushpins are available in most auto parts stores.

Once everything was buttoned

up, it was obvious that the lack of the crossbar made a big difference in the look of the CR-V. The round receivers for the passenger- and driver-side arms are tucked in neatly below the fascia, and are easy to access when attaching the arms needed to connect the tow bar. The arms are simply rotated and pushed to lock in place. Safety pins prevent the arms from accidentally dislodging.

While we didn't miss the use of a crossbar, we did have to use a different approach for hooking up the safety cables. A network of grooves cut into the old arm faceplates made it easy to secure the cables without hooks or connectors; the new system requires the use of hooks (or quick connectors) that go through loops in the baseplate — also a simple task. The power cable is fitted with a standard seven-way plug on the motorhome end and a six-way plug for connecting to the dinghy vehicle. The receptacle for the six-way plug is designed for mounting

integrally to provisions in the baseplate using the provided screws.

Pricing for the Nighthawk is in line with other high-end tow bars at \$1,250 (MSRP), and the baseplate retails for \$449. Included at that pricing are the power cord and safety cables; other accessories, like a tow-bar cover (a very worthwhile option), are available.

Hooking up the new Nighthawk is nearly effortless with precision lineup of the dinghy vehicle no longer a necessity for attaching the arms to the baseplate. The LEDs add a nice-looking element that quickly became a desired feature for nighttime hookup and disconnection, and knowing that there is more light between the dinghy and motorhome gives us a leg up on safety when sharing the road with distracted drivers. **M**

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| Wisconsin RV Show | 1/5/18 - 1/7/18 | Richmond Camping RV Expo | 2/9/18 - 2/11/18 |
| Knoxville RV Show | 1/5/18 - 1/7/18 | Chattanooga RV Show | 2/16/18 - 2/18/18 |
| Savannah RV Show | 1/5/18 - 1/7/18 | Atlantic City RV & Camping Show | 2/16/18 - 2/18/18 |
| Greater Atlanta RV Show | 1/5/18 - 1/7/18 | Gulf Coast RV Show - Mobile | 2/16/18 - 2/18/18 |
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CABIN FEVER

ONE COUPLE HAS TRANSFORMED THEIR 2005 COACHMEN CONCORD INTO A TRUE VACATION RETREAT

This article is part of a continuing series looking at motorhomes that have stood the test of time. What these units may lack in the latest technology they make up for with their definitive style and the innovative modifications of their dedicated owners. 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."

A motorhome is a kind of escape pod. We turn the key and we are transported to faraway places that are starkly different from our everyday lives. But what if you didn't need to burn a single gallon of gas to get away? Imagine a motorhome that is a vacation destination in and of itself, with an interior so unique that you might forget where you are, even if you are still parked in your own driveway. If that sounds impossible, meet Michael and Barbara Wemple (Mikey and Barbi to us) and step inside their one-of-a-kind log cabin conversion of a 2005 Coachmen Concord. I promise — you have never

seen anything like it.

From the arrows hanging over the leather headboard to the bear rug and moose toilet seat in the bathroom, this motorhome bears no resemblance to the one the Wemples drove home from the dealer's lot a dozen years ago. That was the fall of 2005, and the couple was just starting the search for a new motorhome. In their 50s and still working, they wanted something to use for weekends and vacations with an eye toward more extended travel when they retired. After doing some online research, they narrowed their search to the Concord 275, citing the ease of driving and handling a Class



Michael and Barbara Wemple (above) loved the exterior appearance of the Concord, but knew an interior makeover was a must.

C and the Coachmen's streamlined appearance as factors in their choice. They also liked the Concord's layout, including the bedroom slideout, the big back window, and the fact that this unit, unlike many others in that size range, did not sacrifice the dinette for a couch. They had also



The Classic Ride

been dissatisfied with the storage capacity of comparable models, which Michael notes “was pretty minimal.” They tracked down two dealers in Denver that had the 275 DS in stock and took a road trip from their home in Montana to get a close-up look.

As soon as they saw it, the Wemples knew that the Concord was exactly what they were looking for, except for one thing — the factory décor.

“We were not at all crazy about the inside,” Barbara says emphatically.

Still, the couple got what Michael calls “a smokin’ hot deal,” paying \$23,000 less than the Concord’s \$75,000 price tag. For that savings, they were willing to redo the RV’s interior.

They aren’t sure exactly who was the first one to think of the log cabin conversion, but both the Wemples embraced it wholeheartedly. This was not going to be a matter of a few new throw pillows and some wall art — they wanted the motorhome to look like a real log cabin. They replaced the original flooring with rustic pine vinyl planking, and most of the oak trim with rough-cut cedar. The walls were re-covered with either authentic-looking log wallpaper or a rock wallpaper, completely changing the interior atmosphere. Michael then custom-designed hickory tables for the dinette and the space between the cab seats, which he modified with swivels so they could double as living room seating. Barbara used fringed buckskin to re-cover the window valances and lambskin for the back window, which has side frames made of PVC pipe



Above: This log cabin makeover is all in the details. From the evergreens on the cabinet doors to the pinecone wallpaper inlay of the kitchen (left) to the bedroom’s lambskin curtains (center), every corner of this Concord motorhome is outfitted as a mountain getaway. Beneath the nonfiring Winchester rifle (right), bears adorn the walls (and pillows) of the dinette area.

covered with aspen-bark wallpaper. The couple also used a pinecone wallpaper border to add inserts to the cabinets and replaced the accordion door to the bedroom with a pinecone print fabric curtain.

That was just the beginning. The magic of this conversion is in the details, like the antler drawer handles, the little log shelves in the bedroom and the oval snowshoes that Michael converted into magazine racks. The dinette was reupholstered in a pinecone fabric, and the couple found cabin-themed bedding, towels, placemats, dishes and accents to match. Each year something more is added, from animal pelts to the mountain-scene tapestry, to the nonfiring Winchester 76 rifle replica that is permanently mounted above the dinette. Just before this article went to press, Michael emailed me a photo of his new

bathroom lighting fixture, made of — you guessed it — a log.

“This is a work in progress!” he laughs. “I’m always modifying something, or at least thinking about it!”

That included some changes that weren’t necessarily part of the log cabin theme, including replacing all bulbs with LEDs and adding additional 120-volt AC and USB outlets, a 1,000-watt Xantrex inverter and two new 12-volt DC flat-screen TVs. The battery box was modified to fit two Trojan T-105 6-volt batteries as well. Because the couple use their motorhome across all seasons, they also added a Wave Catalytic heater and dedicated 20-amp shorepower cord for electric heater use. In terms of plumbing, Michael replaced all the interior faucets with residential bronze, installed an accumulator

ONE COOL CONCORD

You are not likely to find another Coachmen with the unique attributes of the Wemples’ motorhome, but if you like the layout, size and storage space of the 2005 Concord 275 DS, you can find one in good condition on the used market for about \$30,000. You can install a new 5 Star Tuning kit and high-flow performance cold air intake yourself for about \$1,000 (<http://5startuning.com/product-category/1997-2015-ford-6-8l-rv-class-c/>). As for remodeling the motorhome’s interior, this Concord is proof that with some basic DIY skills, the only limit is your imagination (and the vehicle’s weight ratings, of course).

► The sleek lines and ease of handling a Class C are what initially drew the Wemples to the Concord. Once they made their purchase, they mapped out their interior makeover.





tank in the water line and designed a circulating hot-water system so that hot water quickly makes it to the bathroom.

While the interior conversion was no small feat, that isn't all that the Wemples have changed about this motorhome. Perhaps the most significant additions were the 5 Star Tuning reprogramming kit and Hi-Flow intake, which Michael highly recommends for the Coachmen's Ford V-10.

"I could tell such a big difference," he says of his motorhome's power and performance on steeper inclines after the modifications.

The Wemples also installed new front springs, new Koni shocks, a Roadmaster steering stabilizer and solid extended wheel valve stems with "trucker" valve stem caps. This last modification allows Michael to check all of the tires on the motorhome as well as the couple's dinghy vehicle, a 1998 Chevrolet Tracker, in less than 90 seconds.

So what else would they like to change?

"Not a thing. I just love it the way it is!" Barbara says, adding, "He's done everything I could possibly think of!"

But Michael, ever the tinkerer, is not so sure. He points out that there is lots of "hidden space" behind panels and under seats that can be redesigned for easy access to storage. He recently uncovered an unused space big enough to hold six rolls of paper towels and eight rolls of toilet

paper. And while he is happy with everything they have accomplished thus far, he muses that full-body paint and four-point levelers would be nice to have. He also notes that the Concord doesn't have any solar "yet."

While just stepping inside the Wemples' "log cabin" feels like being on vacation, the Concord has proven to be an escape pod in more ways than one. Last winter the couple used it to snowbird to Arizona for three months to dodge the harsh Montana winter, a trip they hope to repeat in 2018. This summer's trips include a sapphire mining excursion and an August drive to Idaho for the total eclipse of the sun. Their travel companions are two snowshoe Siamese cats, Bill and Ted, who think traveling is "a most excellent adventure."

And of course, both Mikey and Barbi appreciate the reaction they get from other RVers. Folks often approach when they see the log wallpaper and faux stained-glass insert on the open door.

"They always say just what you said: 'I've never seen anything like it,'" they both laugh.

No matter where it is parked, this 2005 Coachmen Concord is its own tourist attraction. Its unique conversion is reflective of the way all of us fit our units to ourselves in ways large and small. Feeling at home wherever we travel is the real attraction of the RV lifestyle, and that is what makes this mobile log cabin a true classic ride. **M**

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Who's Your Caddy?

We bought a shower caddy that was intended to be hung on the shower rod. Instead, we mounted it on a hat rack with hooks to the wall of the shower enclosure to keep shower supplies handy and to avoid the weight and interference of the shower caddy on the shower bar.

And, to keep the shower caddy and contents from bumping against the shower wall while driving, we attached shower scrubs to the bottom back of the caddy to cushion the movement. The shower scrubs are inexpensive and are not affected by the water in the shower.

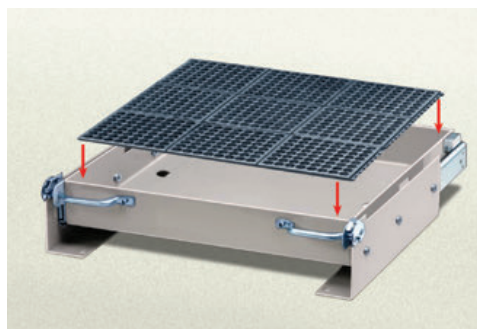
Dennis Jauch | Tampa, Florida



Put a Pin in It

My wife and I have been traveling for about 15 years and we document our travels by purchasing pins at the locations we visit. The pins are available at most attractions and only cost a few dollars. I purchased a United States map and glued it to a corkboard using spray glue, and then had it framed. The pins stick through the map into the backboard and hold fast. Our map/display is on the wall at my office (it could easily go on a motorhome's wall as well) and people ask me about it all the time. We love to travel, so there are more than 750 pins in our map!

Brad Scheppmann | Las Vegas, Nevada



Line 'em Up

When changing the batteries in my 2000 Newmar Dutch Star, I discovered corrosion on the pullout tray beneath the batteries caused by runoff.

After cleaning and repainting the pullout tray, I used a 1½-inch hole saw and drilled two drains in the floor of the pan, to encourage the runoff to flow to the ground easily. Then I installed rugged rubber Grip-Loc tiles under the batteries, cut to size, and with slots for mounting the battery tie-downs. This way, any runoff goes down the drain holes to the ground, and there's air space under the batteries for the tray to dry.

Roy S. Brody | Trenton, New Jersey

Note from technical editor Chris Dougherty: *Excessive corrosion and "runoff" can be attributed to a number of reasons, including tire spray/excessive moisture in the battery space and battery overcharging. Once the batteries are reinstalled and cleaned, apply battery terminal spray/sealer and keep a close eye on them. If you see signs of "boil-over" or electrolyte coming out of the battery vents, check the charging system and have the batteries tested.* **M**



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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Warranty Checklist



Frustrated that a manufacturer wouldn't cover a repair to his RV's refrigerator, a reader turned to Hot Line for help. He wrote:

“ I have a warranty problem with my 2016 Forest River Georgetown Legacy, which I bought last October. During a trip in February, the refrigerator compartment in the residential Frigidaire stopped cooling (the freezer was OK). I notified Frigidaire and was told that since the unit was sold to Georgetown in 2015 my warranty had expired, so I had the refrigerator fixed at a cost of \$331.22. I then emailed Forest River and found that the company's warranty doesn't cover the components in the motorhome. I'm disappointed that I had to assume the cost of the repairs on a coach I owned for just four months.
George C. Fiddler | Warrenton, Virginia

Fiddler's frustration is understandable, as he only had possession of the coach for four months. However, after we sent a letter to Forest River, we learned more about the situation, which serves as a reminder to new owners to be sure to follow the warranty process to a tee ... including registering the appliances with their respective manufacturers, and selecting an authorized repair facility.
Forest River wrote:

After looking into the purchase of the RV by Mr. Fiddler and contacting our refrigerator supplier, we found that he only recently registered his appliance with the manufacturer, so there was no record of him owning it. Also, the service provider that he chose is not an authorized Frigidaire service center (there were eight authorized service centers in Fiddler's area).

Frigidaire will honor the warranty and reimburse Fiddler for the repair; however, this all could have been avoided if he had registered the appliance right after buying the RV.

We appreciate the opportunity to help bring resolution to this issue.

Randy Houser | Forest River Inc. Diesel Division, Elkhart, Indiana

Out of Sync

When their motorhome manufacturer was reluctant to reimburse them for a defective slide mechanism, a couple asked Hot Line to intervene. They wrote:

“ Last November we took our 2013 Itasca SunCruiser to our local Camping World to check the streetside slide, which was “out of sync.” The technician said the slide was failing and needed to be replaced. He gave us a price of \$1,766.07 and we said to go ahead and replace it. We later got a call saying the replacement failed like the first one. Camping World said it contacted Winnebago, which said it would send a new replacement. Camping World then installed the new one and it worked fine, but we'd like to get our money back for the second failed slide.

Sharon and Robert Baxter | Waukesha, Wisconsin

This is an unusual case in that a new slide mechanism failed for a second time. As you'll see in Winnebago's response, had the Baxters asked Camping World to contact the manufacturer about the correct parts, the Baxters would have saved a considerable sum of money — especially since Winnebago agreed to send the correct replacement parts even though the motorhome was well out of warranty. We should reiterate here that it is the responsibility of the consumer to ensure the correct steps are taken before a repair is made.

Winnebago wrote:

The Baxters' SunCruiser was more than 3 years old at the time of the initial slide failure. At that time, had their dealer contacted us, we would have at the most offered to send parts at no charge. However, they did not, and installed the same system, which failed again. After the second failure occurred, the dealer contacted our district service manager, who offered to cover the correct mechanism replacement as goodwill. The offer for goodwill coverage was due to the fact that [the Baxters] had just paid for the prior replacement. We are unable to reimburse the Baxters for the costs involved in the [first] replacement they paid for due to the fact that we are already covering a replacement. As the basic warranty on this coach expired April 6, 2014, we feel this goodwill coverage is more than fair.

Angela Gerdes, Service Advisor | Winnebago Industries Inc., Forest City, Iowa

Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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By Ken Freund

Refrigerator Makes Battery Go Dead

Q I own a Four Winds 5000 Class C. I have a problem keeping the refrigerator running when dry camping. The battery goes dead before the day is over with just the refrigerator running; everything else is off except the carbon monoxide sensors. I have a solar panel on the unit, but it will not help. If the refrigerator is off, the solar panel can keep the battery charged all the time. The battery only goes dead when the refrigerator is on. Is there a way to find out why when the propane refrigerator is on the battery will start to lose its charge within a couple of hours? Does having the refrigerator on make something else come on which drains the battery?

Mike Morgan | Rio Vista, California

A Essentially, the three likely culprits are: You're either not getting enough current when charging the



battery bank, the battery capacity is diminished due to age or sulfation, or the refrigerator is drawing excessive current. You didn't mention what size your motorhome's solar panels are, or what capacity the battery bank is, which are important factors here. I'd start by measuring current draw from the refrigerator. If the refrigerator has a three-way function, make sure you are not running it on 12-volt DC power. Additionally, test the battery with a load tester and test the charging system. I think these checks will solve it. Please let me know.

Using CPAP Machines

Q We own a 2016 Thor Windsport 30-foot motorhome. My wife and I both use CPAP machines while we sleep. We would like to know the best way to have enough electricity for dry camping. In our previous motorhome we installed extra 6-volt house batteries and that worked fairly well. But only one of us used a CPAP then. We are hoping that you know about a better way to get this accomplished.

Wayne Smith | Agoura Hills, California

A CPAP machines use a considerable amount of electricity over time, as you probably know, and it's easier if you connect to shorepower. However, there are many types of CPAP machines designed for travel, and their current draws vary considerably. Some are even available with travel battery packs. Start by checking the current draw of each

machine. Many owners report that by leaving the heated humidifier function off, they can reduce current draw substantially when running on battery power. To calculate power demand in ampere-hours, multiply amp draw by the number of hours they will run (typically eight hours). If you only know the watt draw, divide watts by 12 to get amps at 12 volts. Keep in mind that if you are using an inverter to get 120-volt AC power, it uses some current too, so add a fudge factor of 10 percent or so. Once you have your total amp-hour requirement you can estimate the capacity of the deep-cycle batteries needed to power your machines through the night. Batteries should not be drawn down below 50 percent capacity, as doing so will dramatically shorten their life, so allow for a generous reserve and don't forget that other items are drawing current too. Large 6-volt deep-cycle batteries provide the best bang for the buck

over time. If you don't plan to recharge the batteries each day, you will need to multiply the amp-hour requirement by the number of days before you recharge. For dry camping, you also can't beat a solar panel battery charging system to help keep your power supply up to snuff.

Vegas Fuel Economy

Q We are considering buying a 2017 Thor Vegas. Do you have any idea what the fuel economy might be?

Richard E. Gonzales | Via email

A As the commercials say, your mileage may vary, and it's very true. The way you drive, speed, acceleration, traffic, elevation, wind and gradients cause huge variations. The Ford V-10 engine tends to be a bit thirsty, but the Vegas' body design is more aerodynamic than many other motorhomes using that powerplant.

Fuel economy is a touchy subject and no matter what I say, somebody will probably be unhappy with my answer, but here goes: Based on a number of owner reports, I suspect that in normal use (not steep mountains or towing) and at legal speeds, you are likely to get roughly 7.5 to 10.5 MPG, with most reports falling between 8.5 and 10 MPG.

Dim Dash Lights

Q I have a 2011 Freedom Elite Class C on a Ford E-350 chassis. The dash lights are so dim, I can barely read them in the daylight. Is there a way to make them brighter? I have them turned up to max.

Russ Reynolds | Shrewsbury, Pennsylvania

A Find a bulb on that circuit that's relatively easy to get to and measure the voltage going to it, and compare that to the voltage going to other items at the fuse panel. It could be that the dash light rheostat is faulty, or the bulbs have a bad ground. If the dash lights are getting significantly less voltage with the dimmer switch at full brightness, you will likely have found the culprit. I solved a problem with dim dash lights recently on one of my vehicles by installing LED bulbs in place of the old-fashioned tungsten filament bulbs. They will maintain brightness at lower voltages; however, you lose some of the ability to dim them.

Ford Fuel Pump Failure?

Q I have a 1992 Itasca motorhome with a 460-HP V-8 Ford gasoline engine. After a long drive in hot weather, it develops what seems like a vapor lock. It only is a problem when I slow down from the freeway and stop. At that point it won't accelerate again. It just runs poorly. It will idle, roughly, but won't run well enough to accelerate to highway speeds. I often have to wait for an hour or more to let it cool down. I have been told that it might be a fuel pump problem. Can you give me some help?

Dwayne Neal | Via email

A From your description, it does sound like the classic symptoms these motorhomes displayed back in the 1990s at the height of this problem. Typically, when the pump (which is located inside the fuel tank) heats up, it begins to run slowly and may even stop in some cases. It doesn't flow enough then to provide sufficient fuel for the engine to pull a load. After a cool-down

period (about how long it takes to get a tow truck to the scene), the pump may start working again without leaving a trace of the problem.

Fuel pump output pressure can be tested rather easily at most shops, with a simple test gauge, and most of the faulty units will show subpar pressure if they are bad. For most reliable test results it should be tested under full



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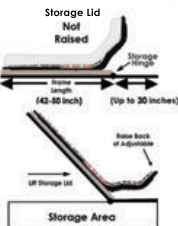
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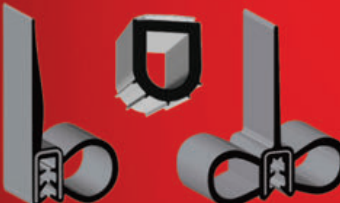
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load while going uphill on a hot day. The fuel filter should also be changed. Ford introduced an updated-style pump and a short wire harness for this problem. Unfortunately, it is not cheap and requires that the tank be drained and lowered. Therefore, to save the shop a lot of grief, bring the motorhome in with the tank below 1/4 full.

Transmission Fluid Loss

Q I have a 2011 Daybreak on a Ford chassis with a V-10 engine. While driving home from Florida I lost transmission fluid. I had been driving for about nine hours when we stopped for the night. I had experienced no transmission problems during the trip. The next morning, the engine sounded odd and revved very high with no movement of the RV when in DRIVE. I revved it a bit more and heard a clunk from the transmission and felt movement. I then drove to a local travel center to get fuel and check the transmission fluid level. The transmission fluid was not visible on the dipstick. I took it to a nearby truck garage to get checked out. The mechanic sprayed the transmission with degreaser and added 8 quarts of transmission fluid. Inspection showed no leaks from the transmission. The only thing he saw was that the fluid leak could have come from the transmission breather. I continued my trip home, monitoring the fluid level, with no more problems. This is the first time I've had transmission problems. What would cause the transmission fluid to come out the breather, and is this a common problem?

Ken Moroney | Wasaga Beach, Ontario, Canada


A This isn't common, thankfully, but I have heard of it happening a number of times. It typically occurs in hot weather, and more often while towing or pulling up a long grade. I believe it is sometimes caused when the fluid is overfilled and begins to foam. When the fluid gets hot it expands rapidly and then starts to blow out the overflow tube. It may get

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into a runaway situation, as less fluid in the transmission has to handle the increased heat, and so on. I think that's what happened to you.

Pay careful attention to the transmission fluid level and check it when it's fully warmed up; avoid overfilling. I also recommend that you install a transmission-fluid temperature gauge. Try to keep temps below 250 degrees Fahrenheit, and pull over if it ever approaches 275 degrees. Remove the pan to install a sensor and replace the filter at the same time. Check for metal and fiber debris. Don't be surprised if the transmission fails, as it may have been damaged when it ran almost dry.

Frozen Dump Pipes

Q My wife and I took our 2012 Fleetwood Southwind 32V to Wyoming and South Dakota in March. Yes, it was cold, but our rig kept us toasty with a combination of forced-air heat and, when needed, the use of

two small portable heaters (when we had electrical hookups or used the generator). The weather during the entire trip was below freezing and while at Badlands National Park I discovered the black- and gray-water dump valves were frozen closed. I used my wife's hair dryer, which allowed me to open the valves; however, I found the black-water line had frozen waste located between the valve and the tank. I managed to break up the "ice" with some tools and drain my tanks, although that was somewhat messy.

Can I insulate the lines running from both tanks with some type of fiberglass wrap or a spray-type product? We love winter camping, as the crowds at the parks are minimal, so I would like to better prepare my rig for the winter weather conditions. I believe my tanks are heated, but I don't know how that works.

Jeff and Anne-Marie Smith | Lake Elsinore, California

A Wrapping the pipes may help somewhat, but insulation doesn't provide any heat, it just slows down the process of freezing and doesn't prevent it. UltraHeat makes both 12-volt DC and 120-volt AC (or combination) heaters for the holding tanks, straight discharge pipe and elbows (in 3-inch and 1½-inch sizes), as well as gate-valve heaters, and can be found at www.ultraheat.com.

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Out-of-Round Tires — Comment

I had a problem of a "bounce" in a semi truck I had about 40 years ago. We rotated tires, balanced tires and installed new tires on all wheels, to no improvement. I saw an ad for Centramatic Wheel Balancers, and thought, why not? I bought a set for the front tires, and got some improvement, then bought sets to have balancers at all wheel positions. I never had such a smooth ride as I had at that time. I have since used the balancers on everything from dually pickups and fifth-wheels to motorhomes. As far as getting a smooth ride, I have not had

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one single problem with any of the setups. I hope this will help someone with a balancing problem.

James H. Rosacker | Coburg, Oregon

Thanks for writing and sharing your experience. I have not tried them, but know these are popular with truckers, and have read many positive reviews and owner reports online.

HHR Towing Tip

The problem Tom Ranly (May issue) is having with flat towing his 2009 Chevy HHR is that he is turning the ignition switch too far. Very carefully turn the ignition switch to the first click, and no lights will be indicated on the instrument panel. We have a 2009 HHR and have flat towed it behind our Fleetwood motorhome for many miles.

Vern Clanton | Rochester Illinois

This is a fairly common problem across brands and **(continued on page 104)**

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(continued from page 101)

models, and everyone who tows a dinghy vehicle should pay attention to this. Thanks for writing, Vern.

Breaking In Brakes — Tip

In the May issue, the final advice at the end of "Air-Brake Conversion?" is "Always break in new brakes carefully to prevent hard stops early on, which glaze linings." The procedure to break them in "carefully" is not defined, but it should be. The brakes should be bedded-in to maximize performance and durability. The general procedure is to make around 10 moderate near-stops from about 45 MPH to about 15 MPH, allowing a ½-mile cooling interval between each one, then finally allowing one last cool-down before completely stopping and allowing the brakes to cool completely. Various sources and manufacturers may offer different values of speed and total number of stops, but the principle is the same — heat cycling to allow an even deposition layer and even mating of the rotors/drums and pads/shoes. Depending on the type of parking brake, it is also advisable to not set it at that last stop (it would be fine if the parking brake is separate from the main brakes). Bedding-in brakes on a motorhome will undoubtedly be more inconvenient than on a car, but it's well worth the effort.

Shawn Doughtie | Alpharetta, Georgia

Thanks for taking the time to spell out this advanced procedure. Drivers should keep in mind that if the parking brake is not set when finished to allow the brakes to cool, wheel chocks should be placed by a passenger before the driver releases the service brakes (for safety). **M**

Have a Tech Question?

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Flying Low

A hot air balloon flight through Taos, New Mexico's Rio Grand Gorge proves contrasts are what make life worth living

By Alan Rider

Call me pompous, but every once in a while I like to use this space to share something that occurs to me to be a Universal Truth. An overarching quality that we motorhomers don't often stop to consider.

In this case I'm talking about contrast. Without it, the world around us — maybe life itself — would be one unbearably uniform shade of gray. And nothing I've ever experienced is quite as antithetical to that dull, gray existence as hot air ballooning.

Now granted I, like many of us, am a lot grayer around the edges than I used to be. And that's OK because for me, life is still as full of contrast as the kaleidoscopic envelope of a hot air balloon rising against a brilliantly blue New Mexico sky.

What got me thinking about the contrasts inherent in hot air ballooning is a flight I took last fall with Ken Eske of Taos-based Paradise Balloons (575-751-6098, www.taosballooning.com). While I've flown aboard hot air balloons more than a few times, something about this particular morning planted a seed in my brain that's been germinating ever since.

As we lifted off it dawned on me that, at its essence, ballooning is a series of juxtapositions. Unlike other means of flight, a hot air balloon ride is all about contrasts. Start with the basic principle that enables these colorful seven-story-tall nylon envelopes — and the wicker passenger baskets dangling below them — to get off the ground

in the first place. For it's the contrast between the superheated — and therefore more buoyant — air inside the balloon and the ambient temperature outside that produces the lift required for flight.

Nowhere are the fundamental contrasts of hot air ballooning more evident, however, than inside the basket itself. One moment you and your companions are floating serenely over the countryside with the cool breeze on your cheeks, while the next the roar of the large propane-fired burners heating the air inside the envelope breaks the silence and warms the side of your face in a manner not unlike

standing next to a crackling campfire.

What made this particular flight unique, though, was the fact that a good part of it was spent below ground level. While that may sound like crazy talk, allow me to elaborate. You see, Paradise Balloons' launch site just north of Taos is a short distance from the 800-foot-deep Rio Grande Gorge. And like most hot air balloon flights, what goes up, must come down. As we slowly drifted toward the rocky canyon rim, it seemed to me that we were flying a little lower than I was used to. Little did I know we were about to go down even farther into the gorge itself.

In the dozens of hot air balloon rides I've taken, I can honestly say this was my first time looking up at ground level. As it turned out, it was also my introduction to a popular hot air balloon challenge known as the "splash-and-dash," where our pilot, Ken, flew low enough to dip the bottom of the basket in the waters of the Rio Grande.

Figure in the way the sunlit golden leaves of the turning aspen trees light up the rocky landscape below and this autumn becomes as good a time as any to take your first hot air balloon ride. When you do, you'll find it's just one more of the many fascinating contrasts that lie waiting for us out there along The Road Ahead. **M**

“As we lifted off it dawned on me that, at its essence, ballooning is a series of juxtapositions. Unlike other means of flight, a hot air balloon ride is all about contrasts.”

Up, Down and Away! ☺

Right: Paradise Balloons offers customers a chance to soar high in the clouds; some trips may even include the "splash-and-dash" challenge, where the balloon floats low enough to dip the basket in the Rio Grande.



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