

**ULTIMATE ALASKA** PART IV: THE FINAL LEG

# MotorHome

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April 2015

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Emerald Lake, located on the South Klondike Highway in southern Yukon, is known for its intense green color (see page 40).



Newmar's Bay Star 3401 is one of 13 "affordable" entry-level Class A motorhomes. Pg. 57

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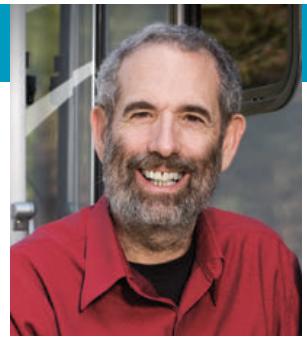
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## ON THE COVER

The Realm FS6 was designed by the dealer (Motor Home Specialist) and built to spec by the manufacturer (Foretravel), resulting in a unique business relationship and a very special motor coach.



By Bob Livingston

# Price of Admission

**W**hat does it take to become a Class A motorhome owner these days? Well, if you want to buy new, it takes about \$100,000. Depending on the deal and brand, \$100,000 will buy you a new entry-level motorhome in the 30- to 33-foot range. That might seem expensive — and I don't want to come off as cavalier — but take a look at the price of a pickup truck and you might change your mind. It's easy to spend \$60,000 on a new truck that you can't even sleep in, at least comfortably. When you make the comparison, today's entry-level Class A motorhomes have a lot going for them.

Author Kristopher Bunker did some survey work and found a cool baker's dozen of entry-level Class A's — some less than our targeted \$100,000 price tag and some more. But for all of them, "entry level" is a misnomer. The motorhomes described on page 57 are fully equipped with a surprising amount of amenities, many at levels unexpected for this price range.

Let's deconstruct the package for a moment. All of these motorhomes, except for one, are built on a chassis that can also be found under models approaching 200 grand. Discounting weight capacities, the underpinnings are comparable. Construction materials and techniques are similar to higher end motorhomes and all of these rigs have systems that provide self-contained livability. Most of the appliances are the same and many

of the water system, LP-gas and electrical components are similar in design and function.

Make no mistake; there is a difference between entry-level and higher end motorhomes. It's like driving a basic economy car rather than a luxury model. Even though technology has made both cars safe to drive and you no longer get crank windows in a basic car, the difference is in the level of convenience and luxury. Expect higher end motorhomes to have finer fabrics, cabinetry and countertops, more comfortable beds, nicer flooring and furniture and more amenities in general. But both will get you where you want to go and allow you to become engaged in the RV lifestyle.

Even though prices are creeping up, the gap between entry and the

next level motorhomes is shrinking. As Bunker explains in his article, the term "entry level" may be headed for extinction.

While it's pretty clear where motorhome design and function are going, there's an element of uncertainty when it comes to dinghy vehicle selection. Undoubtedly, you found the 2015 Guide to Dinghy Towing packaged with this issue. The good news is there are more than 95 models that can be towed on all four wheels without drivetrain modifications. The bad news is that one of our favorite dinghy vehicles, the Honda CR-V, has joined the group of popular vehicles that can no longer be towed or are out of production.

Ironically, advances in technology have made the CR-V incapable of being towed. Honda's use of a continuously variable automatic transmission (CVT) has nixed the capability of the CR-V. Auto manufacturers are under the gun to meet higher fuel economy standards and the CVT helps them to achieve that goal. Manual transmissions are more dinghy-friendly, but demand for these gearboxes has declined precipitously and they are being phased out.

Guess I'll hang on to my Jeep Wrangler. **M**

## Contributors | April



**Neela Bhagat** is a freelance writer who travels extensively throughout North America with her photographer husband, Arjun, and their dog, Count Reggie, in their Class A Challenger motorhome.



**Kristopher Bunker**, the former editor of *Trailer Life* magazine, is an avid camper and has been RVing for more than a decade. He is currently a freelance writer and stay-at-home dad.



**Jeff Crider** is a Palm Desert, California-based writer, photographer and camping enthusiast who previously covered the RV industry and tourism for newspapers in Southern California.



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



**Bobbie Hasselbring** is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of [www.realfoodtraveler.com](http://www.realfoodtraveler.com), which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS Class C.



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

# MotorHome

**Publisher** Bob Livingston  
**Editorial Director** Eileen Hubbard  
**Technical Editor** Chris Hemer  
**Art Director** Rick Damien  
**Production Director** Bob Dawson  
**Production Manager** Brenda Hutchinson  
**Business Manager** Katey Purgatorio

**Consulting Editors** Wes Caughlan, Seana Dawson,  
 Ken Freund, Jeff Johnston

**Contributors** Neela Bhagat, Kristopher Bunker, Bob Carpenter,  
 Jeff Crider, Jenn and Bill Gehr, Bobbie Hasselbring, Scott Hirko,  
 Alan Rider, Mary Zalmanek

**Vice President National Sales** Terry Thompson

**RV Marketplace/Classifieds** Katey Purgatorio  
 3431 S. 257th St., Kent, WA 98032  
 Tel 847-229-6756 Fax 270-495-6278  
 katey.purgatorio@goodsam.com

Sue Seidlitz (Southwest Region)  
 Tel 530-268-3005  
 sue.seidlitz@goodsam.com

Kim Whitaker (Southeast Region)  
 Tel 919-412-6325  
 kim.whitaker@goodsam.com

Lou Cicirelli (Northeast Region)  
 Tel 954-297-9234  
 lou.cicirelli@goodsam.com

Scott Oakes (Northwest Region)  
 Tel 847-229-6758 Fax 270-282-7356  
 scott.oakes@goodsam.com

Crompton Holdings Scott Crompton (Detroit, MI)  
 Tel 334-546-7243 Fax 334-356-7740  
 scottcrompton@mac.com

**Chairman Emeritus** Art Rouse  
**Publisher Emeritus** Bill Estes

## Customer Service

**Subscriptions** (print and digital)  
**800-678-1201**  
 motorhome@cdfsfulfillment.com

**Website** www.motorhome.com

**Editorial** info-motorhomemagazine@goodsam.com



**President** Mark Boggess  
**Sr. Vice President/Group Publisher** Bob Livingston  
**Vice President/Advertising Sales** Terry Thompson



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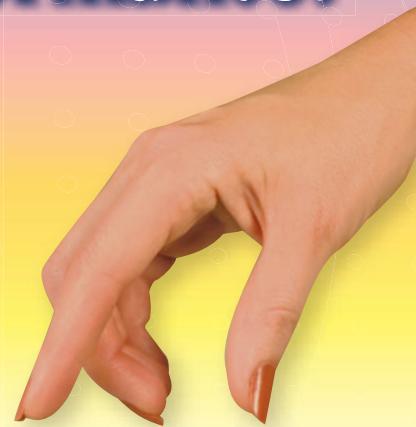
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**From the RV Sanitation Expert**

## Have you visited any off-leash dog areas, parks or beaches during your travels?

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

### There's an App for That

To answer your question, yes, we have. When traveling, this tops our list of things to do. With the help of the Internet, we find areas where we can take our dogs. Last summer, while visiting Virginia Beach, Virginia, we were able to walk our dogs on the beach at designated times (before 10 a.m. or after 6 p.m.) and areas (north of 42nd Street). This was one of the best places we have visited because many beach areas do not allow dogs during the summer months.

Another dog park we found is on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. Island Dog Park in Stevensville, Maryland, is located on Kent Island, just before crossing the Chesapeake Bay Bridge (if you're traveling north). It has a big play area for the pups, along with water, trash disposal and ample parking.

There are some apps that allow smartphone users to locate dog parks in their area; just search for "dog parks" where you purchase apps and see which one might be right for you.

**Gene and Ginger Martel**  
Florham Park, New Jersey

### Four Pet-Friendly RV Parks

Misty Mountain Camp Resort in Greenwood, Virginia, has a very large fenced area right off a beautiful meadow, with benches for owners and several large rocks where pets can be off leash. Bags are conveniently provided for cleanup.

There's a KOA in Interior, South Dakota, that has a very large fenced area for off-leash pets, with a swing inside for pet owners and pet agility stations are available. It's located near Badlands National Park.



The KOA in Sweetwater, Tennessee, has a fenced pet walk where pets can be off leash with a pet cabin. Watch for baby birds in the spring. And, finally, the KOA in Abilene, Texas, has a fenced pet walk with entrances from both sides. Pet agility stations are available.

All four of these campgrounds allow pets while on a leash anywhere in the campground, except for specified areas. Leash rules are made for pet, wildlife and human safety. We always keep our dog on a leash, unless in a protected, fenced area, for her safety as well as the safety of others.

**Ila Rankin | Lufkin, Texas**

### Run, Eat, Stay

I recently discovered an RV resort with a wonderful off-leash dog park. It has well-maintained grass, a great double

## Featured Letter

### Dusty Digs Bonita Beach

Per your request in the January edition, I had to pass this on. We just love the Bonita Beach Dog Beach, which is located midway between Fort Myers and Naples, Florida, on Estero Island. We found this spot last year on our first snowbird trip, which took us all around the Gulf Coast, from the Florida Keys to Texas, and this was our favorite spot by far! We did not see any unattended aggressive dogs here, and there were surprisingly few "accidents" to step on. We took our dog, Dusty, to this beach frequently during our two-week stay at Woodsmoke Camping Resort



in Fort Myers. We liked it so much there that we are returning to Woodsmoke this year for a four-month stay.

Here is a picture of our little 8-pound papillon, Dusty, enjoying the clean, white sand, and one visiting with another little guy while a friendly Great Dane looks on.

**Gordon and Nancy Groff | Via email**

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entry area and a fenced area about 200 by 150 feet. Our dogs love it after several days on the road and leash walking. It is at Grand Lake RV and Golf Resort in Citra, Florida. We make this a regular stop in our travels to Orlando. It also has a café with awesome food.

**Al Boeck | Via email**

### Canines in Kennebunk

While visiting Kennebunk, Maine, and walking our dog, Daisy, someone asked if we had been to the beach. Before 9 a.m. and after 5 p.m. (June 15 to the day after Labor Day), dogs are allowed on the beaches to run, play, sniff and enjoy the ocean. Our Daisy had the time of her life making new friends.

**Dave Lieberman**

Midland Park, New Jersey

### Perfect for Pooches

The entire Oregon coast is perfect for pooches.



Not only are dogs allowed, but they are welcomed and encouraged! It's one thing to let dogs run around, but another to have the people around be friendly and happy while you are doing it. We traveled through Oregon last summer and experienced the joy of our dogs, Bella and Sprinkles, running up and down the beach at full speed. It is one of our fondest memories!

**Tessa Miller | Via email**

### From Coast to Coast

Last summer, we took our dog, Brandy, with us in our RV from New York to California. We stayed at many campgrounds that had pet runs; two parks had excellent runs. Mesa Verde KOA in Cortez, Colorado, has one that is about 3 acres and the best part was the fountain for watering our pet. The second is Yakima River RV Park in Ellensburg, Washington. It provides two areas: one for smaller dogs and one for larger ones. We appreciated any campgrounds on our trip that had a pet run for our Brandy.

**Jim and Nancy Smith | Dansville, New York**

### Bring Fido

Last summer, we drove more than 9,000 miles from Pennsylvania to the West Coast and back. We have



a 2-year-old Icelandic sheepdog named Calli and we discovered a great website during our travels: [www.bringfido.com](http://www.bringfido.com). Type in your location and all dog-friendly attractions in the area are displayed, including dog parks and restaurants. Each listing includes a brief description and visitor comments.

Our favorite place was Lake Havasu City, Arizona. We stayed at Crazy Horse Campgrounds and were parked right on the beach. Calli loved swimming in the crystal-clear lake. Other favorite parks were in Columbus, Georgia, along the Chattahoochee River; Portland, Oregon; and Salt Lake City, Utah.

**The Munsons**

Downingtown, Pennsylvania

### DogGoes Park Finder

We travel with two bichon dogs that need walks/runs when we travel. I found an app for my phone that shows dog parks as well as pet-friendly restaurants. I love it and have used it on all of our travels. I even found a restaurant in Sedona, Arizona, where the server brought a bowl of water to put under our table and asked if the dogs could have a piece of bacon! The app is called DogGoes. I highly recommend it for anyone who travels with dogs.

**Sue Ritz | Janesville, California**

### Bark Beach a Fido Fave

One of our favorite campgrounds is Castaways RV Resort & Campground in Berlin, Maryland (just south of Ocean City, Maryland). It is extremely dog friendly. In fact it has a separate beach for the dogs called Bark Beach. The dogs can go in the water off leash. It also has a fenced-in dog park for the dogs to run. It is a wonderful RV park for our four-legged friends.

**Bob and Jan Wilson | Accord, New York**

### Kamp K9 at KOA

We have been traveling in our motorhome with two golden retrievers for many years now. The nicest dog park that we have found is outside of Evergreen, Colorado. Elk Meadow Park has two fenced-in dog parks (totaling 6 acres) that are all mountain areas with lots of trees, boulders and room to explore. It also has several trails that are off leash for hiking. It is just a short distance south from Interstate 70.

There is a nice off-leash area with lake access in Estes, Colorado, and in Homer, Alaska, we found a beach where the dogs could play off leash.

We try to stay at KOAs that have a Kamp K9, so that the dogs can roam a little after being in the coach all day. Enjoy your travels with the furry kids!  
**Bob and Judy Heim | Millbrook, Illinois**

### Two Spots for Spot

We visited Twin Grove RV Resort & Cottages in Pine Grove, Pennsylvania. There are two large dog runs available for your canine friends. It is completely fenced, and has water, dog ramps and jumps. It is an all-grass area with some terrain changes. Also in Manzanita, Oregon, on the coast, the beaches are vast for long runs. Our dog really enjoyed both areas.

**Leonard Hellwig | Madras, Oregon**

### Camping With Big Dogs

We have two German shepherds that we travel with. Ruger is 8 years old and weighs 85 pounds; Rebel is 5 years old and is 110 pounds. They travel very well in our 43-foot motorhome, but we do have problems when it comes to finding RV parks. It seems that there are certain areas of the country that do not like large dogs. We usually have to call more than one campground to find a place to park.

We recently were in the Phoenix, Arizona, area and looking for an RV park. I finally found one that would take our German shepherds. We arrived, and the park managers met our dogs and fell in love with them. We were setting up camp when some residents started complaining to the managers about the size of our dogs.

The managers were great; they told the people to read the rules. Later, they told us if we had any problems with anyone at the park to make sure that we let them know.

I try to look up off-leash dog parks in the areas where we stay, so our dogs can get out and stretch their legs and run. I haven't really found any reliable apps for that. We drive around a lot and always keep an eye out for off-leash areas. We also talk to people in the area and ask if they know of any off-leash dog areas. Maybe Good Sam can add dog size, breed restriction, and off-leash areas to its RV park filters.

**Calette Rozell | Via email**

### Doggone Good

We love Carrabelle Beach RV Resort in the Florida panhandle. Across the street is a beach where our dog, Molly, loves to run. We put her on a leash if people get close. It is always a fall and spring stop for us, and during most of the early mornings and late afternoons the place is free running for Molly.

**Sheila Hill | Via email**



### Biking With Man's Best Friend

As an RVer and dog lover, I agree it's tough to find places when traveling that afford the same freedoms I have at home with my dogs in northern Nevada. I encourage your readers to check out Carson City, Nevada, as there are many running, hiking, mountain biking, equestrian and OHV trails that all allow for dogs to be off leash.

The Carson City Visitors Bureau has a free mobile app that can help find trails to explore, as well as food, lodging and entertainment for when you're done playing with your dog. Just search "Visit Carson City" wherever you get your apps.

**Cathleen Allison | Via email**



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## P.O. BOX

### Leash-Free Beaches

Northern California's Humboldt County is a great place to visit with dogs of any size. My Australian cattle dog and I had a wonderful time running on the beaches and meeting other dogs and their people, though parking an RV can be challenging. If your dog is a herding breed, read online about specific beaches that permit ATVs and/or horses ([www.redwoods.info/showrecord.asp?source=URL&id=5113](http://www.redwoods.info/showrecord.asp?source=URL&id=5113)). Herding is not always a good idea!

**Sue Robinson | Via email**

### Ruffing It

Falcon Meadow RV Campground in Falcon, Colorado, has a 5-acre pasture adjacent to the park where dogs can run free. Cleanup is not mandatory in this area, just watch your step!

**Jim Ozburn | Peyton, Colorado**

### Anywhere but Québec's Parks

We always travel with our 12-year-old golden retriever, Sam, and our first choice of campgrounds is provincial, state and federal parks (national). Since our own Québec provincial parks (called SEPAQ) do not permit dogs in their campgrounds (in general, with a few specific, odd exceptions on some reserves), we travel to nearby Ontario, New Brunswick and New England states where man's best friend is welcome with open arms.

Ontario Sandbanks Provincial Park deserves an award for its two very large and beautiful dog beaches, located at each end of its famous public beach. Also, the Maine campgrounds and cities (especially the Bar Harbor area), top the list of dog-friendly places. At the Jordan Pond House Restaurant in Acadia National Park, a waiter served our dog a bowl of water at the same time another waiter served a glass to my wife and me. Now, that is dog friendly! Thanks to all of those dog-friendly places for their kind consideration and equal treatment to dog owners.

**Yvan Jérôme | Laval, Québec, Canada**

### North to Alaska Adventure, Part 1

This is a great story from a great adventure. I know, because my

cousin's family and my wife and I drove together in our Class A's to the same places mentioned in the January article and more. It was a four-month round trip from Sarasota, Florida.

The best part of the Alaskan adventure is the wildlife! Alberta, British Columbia, Yukon Territory and Alaska have fabulous wildlife — bears, elk, fox, caribou, sheep, moose, beaver and numerous others — that can be seen from the road as well as on tours. Also, bring lots of money; you'll need it.

**Bill Meyer | Via email**

### Keeping Mice Out

I have a question for your readers. We have had our 36-foot 2004 R-Vision Condor motorhome for four years and we live in the forest in central Oregon. We have a serious problem with mice getting into our coach. We tried three plugins that say they get rid of mice, as well as dryer sheets, Irish Spring soap and mothballs, but none of those worked. We also used the stuff you sprinkle on the ground around the RV and sprayed foam where we thought the mice might be coming in, but we still have a problem.

Although there's no food to draw them in, the mice still come and build nests under the bed, and chew holes in the rugs, blankets, bedding and towels. Every time we use the motorhome we have to load everything back in and take everything out, which is quite a job.

We can't be the only RVers with this awful problem. Maybe someone out there knows something that really works. Please help. We are desperate.

**The Harts | Via email**

## Question of the Month

**Do you have a foolproof method for keeping mice and other rodents out of your motorhome?**

**Send your comments to:**

MotorHome, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036; or email [letters@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:letters@motorhomemagazine.com)

# ESCAPES

**Restore Headlights** ➔  
Meguiar's Perfect Clarity  
Headlight Restoration Kit  
only takes two steps: clean,  
then coat. **pg. 14**



**12** ROAD FOODIE | **14** WHEELS & GEAR | **16** NOTEWORTHY & NEWS BRIEFS | **18** CROSSROADS



## Where Every Day is Thanksgiving

A unique garden near Provo, Utah, showcases the beauty and majesty of nature

By Mary Zalmanek

**T**hanksgiving Point in Lehi, Utah, is the result of Alan and Karen Ashton's good fortune. After Alan co-founded the software company WordPerfect, the company's financial success allowed him and his wife to give back to their community near Provo. The aptly named 55-acre Thanksgiving Point Gardens has 15 themed gardens, stately lawns and the largest man-made waterfall in the Western Hemisphere. Four miles of hiking paths wind through the gardens. Visitors may prefer to rent golf carts or Segways to tour the grounds. The vivid, seasonal gardens are open from late March through October. Each April more than 250,000

tulips bloom during the popular Tulip Festival (April 17-May 9, except Sundays).

There are several other attractions at Thanksgiving Point. The Museum of Ancient Life has 60 complete skeletal displays, making it one of the world's largest displays of mounted dinosaurs, and 50 interactive, hands-on displays where guests can touch actual fossils and dinosaur bones and eggs. Farm Country offers an up-close view of a variety of animals on a real working farm, and the Museum of Natural Curiosity features a rainforest exhibit and a hurricane chamber. For more information, call 888-672-6040, or go to [www.thanksgivingpoint.org](http://www.thanksgivingpoint.org).

By Bobbie Hasselbring

# Fabulous Factory Food Tours

**A**ll around the country, spring is popping up and many of us are itching to hit the road. Here's a great travel secret for budget-conscious foodies: factory food tours. These tours are often free (or cost a nominal amount). They're fun, educational and you usually leave with some tasty samples. And many offer free RV parking.

Perhaps the most well-known factory food tour in the United States is Hershey Chocolate Company's in Hershey, Pennsylvania, the granddaddy of all factory food tours. This chocolate company has created Hershey's Chocolate World, an entire theme park dedicated to chocolate making and Hershey products.

If you'd rather not battle crowds at Hershey's, there are plenty of other factory food tours to discover. Here are some of my favorites.

**Blue Bell Ice Cream.** If you live in the South or the Midwest, chances are Blue Bell is your favorite ice cream. In Brenham, an hour or so north of Dallas-Fort Worth, you can see how the third-largest ice cream maker in the U.S. creates the sweet stuff. The company uses only local milk (they boast, "It's so fresh, yesterday it was grass."). More than 200,000 ice cream lovers line up each year for the 45-minute Blue Bell factory tour that takes visitors high above the production floor of humming stainless-steel equipment. The tour ends at the ice cream parlor where you have your pick of dozens of scrumptious flavors like sea salt caramel, Southern peach cobbler and red velvet cake.

**Bob's Red Mill.** If you're into healthy foods, touring Bob's Red Mill, a stone-grinding mill that sells its whole-grain products around



Unlike most ice cream makers, a half-gallon is still a full half-gallon at Blue Bell. The Bob's Red Mill Whole Grain Store features an old-time grain elevator and water wheel.

the world, is a good fit. The free, 90-minute tour educates visitors about different types of grains and grinds and you even get to play with all kinds of uncooked grains. Guests leave with samples of Bob's Scottish oats, granola and muesli.

**"JIFFY" Mix Plant – Chelsea Milling Co.** "JIFFY" mixes — those iconic little blue-and-white boxes of muffin, pancake and cake mixes — have graced American kitchens for more than 80 years. The plant, in the village of Chelsea, just outside Detroit, is a step back in time. After donning hairnets and watching a short historic video, visitors are led through the Chelsea Milling Co. plant where they process local grains into the familiar "JIFFY" products. No glass windows or even rails separate visitors from the decades-old whirring and clanging machines that process and package the products. You also get to meet the workers, many whose families have worked here for generations. At tour's end, you get your choice of "JIFFY" mixes (perfect for RV-sized kitchens).

### What's your favorite food factory tour?

Email Bobbie at [bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com](mailto:bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com)



## Chilling & Milling

From far left: Blue Bell features 50-60 ice cream flavors, some that are seasonal. Bob's Red Mill whole-grain products are sold in 80 countries.



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**Chelsea Milling Co.**, 201 W. North St., Chelsea, Michigan, 800-727-2460, [www.jiffymix.com](http://www.jiffymix.com)

**Blue Bell Ice Cream**, 1101 S. Blue Bell Road, Brenham, Texas, (there are also tours in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma, and Sylacauga, Alabama) 800-327-8135, [www.bluebell.com](http://www.bluebell.com)

**Bob's Red Mill**, 13521 SE Pleasant Court, Milwaukie, Oregon, 800-349-2173, [www.bobsredmill.com](http://www.bobsredmill.com)

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**Lippert Components, 574-535-1125,  
[www.store.lci1.com/flowdown](http://www.store.lci1.com/flowdown)**



## Like a Razor

Sea Eagle has just introduced the first of its kind 393rl RazorLite Kayak to its line of inflatable kayaks, boats and stand-up paddleboards. Constructed of drop-stitch material throughout, the 393rl RazorLite Kayak is 12 feet 10 inches long, 27 inches wide, and weighs only 28 pounds. With a tapered, hard-nose bow and stern, this kayak will cut through the waves cleaner, straighter and sharper than any other kayak on the market, according to the company. Made of 1,000-denier reinforced PVC with quadruple overlapping seams and rigid drop-stitch technology, the RazorLite Kayak is made to last. The included backpack allows you to take the lightweight RazorLite to the most remote locations. MSRP: \$1,099.

**Sea Eagle Boats, 800-748-8066, [www.seaeagle.com](http://www.seaeagle.com)**

## Clearer Eyes

After years of UV exposure, the standard coatings on polycarbonate headlights on a motorhome or dinghy vehicle can eventually breakdown, becoming yellow and hazy. It's not only unsightly, but it also reduces headlight effectiveness, posing a potential safety hazard. The car care experts at Meguiar's have developed a simple solution for this problem with the innovative, two-step Perfect Clarity Headlight Restoration Kit. The easy to use kit quickly restores clarity while preventing re-oxidizing and yellowing for up to one year, according to the company. Meguiar's Perfect Clarity Headlight Restoration Kit has been designed for hand use, but may also be used with Meguiar's DA Power System (available separately) for even faster headlight cleaning. Kits are available from a variety of retailers and sell for about \$20.

**Meguiar's, 800-347-5700, [www.meguiars.com](http://www.meguiars.com)**



## Instrumentation Fix

All Workhorse motorhome chassis and commercial trucks from 2003 to 2005 have Actia instrument clusters that may be plagued with faulty LCD odometer screens. Ultra RV Products offers a permanent solution with its proprietary, industrial-grade LCD screen that replaces the original equipment screen. The company's Actia instrument cluster repair service is performed in-house, and includes new stepper motors for the analog gauges and a re-soldered, printed circuit board. Simply remove the cluster, send it in and within seven to 10 business days, the company maintains it will have it back to you in better than new condition for \$399.

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## Dodgen Ownership Change

According to a report by *RVBusiness*, Humboldt, Iowa-based Dodgen Industries Inc., manufacturer of Born Free Class C motorhomes, was sold to HBF Investments, Des Moines, Iowa, in January. The company's new president is Jeff Butler, former head of engineering for Forest River Inc. subsidiary Dynamax, who took over January 27. John Dodgen, who is now retired, founded Dodgen Industries in 1946.



## New Chassis Maintenance Plan

Spartan Chassis Inc. has introduced PremierCare — a free maintenance plan for motorhome chassis. According to the company, PremierCare is the industry's first and only three-year or 50,000-mile complimentary chassis maintenance plan. Initially, the program will only be available on units sold at Motor Home Specialist in Alvarado, Texas, that are equipped with a Spartan chassis.



The plan applies to the Foretravel Realm on Spartan's K3GT chassis (shown), the Entegra Cornerstone on Spartan's K3 chassis and the Entegra Anthem and Aspire, both of which are on Spartan's MMTG chassis.



### RV SHOWS | APRIL

April 10-12	Providence, Rhode Island	22nd Annual Rhode Island RV & Camping Show & Sale 804-337-8463, <a href="http://www.gsevents.com">www.gsevents.com</a>
April 15-19	Pomona, California	RVIA Spring RV Show 818-248-6600, <a href="http://www.thebestrvshow.com">www.thebestrvshow.com</a>

## NEWS BRIEFS

### RV Shipments are Up!

▶ It's official: 2014 was a banner year for the RV industry. According to the Recreation Vehicle Industry Association (RVIA), for 2014 as a whole, all RV shipments reached an eight-year best of 356,735 total units, a gain of 11.1 percent over 2013. This was the fifth consecutive annual increase and the fourth double-digit percentage gain in RV shipments since the end of the recession. According to RVIA spokesman Kevin Broom, "People are out there buying RVs. The reason for that is the lifestyle. There are really good, innovative, interesting designs out there that appeal to people looking to buy."

### Camping World Acquires Tom Raper RV

▶ Camping World and Good Sam announced in January that an agreement had been signed to acquire the three existing dealership locations of Tom Raper RV, in Richmond, Indiana, and Fairfield and London, Ohio. The locations are slated for renovation to feature additional service bays, a Camping World retail store and state-of-the-art collision centers, in order to prepare them to join more than 100 other Camping World SuperCenter locations.

### World Heritage Site Itinerary

▶ The National Park Service has released a new online travel itinerary highlighting the 22 World Heritage Sites located in the U.S. The website reveals why these special destinations have been identified as having such universal significance. Visit [www.nps.gov/nr/travel/worldheritagesites](http://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/worldheritagesites).

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Photo: Robert Goodier

Western South Dakota

## Remember the Cold War?

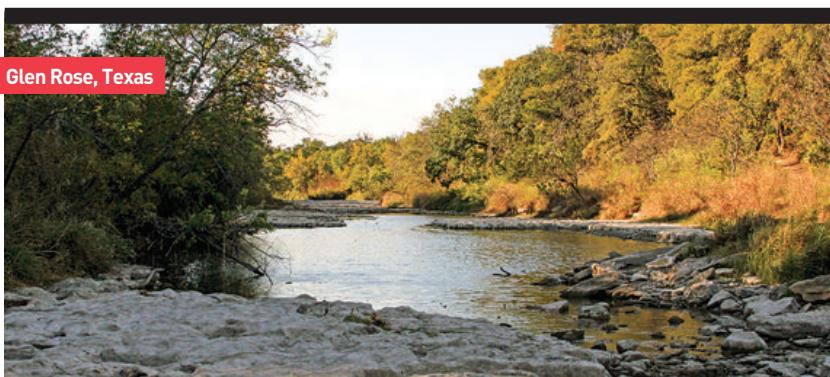
Last November, the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site in South Dakota marked the site's 15th anniversary with the grand opening of a new visitor center to tell the story of America's nuclear missile defense system.

Even those too young to remember "duck-and-cover" school drills of the '50s find it fascinating to descend 31 feet underground in a six-passenger elevator to the site's deactivated Delta-01 missile launch control center. A National Park Service ranger guides visitors past a blast door and points out workstations where rotating pairs of missileers were on duty 24/7/365.

You'll see slots where the two Air Force officers would have inserted separate keys if an order had ever come to launch intercontinental ballistic missiles. Their consoles were placed 12 feet apart to help prevent one person from "going rogue" and trying to launch the missiles alone.

From Delta-01, you can drive about 15 miles west to visit Delta-09, an actual launch facility (missile silo), and peer through the glass enclosure to see a Minuteman II training missile housed below.

**For more information**, call 605-433-5552 or visit [www.nps.gov/mimi](http://www.nps.gov/mimi) — *Christine Goodier*



Glen Rose, Texas

Photo: Neala McCarten

## Following in the Steps of Giants

It's not every day I get to stand in the footprint of a dinosaur, but visitors to Dinosaur Valley State Park in Glen Rose, Texas, get to do just that. In fact, we probably walked over several tracks in this unusual and RV-friendly park as we trod quite literally in history through the beds of the Paluxy River. About 113 million years ago the area was home to two kinds of prehistoric creatures that lived on what was the edge of a prehistoric sea.

What enabled the tracks to be preserved were the crustaceans that lived in the sea. Their shells formed a limey mud perfect for preservation, which means that present-day visitors don't have to be concerned with the destruction of the footprints by their enthusiastic search and discovery.

On your way into the park, stop at the interpretive center for models of the tracks, which will help you recognize them inside the park. The park offers mountain biking, fishing and 20 miles of hiking trails, as well as 46 partial-hookup campsites. Birdwatchers can look for golden-cheeked warblers and black-capped vireos — two species of endangered birds that live in the area.

**For more information**, call 254-897-4588, or go to [www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley](http://www.tpwd.texas.gov/state-parks/dinosaur-valley) — *Neala McCarten* **M**



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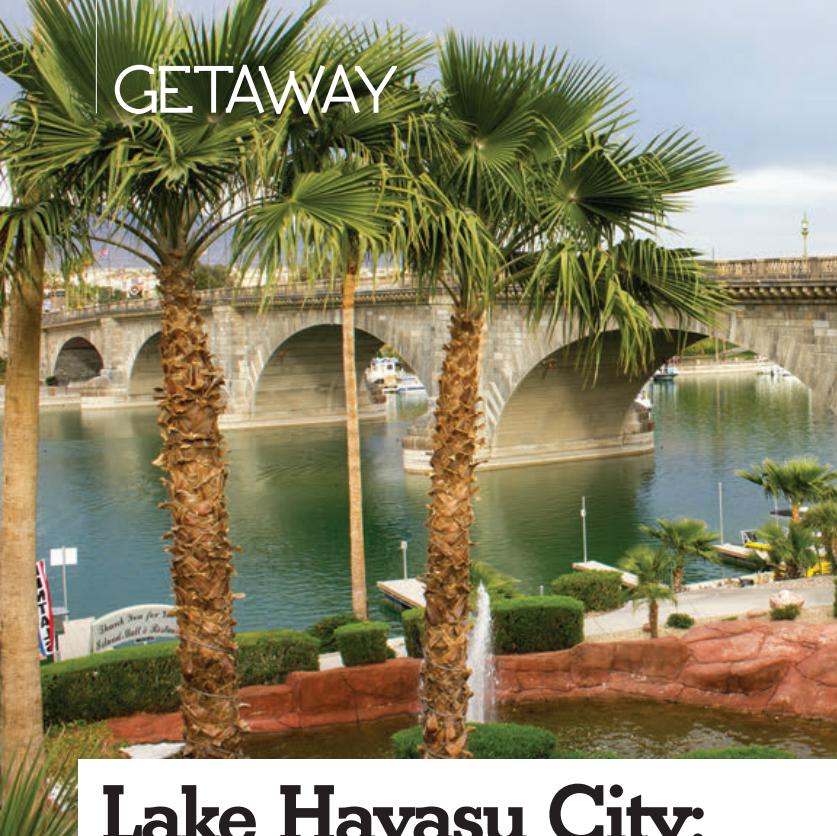
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## Lake Havasu City: Arizona's Playground

In addition to outdoor activities — mountain biking, boating, fishing, golfing and hiking — this town is home to an English Village and historic London Bridge

By Mary Zalmanek

**A** sign on the outskirts of Lake Havasu City invites visitors to “Play Like You Mean It.” My husband, Jim, and I accepted that as a challenge to see how much outdoor fun we could squeeze into our five-day visit.

We weren't the only ones who were spending time in “Arizona's Playground” in the winter of 2014. With the nasty weather in much of the U.S., Lake Havasu City was an attractive destination. So attractive, in fact, that when I called to make reservations a few days prior to our arrival, I had to call five RV parks before I found one with a single vacancy for our short motorhome. If you plan to go in the high season, make your reservations early.

I imagine many of the city's 750,000-plus annual visitors start their vacations the same way we did with a stop at London Bridge. This bridge spanned the Thames River in London, England, from 1831 until it was dismantled in 1967. Robert P. McCulloch, chainsaw

entrepreneur and founder of Lake Havasu City, bought the bridge at auction from the City of London for \$2,460,000, outbidding several others including comedian Red Skelton and some Saudi Arabian princes. McCulloch hoped the world's largest antique would attract prospective land buyers and tourists to the developing city. Before the bridge was disassembled, the exterior stones were carefully numbered. The granite blocks were shipped through the Panama Canal to California, then trucked to Lake Havasu City. Reconstruction was completed over a span of three years for an additional \$5.1 million. On Oct. 10, 1971, the lord mayor of London, numerous Arizona and British officials, and 50,000 spectators were on hand for the dedication of the rebuilt bridge. The bridge is now Arizona's second most popular tourist attraction next to the Grand Canyon.

London Bridge comes with stories to tell. Strafing marks in the granite blocks are the results of shots fired from a German fighter plane

**Getting Here** ➔ Lake Havasu City is located on the eastern shore of Lake Havasu on the Colorado River border of California and Arizona. Situated off state Highway 95, the town is an 18-mile drive south from Interstate 40, and a 65-mile drive north from Interstate 10.





during the 1940 Battle of Britain. Lamps on the bridge are made from melted-down cannons of Napoleon Bonaparte's army. The bridge is rumored to be haunted; reported sightings include a British police bobby patrolling the bridge, and a woman in black. We saw the battle scars and the historic lamps, but didn't spot either ghost.

The English Village adjacent to the bridge sits on an acre that was donated back to the city of London by McCulloch. The village welcomes tourists with an elaborate wrought-iron gate built in 1862 in Worcester-shire, England, a pair of silver city of London dragons and a fountain with four Trafalgar Square-type lions. After admiring the English memorabilia, we stopped at the visitor center to plan our activities in the Arizona desert.

We asked about mountain biking and were directed to SARA (Special Activities and Recreation Area) Park. In addition to hiking and biking trails, the 1,100-acre park 5 miles south of town features an area to fly model airplanes, a raceway, a shooting range, and baseball and softball fields. From a parking lot in SARA Park, we set off on the Crack in the Mountain Trail, not following a map or watching trail markers, and eventually ended up wondering which way to go in a sandy wash in a

From far left: In addition to hiking and biking trails, the 1,100-acre SARA Park features an area to fly model airplanes, a raceway, a shooting range, and baseball and softball fields. London Bridge Golf Club is the city's first golf course. From several fishing structures in Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge, anglers can cast their lines for striped, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill and catfish.

narrow canyon. Jim commented that we might travel faster without our bikes. A friendly hiker asked if this was our first time here. After we confirmed that it was, she said, "I thought so. Most bikers follow the blue trail over that ridge." That's when we noticed our yellow trail markers. We switched to the blue trail. Even that trail was challenging, but it rewarded us with a magnificent view of Balanced Rock Cove and its clear, turquoise waters. Back at the parking lot, I noticed all the cars with bike racks were parked in a different lot on the east side of the street. We drove over there and talked to two men unloading their bikes. They said the trails east of the Crack in the Mountain are more popular for biking. While we thoroughly enjoyed our ride, next time we will either bring hiking poles to negotiate sandy wash and the series of dry falls through the Crack, or ride bikes on the east trails.

The next day we got an early morning tee time at London Bridge Golf Club. It was the first golf course built in the city. With mountains in the background and palm trees dotting the course, it's a picturesque place to enjoy the game. A lovely couple from North Dakota joined us to make a foursome. We occasionally paused to watch hot-air balloons floating above us and a hungry coyote stalking the ducks in the pond. After we finished 18 holes, we had a tasty lunch in the clubhouse.

Since Lake Havasu, a reservoir on the Colorado River, is one of the reasons the area is so popular with tourists, we wanted to get out on the water. During our visit the water was too cold for me to try stand-up paddleboarding for the first time, even though there were a few brave souls on the water making it look like fun. Instead we opted for kayaking. I called WACKO (Western Arizona Canoe and Kayak Outfitters) to book the Castle Rock Mesquite Bay



Sunset Charter's Copper Canyon Tour takes visitors to view the unique topography of the area.

paddle trip. The owner offered to pick us up at the RV park, but it was just as easy for us to go to his shop. He left us on the shore of Castle Rock Bay with a few words of wisdom about the best wildlife viewing, and told us to call when we were ready to be picked up. We paddled near the California side of the reservoir, spying plenty of waterfowl and a lone coyote along the way. A local fisherman told us the fishing was good year-round. He often catches his limit of bass, catfish and trout.

Another way we wanted to experience the lake was through one of the narrated boat tours. We looked over the options and hoped to do the Sunset Charter and Tour Company's Lighthouse Tour. Since that two-hour tour was already booked with people who were better at planning ahead, we instead went on the Sunset Charter's Copper Canyon Tour. We boarded the Canyon Cruiser Kon Tiki on a waterfront dock near London Bridge. Since we passed several lighthouses en route, our captain told us the interesting history of Lake Havasu's lighthouses. Just as you wouldn't expect to find London Bridge in the Arizona desert, you wouldn't expect to find more lighthouses here than in any other U.S. city. All but one of them are one-third-scale replicas of famous lighthouses on the East and West coasts, and the Great Lakes. The Lake Havasu Lighthouse Club built these functional navigational beacons to ensure safety for night boating and fishing. The first lighthouse was built in 2000. There are currently 24 in strategic locations around the lake, with plans for 16 more. All materials and labor are donated for this worthy cause.

On the day our tour took us to Copper Canyon, the site of a copper mine during the late 1800s, it was calm and peaceful. Just a few other boats floated in the area. When 15,000 to 20,000 college students arrive for spring break in March and April, it's party central. Boats pack into the cove so tightly that people can sometimes walk from one shore to the other across

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## GETAWAY

LAKE HAVASU CITY

the decks of boats. After spring break or busy holiday weekends, it becomes a popular spot to scuba dive. Divers often find various items lost by boaters. A friend of our captain reported finding a Rolex watch valued at \$10,000.

We drove through Bill Williams River National Wildlife Refuge on our way to Lake Havasu City and vowed to spend some time there before we left the area. The river that flows through the area was named after Bill Williams, a mountain man who explored Arizona in the early 1800s. Just 23 miles south of the city, the 6,105-acre refuge seemed like the perfect place to spend our last afternoon. After picking up a brochure about the Peninsula and Delta Nature Trails at the visitor center, we walked to the end of the peninsula and caught glimpses of the great blue herons nesting on nearby Heron Island. Open waters around the small island provide natural protection from predators.

From several fishing structures

on the peninsula, anglers can cast their lines for striped, largemouth and smallmouth bass, bluegill and catfish. Boating is permitted at no-wake speed. Both Lake Havasu and Bill Williams River are popular Arizona fishing destinations.

On the Delta Trail, numbered information markers corresponded to notes in the brochure about native and introduced plants, a pond used as a grow-out facility for two species of endangered fish, and paths used by beavers and other animals. We looked down upon the Bill Williams Delta Marsh, which provides a riparian habitat for resident and migratory birds. A canoe trail starts below the visitor center and winds through the river delta for about 2½ miles one way. Canoes and kayaks cannot be rented at the refuge, but WACKO will provide a round-trip shuttle.

Lake Havasu City's tagline is "Play Like You Mean It." For us, it was good advice that we took to heart. **M**

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#### Lake Havasu City Convention and Visitors Bureau

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[www.golakehasvasu.com](http://www.golakehasvasu.com)

#### Lake Havasu State Park

928-855-2784

[www.azstateparks.com](http://www.azstateparks.com)

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By Bob Carpenter

# 12 BLUEGRASS FESTIVALS

Places to camp and jam, hear great music and make new friends



**B**luegrass festivals have grown during the past few decades to the point where there's actually a circuit, with performers (and some fans) traveling across the country from one to the next. A resurgence in the popularity of bluegrass after the 2000 release of the movie "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" certainly boosted the genre and recently major country stars (like Dolly Parton, Alan Jackson, Vince Gill, Ricky Skaggs, Dierks Bentley and more) have released bluegrass albums to much acclaim.

Typically, bluegrass festivals last for a two- or three-day weekend, but some run longer. Most festivals have a camping area, or one that is nearby, but many only provide dry camping sites, so be prepared to boondock while you are there. A big part of the fun of attending a festival is jamming with fellow campers until late into the evening.

We've gathered here a sampling of some bluegrass festivals across America that combine the love of RVing with the love of music.

## **APRIL MerleFest — Wilkesboro, North Carolina**

You want big? MerleFest brings more than 75,000 people together to hear

awesome music (April 23-26; [www.merlefest.org](http://www.merlefest.org)). Performers typically include acts such as Alan Jackson, Balsam Range, Carolina Chocolate Drops, Junior Sisk & Ramblers Choice, Missy Raines and The New Hip, The Nashville Bluegrass Band and lots more. Seriously, lots. In 2014 there were more than 130 performers on the bill — with 13 stages.

MerleFest celebrates the life and music of Doc and Eddy Merle Watson. Considered one of the premier music festivals in the country, MerleFest is

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Above: They really play up the Huck Finn angle at the Huck Finn Jubilee in Ontario, California.  
Below: Nickel Creek performed at last year's Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival in Oak Hill, New York.





an annual homecoming of musicians and music fans to celebrate traditional, roots-orientated sound of the Appalachian region, including bluegrass and old-time music. With so many acts it's easy to expand into Americana, country, blues, rock and many other styles.

MerleFest has often served as a launching pad for new "buzz bands" like Mandolin Orange, Jon Stickley Trio, Kim Robins and more. The Midnight Jam on Saturday has a slew of special guests. In addition to promoting "traditional plus" music, a term used by Doc Watson to describe the wide variety of musical genres and styles celebrated at MerleFest, the festival also features heritage crafts demonstrations, instrument picking lessons and jam sessions.

The Pickin' Place is a venue devoted to pickin' and grinnin'. Included in The Pickin' Place are the Traditional Jammin' Tent, Bluegrass Jammin' Tent, Anything Goes Jammin' Tent and Hands On Tent. Bring your acoustic instrument to this area hosted by the Wilkes Acoustic Folk Society.

The festival, held at Wilkes Community College, offers limited RV spaces. It's dry camping only, but a dump station is located on Stevens

Lane. You must have a four-day festival pass to purchase a camping space.

**MAY Dr. Ralph Stanley's Annual Memorial Weekend Bluegrass Festival — McClure, Virginia**

For the past 44 years, the Memorial Weekend Bluegrass Festival (May 21-23; [www.drRALPHstanleyfestival.com](http://www.drRALPHstanleyfestival.com)) has showcased some legendary performers (like Dr. Ralph Stanley and Ralph Stanley II, of course). The 2014 festival hosted Second Generation, Doyle Lawson & Quicksilver, and more. Tickets are sold at the gate only, no advance sales.

Don't miss the Dr. Ralph Stanley museum in nearby Clintwood. A trolley runs from the festival to the museum.

Electrical hookups for motorhomes are available for \$25 on a first-come, first-served basis. Dry camping sites are also available. Water, shower facilities and dump stations are located on the grounds.

**MAY DelFest — Cumberland, Maryland**

Held at the Allegany County Fairgrounds — nestled along the Potomac River in the scenic Appalachian Mountains — DelFest (May 21-24; [www.delfest.com](http://www.delfest.com)) is a family-friendly festival celebrating the rich legacy of Del McCoury's music. Of course you'll see the Del McCoury Band at this festival, but also about 35 others.

There are three options for on-site camping. The RV Dry Pass is dry

camping only. The RV Pass includes limited electricity only (on a first-come, first-served basis). And the RV DELuxe Experience is a VIP package that includes an RV Pass with full hookups and a reserved space. A family camp area is available for those who want a more kid-friendly environment.

**MAY Strawberry Music Festival — Grass Valley, California**

Held in the heart of the Sierra Nevada foothills, the Strawberry Music Festival (May 21-25; [www.strawberrymusic.com](http://www.strawberrymusic.com)) has been going strong for 34 years. The venue, Nevada County Fairgrounds, has been called one of the most beautiful fairgrounds in California, and offers forested camping, tree-lined meadows, permanent bathhouses and level terrain. Camping is first-come, first-served; however if you have a camping ticket, there will be space for you whenever you arrive. Although a large portion of the camping is shaded by forest canopy, other areas are open meadow camping. This year's headliners include Bonnie Raitt, Peter Rowan's Big Twang Theory and Ray Bonneville.

The Strawberry Music Festival, held in Grass Valley, California, has large areas for camping on-site.



From Left, Photos by Will McIntire, Roli Breitenmecker

Photo: John Pierce

**JUNE Bill Monroe's Bean Blossom Bluegrass Festival — Morgantown, Indiana**

The man who is credited with inventing the genre started this festival and it claims to be the world's oldest, continuously running bluegrass festival (this year will be its 49th year). Nestled in the beautiful hills of Brown County in southern Indiana, it features classic sounds of traditional bluegrass.

The picturesque and natural surroundings of the Bill Monroe Music Park & Campground in Bean Blossom provide a beautiful backdrop for the music and camping. This eight-day event (June 13-20; [www.beanblossom.us](http://www.beanblossom.us)) features more than 75 bands!

Campsites have 30- or 50-amp electricity and water hookups. Both wooded and open sites are big-rig friendly. Facilities include hot showers, restrooms, a coin laundry, two dump stations, a stocked fishing lake (no license required), walking trails, picnic tables, fire rings and barbecue grills.

**JUNE Huck Finn Jubilee — Ontario, California**

Held on Father's Day weekend (June 12-14; [www.huckfinn.com](http://www.huckfinn.com)), the Huck Finn Jubilee is celebrating 41 years in 2015. This bluegrass festival has a heavy emphasis on activities and fun, but the music is top notch too. You might hear The Gibson Brothers, or Sam Bush or Rhonda Vincent, or The String Cheese Incident or one of about 20 other bluegrass performers.

When you need a break from music, there are two fishin' holes that are regularly stocked, and lifeguards if you want to swim or paddleboat. A Mountain Man Village and Camp allows you to step back in time to the 1840s with demonstrations of blacksmithing, tomahawk throwing, flint knapping and more. The zero-depth Splash Play Area has a Slip 'N' Slide, and there's a big dance on Saturday night. You might want to try to climb the greased pole, build a river raft, or join in the Tom Sawyer Fence Painting Championship.

The festival is conveniently located at the 150-acre Cucamonga-Guasti

Regional Park with green grass, bountiful trees and lots of space for dry camping. There are no dump stations on site, but a honey dew wagon and a vehicle offering fresh water for a fee is always there. Showers and portable restrooms are also available.

**JUNE Telluride Bluegrass Festival — Telluride, Colorado**

The 42nd "Festivarian Pilgrimage" (as some call it) to the 8,750-foot elevation of the San Juan Mountains of southwestern Colorado will take place June 18-21 ([www.bluegrass.com/telluride](http://www.bluegrass.com/telluride)). The Telluride Bluegrass is a spectacular four days of community, inspiration and unbridled acoustic adventures.

Bonnie Raitt said, "I loved the vibe of playing the festival, so eclectic, tribal and such a wild celebration. It's like the whole town is one big partying tribe, and in one of the most stunning settings you could imagine."

Popular acts have included the Punch Brothers, Ray LaMontagne, Peter Rowan, Steve Winwood and Allison Krauss (she was part of the "house band" in 2014).

A central part of the Festivarian experience is camping — sharing a meal with new neighbors, returning home after an exhilarating day of music to share a few tunes at the campsite. There are several campgrounds nearby: Two camping areas (Town Park and Warner Field) are adjacent to the festival grounds while

the quieter high school campground is located on the edge of town. Other options are just west of town and accessible via a free shuttle bus that runs late into the night.

One nice aspect of the festival is that during the week prior to the event, Planet Bluegrass offers music lovers the opportunity to immerse themselves in the world of bluegrass. Small classes with professional musicians are hugely popular. Sessions on group jamming, vocal coaching, songwriting, one-on-one instruction and more fill up the schedule. Band scrambles, barbecues and jamming for novices through advanced ability levels are common. There's even an opportunity to make your own instrument. No experience is needed to build a mandolin and mando-building graduates can build a guitar.

**JUNE ROMP — Owensboro, Kentucky**

Held at Yellow Creek Park and billed as the Bluegrass Roots and Branches Festival, ROMP (River of Music Party) has Americana dance bands lighting up the night with a hybrid of bluegrass and dance music from the front porch of the iconic cabin in Pioneer Village. If you can withstand the hours and hours of dancing and smiling, then you can attend the All-Night After-Parties too! This year (June 24-27; [www.rompfest.com](http://www.rompfest.com)) will be the 12th ROMP. Last year's performers included Ricky Skaggs & Kentucky

The Carolina Chocolate Drops were one of the featured artists at ROMP, which many call the Bluegrass Roots and Branches Festival.



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Thunder, the Sam Bush Band and Old Crow Medicine Show. John Prine is this year's headliner.

Dry camping sites at the beautiful venue are plentiful, but are on a first-come, first-served basis. Nature trails compete with arts and crafts classes and workshops, plus there's plenty for kids to do at the Beumont Grinn Village.

**JULY Grey Fox Bluegrass Festival — Oak Hill, New York**

This four-day music festival (July 16-19; [www.greyfoxbluegrass.com](http://www.greyfoxbluegrass.com)) features dozens of internationally acclaimed artists, music and dance workshops, children's activities, food, crafts and thousands of fans from around the world. On-site dry camping is a big part of the event with 4,000 camping tickets sold each year. "We do not have many rules," the organizers state, "Just enough to ensure a safe and pleasant weekend for all." Several "quiet camping" areas are available (super quiet from 10 p.m. to 7 a.m.) if you want to avoid the all-night jamming that goes on in the regular campground areas. Other areas include Pickers Paradise, Generatorville and Family Camping.

**AUGUST Summergrass — Vista, California**

North County San Diego's Vista, California, puts on a three-day festival every year (Aug. 14-16; [www.summergrass.net](http://www.summergrass.net)) on the grounds of the Antique Gas & Steam Engine Museum. While the bluegrass is great, with headliners such as Della Mae and Special Consensus, the camping is filled with spirited jammers, and the food is varied and high quality. The fact is that the surrounding scenery of old steam engines, tractors, trucks and farm implements is a huge draw for a lot of people. It's such a throwback to the days of old that you could spend the three days wandering and exploring and not see everything. One official described it as "Disneyland for old people," but the young ones have just as good a time checking out the historical preservation.

There's dry camping on site, with more than 200 spaces available. About 50 of the sites have electricity and a

dump station is available. Generators are not allowed after 10 p.m., but jamming is unlimited and it's common to see jams lasting until 3 a.m.

**SEPTEMBER Wheatland Music Festival — Remus, Michigan**

An annual celebration of music and the arts, dating back to 1974, the Wheatland Music Festival is not strictly a bluegrass festival, but there sure is a lot of it going on there. And the old-time music and roots music that gets played isn't much of a stretch from bluegrass. Performers in 2014 included singer/songwriter Rodney Crowell, American roots performers Pokey LaFarge, bluegrass singer Sarah Jarosz and Irish accordionist Sharon Shannon. The 2015 festival will be the 42nd annual.

Rolling hills, meadows and wooded areas of sugar maple, beech, red oak, black cherry, aspen, white and jack pine are spread throughout the 160-acre Wheatland Music Organization property. Once the centennial farm of Mark and Gladys (Baumann) Wernette, the Wheatland property includes the southeast quarter of Wheatland Township's Section 30 in Mecosta County, Michigan. Stone pile fences and pine stump rows built long ago to confine cattle and control erosion serve as wistful reminders of the land's rich heritage. Since 1975 when the traditional arts organization began using the site for events, walking paths and roads have been built on the property.

Each year, in early September (Sept. 11-13; [www.wheatlandmusic.org](http://www.wheatlandmusic.org)), local and world-renowned musicians gather together for three days of singing, dancing and friendship. Thousands of children and adults converge on the festival site for traditional music and arts. Something like 10,000 volunteers help put on the Wheatland Music Festival in Remus, Michigan.

Kids Hill is great for the young ones, but MiddleGround was created to provide a place where young people who have outgrown Kids Hill can have fun and learn the ancient art of volunteering. Late night Friday and Saturday at Centennial Stage bands perform that

are geared toward the younger crowd.

Only dry camping is available and is on a first-come, first-served basis.

**SEPTEMBER Pickin' in the Pines — Flagstaff, Arizona**

One of the magical things about a music festival is the community that forms in the campgrounds. At Pickin' in the Pines all of the campgrounds are an easy ¼-mile walk to the amphitheater but there is also a shuttle every 15 minutes. Pickin' in the Pines is a world-class bluegrass and acoustic music festival first held in 2006. Held in a family-friendly setting under towering pines and bright blue skies, there are workshops, band contests and more.

Held in September (Sept. 18-20; <http://pickininthepines.org>), headliners in 2014 included Peter Rowan's Bluegrass Band and the Travelin' McCourys with Bryan Sutton.

There are four camping options at Pickin' in the Pines and some have partial hookups. **M**

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By Jeff Crider



# A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME

More and more RV parks and resorts across the U.S. are adding pickleball courts to their on-site amenities

**P**ueblo El Mirage RV & Golf Resort in El Mirage, Arizona, installed its first two pickleball courts six years ago. But so many snowbirds took an interest in pickleball that lines started to develop and Pueblo El Mirage ended up losing some of its snowbirds to competing resorts that had more pickleball courts.

“In all my years working in the RV resort business, I have never seen a sport, other than golf, that is this popular,” said Vickie Jepperson, manager of Pueblo El Mirage RV & Golf Resort, which responded to the competition and built 16 more pickleball courts, which were completed two years ago.

The pickleball courts at Pueblo El Mirage are now so highly regarded

that the resort hosts one of the largest pickleball tournaments in the world each February — the Arizona State Pickleball Championships.

RV resorts across the country now recognize that if they want to cater to baby boomers, they need to offer pickleball.

“Pickleball has become a

mandatory, expected amenity,” particularly at the highest quality RV resorts, said Greg Sidoroff, vice president of operations for La Jolla, California-based Sunland RV Resorts. Sunland offers pickleball courts at Golden Village Palms RV Resort in Hemet, California; Emerald Desert RV Resort in Palm Desert, California; and Silver Palms RV Resort in Okeechobee, Florida.

Like a miniature version of tennis, pickleball involves hitting a ball over a net to opposing players, but it requires only one-fourth of the space of a tennis court. This makes it much easier and

Voyager RV Resort in Tucson, Arizona, is one of 16 Equity LifeStyle (ELS) Properties resorts across the country that have pickleball courts.

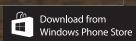
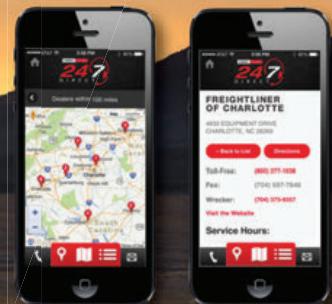


Photos: Credit of the resorts

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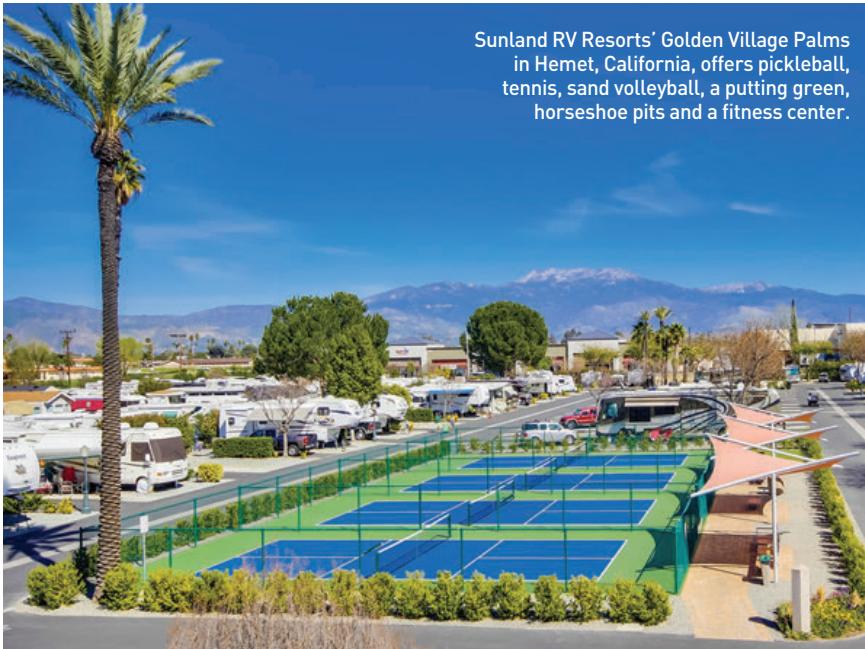


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Sunland RV Resorts' Golden Village Palms in Hemet, California, offers pickleball, tennis, sand volleyball, a putting green, horseshoe pits and a fitness center.

less physically taxing to play than tennis, hence its popularity with baby boomers.

"Pickleball is a main focus for our amenity upgrades across the country," said Dan Perlis, a regional vice president of operations for Chicago-based Equity LifeStyle (ELS) Properties, which has installed pickleball courts at 35 RV resorts across the country.

Pickleball is a natural fit for ELS resorts, Perlis said, because it's a very social game that involves four players — two on each team — rather than two opposing players, like tennis. "Because there are more people involved, the sport becomes more social, and this is what our resorts are all about," he said. "We've even been converting tennis courts into pickleball courts."

And while Sunbelt RV resorts that cater to winter visitors are most likely to invest in pickleball courts, RV parks and resorts in snowy climates are also seeing the merits of having pickleball facilities.

J & H RV Park in Flagstaff, Arizona, converted some of its tennis courts to pickleball courts, according to park owner Jo Ann Mickelson. ELS, for its part, has pickleball courts at 16 RV resorts in Oregon, Washington, Michigan, Ohio and Virginia.

From a cost standpoint, RV resorts are finding that pickleball courts are a more lucrative investment than tennis courts because they can entertain a lot more people using the same amount of space, said Wendell Johnson, general manager of 1,284-site Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort in Casa Grande, Arizona.

RV resorts that invest in extensive pickleball facilities can also host pickleball tournaments, which helps generate even more business. Palm Creek has 24 pickleball courts and hosts in-house and open tournaments.

"We have had several people come in RVs for a tournament and then come back to stay with us during the following winter season," Johnson said. "We have also had many non-RVers come for a tournament



### 🕒 A 50-Year-Old Sport

According to the USA Pickleball Association, the game was invented in 1965 on Bainbridge Island, Washington, by three dads — Joel Pritchard, Bill Bell and Barney McCallum — whose kids were bored with their usual summertime activities.



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## A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME



Sun RV Resorts' Palm Creek Golf & RV Resort in Casa Grande, Arizona, has 24 pickleball courts.

and later rent or buy a home. Our 24 pickleball courts have been a great marketing tool for Palm Creek."

Southfield, Michigan-based Sun RV Resorts, which owns Palm Creek, has also added pickleball courts at several of its properties in Florida and Texas.

Encore and Thousand Trails RV Resorts and Campgrounds, for its part, hosts an annual pickleball tournament every September at its RV resort in Seaside, Oregon, which is sanctioned by the USA Pickleball Association.

"Pickleball is a big deal," said Deb Foster, who has witnessed pickleball's growth in popularity at Carefree RV Resorts' Sun-N-Fun RV Resort and Campground in Sarasota, Florida, where she works as activities director.

Sun-N-Fun started with three portable pickleball courts in the resort's pavilion area in 2008. But pickleball became so popular that the resort subsequently added six more permanent pickleball courts outside, while it used the three portable courts for pickleball classes. At the time of this writing, Foster said, Sun-N-Fun was adding three more pickleball courts in response to continuing growth in demand for pickleball facilities.

Some RV resort operators told *MotorHome* that interest in tennis is waning, while demand for pickleball continues to grow. But Foster, who plays both tennis and pickleball, said

she doesn't see pickleball replacing tennis as much as she sees it absorbing aging tennis players.

"A lot of tennis players, as they age and as their knees start giving them problems, go to pickleball because it's a shorter court, but you can have the same level of aggressiveness that you have in tennis," she said.

Foster added that people can play pickleball at whatever level of intensity they want to play. "I play both tennis and pickleball for the exercise," she said, adding, "I exert as much energy playing pickleball as I do tennis."

Pickleball also requires less technical skill than tennis, so it's easier to master, which makes it accessible to a greater number of potential players, said Seth Harper of Sky Valley Resort in Desert Hot Springs, California, which installed its first pickleball courts in 2001.

RV resort operators across the country, meanwhile, are adding more pickleball courts to keep up with rising demand.

"We put in our first two pickleball courts in 2011. Then we added two more in 2013. And this summer we're putting in two more," said Cherie Suddarth, manager of the 756-site Gold Canyon RV and Golf Resort in Gold Canyon, Arizona, adding, "Pickleball is a great activity for people to meet each other and have fun." **M**



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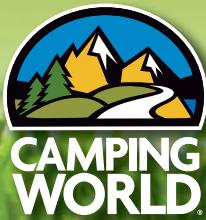


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Automatically scans and searches for available TV signals and points where the most channels are found. No manual aiming or pointing to bring in local digital broadcast signals. Manual override option lets you manually tune the antenna if desired. Roof-mounted, dual band VHF/UHF antenna utilizes a state-of-the-art amplifier to increase range and channels. Mfr. 2 year limited warranty. Only 15 1/2" dia. x 7"H. Made in USA. **Let Us Install It—Club SALE \$134** | ♦ Catalog & Internet Only

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**Smarttote² Deluxe 4-wheel Waste Tank, 27 Gallon #82132**  
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Folds flat for storage

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Kit includes shower head with non-slip rubber grip, wall bracket with peel-and-stick tape, extra long 72" hose and plumber's tape. Rated 2 GPM. WaterSense certified and CSA listed.

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20,000 BTU cooking power

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Uses disposable propane cylinders

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20,000 BTUs of cooking power under porcelain coated cast iron grates. InstaStart™ ignition. Heavy-duty side table holds grilling accessories. Sturdy aluminum frame rolls easily on rugged, off-road-ready wheels. Uses disposable propane cylinders or connect to a refillable cylinder with adapter hose (sold separately). CSA listed. | |

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**NEW! USA Dogworks Pop Up Kennel #81268**  
Twist to fold for storage. Stands 18"W x 22 1/2"H x 27 1/4"D, folds to 1 1/2"H.



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**NEW!**



# NORTH TO ALASKA: A 5,000-MILE JOURNEY TO THE LAST FRONTIER

## The Final Leg – Valdez, Alaska, to Prince George, British Columbia

**W**e've reached the last part of our great Alaskan adventure, but we still have 12 more days and roughly 1,800 miles left to explore, including a trip on the White Pass & Yukon Route Railroad and a catamaran cruise through the storied Inside Passage.

### Day 35: Valdez to Tok (254.6 miles)

Leaving Bear Paw RV Park in Valdez, our destination is Tok RV Village. The weather is 51 degrees, and for the next 20 miles, moisture-laden bushes droop heavy with fog, and mist surrounds the hills. The dew-laden roadside grass glows silvery in the morning sun as we head north on the Richardson Highway.

Low clouds shroud the mountain-tops of Keystone Canyon, and hanging glaciers slip into the silent valley below. Waters gently cascade down Bridal Veil and Horsetail falls just off the road. We drive cautiously along the slippery mountain highway. As we begin the

7-plus-mile ascent through legendary Thompson Pass, trucks on the road groan and struggle to make the climb.

Thirty-three miles out of Valdez, the Worthington Glacier fills the 5,774-acre valley. The light is different now as its icy white cloak glows in the soft sun. We were here four days ago on our way to Valdez, but it's so irresistible that we stop again to take it all in.

The sun breaks through the clouds and casts a gentle blush across the valley while the majestic Wrangell Mountains glisten in the distance. We see small lakes scattered throughout the area, an eagle sunning itself high on a tree and a moose feeding on lush green reeds in a roadside pond.

Turning right at Tok Highway, we pass the historic Gakona Lodge and Trading Post at the confluence of the Gakona and Copper rivers. Crossing the Chistochina River, gorgeous views accompany us all the way to the junction of the Glenn Highway. At mile 254, we turn onto Alaska Highway 2 and then into Tok RV Village (907-883-5877, [www.tokrv.net](http://www.tokrv.net)).

### Day 36: Tok, Alaska, to Destruction Bay, Yukon Territory (224.5 miles)

Back on Alaska Highway 2 south, the road is full of washboards, frost heaves and construction, which back up traffic and slow us to a crawl. Crossing the Tanana River bridge, we arrive at the Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge at mile 82.1. This 730,000-acre bird migration corridor is known as the Tetlin Passage, where more than 180 bird species and 44 mammals raise their young.

At the U.S. Customs and Border

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**Emerald Lake's color is caused by fine limestone dust just below the water's surface.**



Protection station Port Alcan, we're back in the Yukon Territory. Small, busy Beaver Creek is a good place to stop, refuel and satisfy your hunger. Buckshot Betty's has a restaurant/store, fuel, an ATM and post office.

Now 20 miles southeast of the border, we're 113 miles from Tok and 184 miles from Haines Junction. Construction crews working from opposite directions connected the Alaska Highway here at Beaver Creek in 1942.

Except for occasional frost heaves, it's a scenic, relaxing drive. At mile 180.5 there's a dramatic view of Canada's six highest peaks, all more than 15,000 feet tall. We stop at the Kluane Museum of Natural History at Burwash Landing. Small and unimpressive on the outside, it's amazing inside. Rated No. 1 in the Yukon, its remarkable wildlife exhibits are displayed as if in their natural habitat.

At mile 224.5 we reach Destruction Bay RV Lodge (867-841-5332) for the night. It has spacious sites with electricity and water, but no sewer hookups.

Destruction Bay, on the shores of Kluane Lake at Alaska Highway mile 1,083, was a truck relay station during the highway's construction before a devastating storm wreaked havoc here, giving it its name.

Lodge owner Loren Maluorno has a special evening planned for our RV group: a sumptuous dinner with roast beef, potato salad and berry pie. Yum! After dinner, Maluorno narrates fascinating Yukon folklore and tells us about life in this remote area.



### Going With a Group

If you'd like to travel to Alaska with other RVers, two popular tour companies are Adventure Caravans (844-872-7897, [www.adventurecaravans.com](http://www.adventurecaravans.com)) and Fantasy RV Tours (800-952-8496, [www.fantasyrvtours.com](http://www.fantasyrvtours.com)).



Broadway, one of Skagway's main streets, is home to many buildings built between 1897 and 1900.

### Day 37: Destruction Bay, Yukon Territory, to Skagway, Alaska (269.5 miles)

Continuing along the Alaska Highway, we pass Soldier Summit, site of the 1942 opening of the Alaska Highway. From Haines Junction we continue on to Whitehorse, then turn onto Klondike Highway 2 heading toward Skagway.

Stopping at dazzling Emerald Lake, located in Yoho National Park in British Columbia, we're mesmerized by the water's stunning, almost hypnotic emerald green color.

On to the village Carcross, originally named Caribou Crossing. Just north of town is said to be the world's smallest desert, and it's a magnet for travelers. We wonder how a desert could have formed here. These sand dunes are remnants of the last ice age, when a large lake dried up, leaving behind this rare, geological feature.

Driving south we stop for pictures at the Bove Island lookout in Tagish Lake, with expansive views of Windy Arm. Approaching the border at mile 249.9, there's a long line ahead. This is supposedly the busiest of all U.S./Canada border-crossing stations. All vehicles must pass through a large metal arch scanner, and the space is so tight, it's disconcerting.

At White Pass Summit, the time zone changes and we set our clocks back one hour. A steep downgrade takes us from 3,292 feet to sea level in just 11½ miles along a narrow, single-lane road hedged in by mountains. Congested with buses, RVs, bikers and hikers all going to Skagway, extreme caution is required when driving here.

Crossing the Skagway River gorge and Captain William Moore Bridge, we enter Skagway and check in at the well-laid-out, full-service Garden City RV Park (907-983-2378).

### Day 38: Skagway, Alaska

Skagway, nestled in a fjord at the northern end of Alaska's Inside Passage, became a major corridor to the Yukon when gold rush fever swept North America like a tidal wave in 1898. Boats off-loaded thousands of prospectors, and Skagway was transformed into a tent city flooded with gold seekers heading north to Dyea. From here they hiked the perilous Chilkoot Trail, called "the meanest 33 miles in history" to Whitehorse. Waiting boats took them up the hazardous, rock-strewn rapids of the Yukon River. Many lives were lost when boats floundered and sank as they headed to Dawson City, where it was rumored the area was littered with

Photo: Bryan Adams



Photo: Neela and Arjun Bhagat

From far left: The WP&YR narrow-gauge railroad was built during the Klondike Gold Rush of 1898. The sand dunes north of Carcross are remnants from the last ice age.

gold. It's estimated that of the 40,000 or so who undertook this treacherous journey, only 4,000 found gold.

Today, about 2,000 hikers annually retrace history along the Chilkoot Trail, now a historic landmark. The construction of the White Pass & Yukon Route Railway (WP&YR) in 1900 made the Chilkoot Trail obsolete.

Skagway was a hotbed for lawlessness and scoundrels, the most notorious of which was "Soapy Smith," a con man who sold wrapped soap bars containing \$5, \$10, and \$100 bills to excited bystanders. Soapy's own cronies, mingling with the crowd, always found the money. Soapy became entrenched in Skagway's politics. At Jeff Smith's Parlor, under his watchful eye, many fraudulent decisions favoring him were made. Eventually, a vigilante committee was formed to confront him. During a meeting at the wharf, Soapy arrived unexpectedly. Frank Reid, the city's surveyor, confronted him, and a shootout ensued, leaving Soapy dead and Reid fatally wounded.

Reid and Smith were buried at the Gold Rush Cemetery about 2 miles north of town. An impressive memorial

marks Reid's grave, but Soapy's, so insignificant, is hard to find. A nearby waterfall was named after Reid, but Soapy became the town's legend.

Between 2nd and 3rd avenue, the Arctic Brotherhood Hall was built in 1898. Thousands of pieces of local driftwood cover its facade, making it the most photographed building in Alaska. We see the Trail of '98 Museum inside.

Also worth visiting is the Skagway Museum and Archive, located in the old McCabe College building and the WP&YR 1898 Train Depot.

This evening our caravan group gathers at Eagles Hall, on 6th and Broadway, for Monte Carlo Night, and then head next door to the adjoining theater for the "Days of '98." This hugely entertaining vaudeville show is presented as a hilarious skit recalling the wild gold rush days, and includes can-can dancers and ragtime music.

### Day 39: Skagway, Alaska (Juneau trip)

Today we ride a catamaran to Juneau, the only state capital in the U.S. without road access. At 7:25 a.m., Captain Glen Jacobsen, along with his deckhand, daughter Anna, welcomes us aboard

Skagway is one of the most interesting and popular towns to visit in Alaska's Inside Passage.

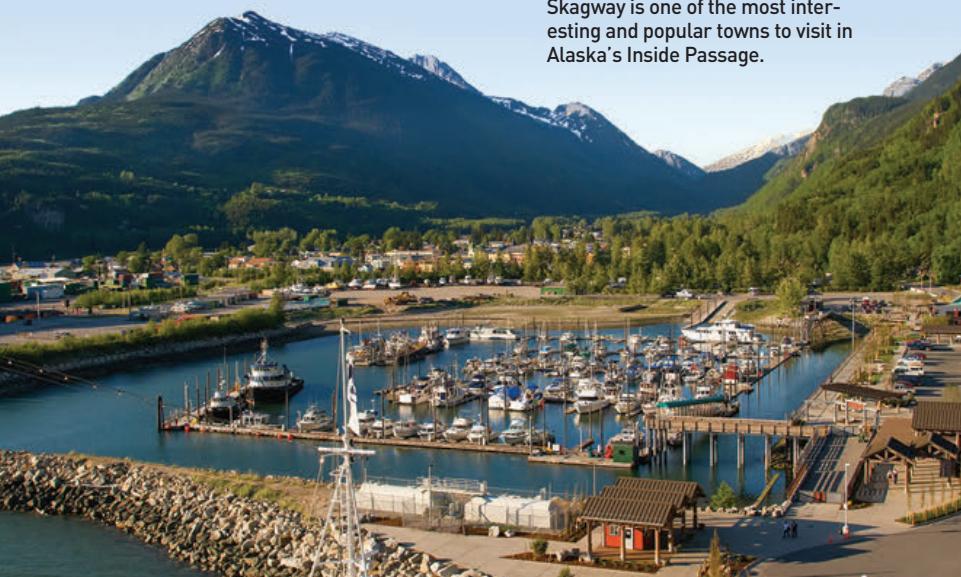
the Fjordland. We're served breakfast and coffee as we make our way through the early morning mist of the Lynn Canal. Inappropriately called a "canal," this massive, 2,000-foot-deep gorge is part of the storied Inside Passage. It's the longest, deepest glacial fjord in North America, and part of the Marine Highway System connecting Juneau, Haines and Skagway.

Humpback whales inhabit these deep waters. Suddenly Capt. Jacobsen calls out "whales sighted starboard," and everyone rushes outside, cameras clicking. Three or four humpbacks put on an incredible show, blowing, diving and frolicking.

Once we reach Juneau it's raining, and a bus takes us into downtown. We browse some gift shops and warm up with hot chocolate at the Heritage Café on South Franklin Street, then meet up with many of our caravan friends at the Red Dog Saloon. Several large cruise ships are in the harbor, and the restaurant/bar with its popular Wild West theme is packed.

After lunch, the bus takes us past the Alaska State Capitol, the governor's mansion and other attractions on our way to Mendenhall Glacier. A trail from the glacier's visitor center leads to outstanding views. The massive glacier is about 12 miles long and 1½ miles wide, rising 100 feet above the water, with ice depths about 2,000 feet in some areas. We take photos of this natural marvel and then head back to town for our return trip to Skagway.

Heading back on the boat, we pass an area of treacherous rocks and three lighthouses. In February 1898, the story goes, the Clara Nevada, with 40 passengers and lots of gold, hit rocks during a violent storm and sank. Original reports indicated four survivors, but no lifeboat or gold was found. Later, rumors surfaced that the captain and some of his crew were seen in various towns having a good time.



### **Day 40: Skagway, Alaska (train trip)**

Today we ride the famous WP&YR. (Remember to take your passport since the train enters Canada and re-enters the U.S.) Construction on the WP&YR began in 1898. The railroad, including a steel-cantilever bridge, was completed in two years. Climbing nearly 3,000 feet in 20 miles and negotiating extreme, rugged topography, numerous bridges, sharp bends and two tunnels dug through the mountains and viaducts across deep gorges, this amazing engineering feat was designated an International Historic Civil Engineering Landmark, and awarded equal status as the Panama Canal, Eiffel Tower and Statue of Liberty.

Boarding one of the refurbished vintage passenger coaches, we settle into our seats for the 3½-hour, 40-mile round trip. Leaving town, we pass Gold Rush Cemetery and a black cross marking a tragic accident, when a massive 100-ton granite rock plunged down the hill crushing two workers.

The landscape changes rapidly as we negotiate sharp cliffs, bends and bridges. Surrounded by mountains and cascading waterfalls, we cross deep ravines and salmon-filled rivers. The original bridge, built in 1901, now unused, is pointed out to us. At Inspiration Point there's an awesome view of Lynn Canal and the Chilkat Range.

Then, without warning, we plunge into two long, pitch-dark tunnels. Blinded as we re-enter daylight again, there's much amusement among our group, trying to figure out "who kissed who." Reaching White Pass, the international U.S./Canadian border, flags of both countries fly. The locomotives are unhooked, and moved to the other end for our return to Skagway.

Once back in Skagway, we visit the famed Red Onion Saloon. Stepping inside this once-boisterous tavern, its Wild West mood is infectious. Retaining much of its bygone theme, the original old bar with its loud atmosphere is a popular hangout. Waitresses dressed in period costumes, and dollar bills tucked into their bras, busily serve customers. On the enormously popular

"brothel tour," buxom ladies in typical late 1800s-style dresses escort curious visitors upstairs. It costs \$5 for 15 minutes, "just like the good old days," says the "madam."

### **Day 41: Skagway, Alaska, to Northern Beaver Post, Yukon Territory (308.1 miles)**

Leaving Skagway, we pass through White Pass Summit U.S. customs station and turn our clocks ahead one hour. Retracing our route along Tagish Lake and Carcross, we turn right onto Route 8 toward Atlin/Tagish, cross the Tagish Bridge and turn right onto Alaska Highway 1 toward Teslin.

The Teslin Tlingit Heritage Centre on Teslin Lake has many interesting exhibits of Tlingit history and culture. An impressive and colorful row of totem poles lines the main entrance. After briefly visiting the nearby George Johnston Museum, we resume our journey through conifer forests.

We cross Nisutlin Bay Bridge and our pleasant drive continues through gently undulating terrain, crossing the Continental Divide, then passing Rancheria Falls at mile 234.3. Just beyond Big Creek Bridge, we look for the Cassiar Highway 37 south sign and at mile 308 check in at Baby Nugget RV Park (867-536-2307, [www.nuggetcity.com/rvpark.html](http://www.nuggetcity.com/rvpark.html)). The park has water, electric and cable, and a dump station.

### **Day 42: Northern Beaver Post, Yukon Territory, to Dease Lake, British Columbia (147.4 miles)**

Leaving Baby Nugget RV Park, we take Cassiar Highway 37 toward the British Columbia/Yukon Territory border.

We stop at Cassiar Mountain Jade Store at mile 76.2. Jade is brought over from the Princess Jade Mine, about 82 miles east. It's one of the largest jade claims in the world. We watch precision carving of vases, jewelry, memento boxes, chess sets and more.

Our drive continues, surrounded by rolling hills and pristine lakes. Mount Edziza, part of an active 7½ million-year-old volcanic complex, is located within a provincial park where obsidian

tools and weapons made by the Tahltan and Iskut people have been excavated.

Farther on, we drive past a vast forested area of several thousand acres, where a lightning strike in 2010 ignited a devastating fire, closing the Cassiar Highway for several days. This natural phenomenon lets nature rejuvenate the forests

At mile 147.4 we turn left into Dease Lake RV Park (250-771-4666).

### **Day 43: Dease Lake, British Columbia, to Hyder, Alaska (242 miles)**

Back on Cassiar Highway, we reach Gnat Pass Summit (elevation 4,072 feet), and encounter many sharp curves along this mountainous terrain. At mile 55.2, we reach a large pullout overlooking Tatogga Lake. This beautiful scene is a must for great photos.

Bell II Crossing, mile 148.3, is a convenient place for fuel and shopping. Continuing along Route 37A south to Meziadin Junction and heading toward Stewart and Hyder, we're surrounded by majestic mountains. The dramatic scenery makes for an exceptionally picturesque drive.

At mile 221 we reach Bear Glacier. Captivated, we stop to admire the icy blue glacier. We must leave now, but we'll be back tomorrow. After passing the "Welcome to Stewart" sign, we turn into Bear River RV Park (250-636-9205, [www.bearriverrvpark.com](http://www.bearriverrvpark.com)).

The Portland Canal, a narrow 90-mile-long saltwater fjord, separates Hyder, Alaska, and Stewart, Canada. The main attraction here is Fish Creek, just north of Hyder. Located in the heart of the Tongass National Forest, Fish Creek Wildlife Observation Site attracts brown (grizzly) and black bears that come here to fish for returning chum and pink salmon. This recreation area along the Salmon River is open mid-July through early September with an admission charge. Operated by the U.S. Forest Service, rangers are present to ensure the safety of visitors.

We drive to Fish Creek along the heavily wooded Salmon Glacier Road, where bears frequently wander, to the observation area. We enter a long



viewing platform that runs along Fish Creek and spot a bear ambling along the stream. As dusk approaches, we return to the RV park.

#### **Day 44: Stewart, British Columbia, and Hyder, Alaska**

The quaint town of Hyder, Alaska (population about 100), is called the “friendliest ghost town in Alaska” and recalls frontier days. The small post office, a few businesses and restaurants service the needs of the residents.

Feeling brave? Stop at the Sealaska Inn and Camp Run-A-Muck to get “hyderized” with a shot of its famous 190-proof alcohol drink, also fittingly called the “snake bite.” It’s pretty potent stuff we’re told. Remember, if you go to Hyder or Fish Creek, both in the U.S., you must show your passport when returning to Stewart, Canada. Both observe Pacific Time.

Hearing there’s a lot of bear activity today, we head to Fish Creek. It’s misty with a light drizzle, and covering our cameras with plastic bags, we find excellent spots on the viewing platform.

Around mid-morning, we return to Bear Glacier on Highway 37, north of Stewart. From a viewpoint along the road, we stop for one of the most amazing sights we’ve seen: a huge, luminous blue-and-white ice bridge formed at the toe of the glacier. In the silence we can hear the melting water rush under the bridge into Strohn Lake.

Returning to our campsite we prepare for tomorrow’s drive.

#### **Day 45: Stewart, British Columbia, to Smithers, British Columbia (204.6 miles)**

Today, typical mountain weather rules with intermittent sun, clouds and fog. Heading back north on Highway 37, we’re treated to a close encounter — black bears ambling along the roadside. Paying no attention to us, they wander off into the nearby forest.

Passing Meziadin Lake Provincial Park, a popular site for boating, camping and fishing, we keep going. An interesting detour and historical side trip at mile 134 is St. Paul’s Anglican Church, with its original 1893 bell tower and several totem poles. We continue, and look out for Yellowhead Highway 16 heading to Smithers.

At Moricetown, mile 182.3, we photograph nets set up by fishermen. Once inhabited by the Bulkley Valley Indians, it was renamed after the pioneer missionary, Father Morice. Salmon swimming upstream are caught with basketry traps, dip-nets and harpoons, then smoked at the native hatchery.

At Smithers, mile 204.6, we take a right toward Smithers Par 3 and RV campground (250-847-3229, [www.smitherspar3andrv.com/the-rv-park](http://www.smitherspar3andrv.com/the-rv-park)).

#### **Day 46: Smithers, British Columbia, to Prince George, British Columbia (232 miles)**

Today is the final leg of our journey. Back on Yellowhead Highway 16, we drive through Houston, Topley, Burns

Canada’s Tagish Lake has two arms, Taku Arm in the east and Windy Arm in the west. The Klondike Highway runs along Windy Arm, south of Carcross, Yukon Territory.

Lake and Frazer Lake. Reaching a steep downhill grade at mile 214, we see a “Welcome to Prince George” sign. We find it somewhat complicated getting through Prince George to the Southpark RV Park (250-963-7577). Spacious, wooded, and well-maintained, we settle into our full-service site.

Our farewell dinner starts at 4:30 p.m. at Carmel Restaurant. After a huge buffet, we receive a gift bag of memories from Adventure Caravans.

#### **Day 47: Prince George, British Columbia**

After a farewell breakfast, hugs and goodbyes, our friends hitch up and drive away one by one. Waving to each other, we feel sad. It’s not an understatement to say this was a once-in-a-lifetime journey. Credit for our extraordinary, trouble-free experience goes to the planning and support of wagon masters Ken and Carole Adams and tail gunners Bill and Carol Hamilton.

Needing to get some work done on our motorhome before the long trip back home to Wisconsin, we stay another day in Prince George. We drop off our coach at a service center for a front-end alignment and replacement of leaking rear-axle seals (the result of the rough roads). We have a few hours available so we unhook our dinghy and explore the city.

At the Central BC Railway and Forestry Museum, we explore and climb into some old locomotives, fire engines and rail cars, and take a ride on the Cottonwood Minitrain. We then head to the Two Rivers Gallery, which focuses on contemporary Canadian art. Picking up our motorhome, we return to the RV park and prepare for our trip home.

This trip was indeed an exceptional experience. The all-embracing wilderness and serenely beautiful contact with nature in all its majesty made for the motorhome journey of a lifetime. **M**

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WITH REMOTE CONTROL AND  
AUTOMATIC BRAKE**  
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60813/61889

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HaulMaster

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# Realm of One

Foretravel and Motor Home Specialist Team Up to Create a Unique Luxury Motor Coach

By Chris Hemer

**S**ignificant achievements are rarely the work of just one mind. The seed that becomes a tree of inspiration is usually sown by a dedicated team, motivated by a singular vision. In the world of luxury motor coaches, a collaborative effort is always part of the process, but it usually starts on a computer screen — and ends on the production floor — at the manufacturer's facility. In the case of the all-new Realm FS6 Class A, things were a little different. In fact, you could say they were unprecedented. Because, instead of the factory dictating everything from concept to creation, the Realm was designed by the dealer and built to spec by the manufacturer, resulting in a

unique business relationship — and a very special coach.

Foretravel is a small manufacturer of bespoke motor coaches in the east Texas town of Nacogdoches. On an average year, it sells around 20 units priced in the \$1.3 million to \$1.6 million range. By contrast, Motor Home Specialist RV (MHSRV) of Alvarado, Texas, about 40 miles north of Dallas, is the No. 1 volume-selling motorhome dealer in the world, moving around 60 to 70 motorhomes a week. It's also the nation's sole Foretravel dealer, so it was in a unique position to request a luxury Class A product line built exclusively for the dealership that would fill a conspicuous gap between the \$500,000 to

\$1 million price points. Spearheaded by Foretravel's Manager of Product Development Darrell Luce, and MHSRV CEO Donny O'Banion, the goal for the Realm project was to provide all of the touchstones of a custom coach in a 45-foot product that would cost roughly half as much, or around \$700,000, fully loaded.

A big part of a custom coach's price tag originates with its robust chassis. Testament to Foretravel's commitment to quality is that it normally builds its own, but that would be cost-prohibitive for the Realm project. So, Foretravel turned to Spartan for its new K3GT chassis. In addition to a stout gross vehicle weight rating of 54,000 pounds, the K3GT packs a 15-liter, 600-horsepower Cummins ISX diesel, and is equipped with independent front suspension and Spartan's new passive steer tag axle, which the company claims is good for a 7 percent reduction in curb-to-curb turning radius. The

**ABOVE:** Beautiful Mystic Bronze paint is highlighted by flush-fit slides and dual-pane frameless windows. An electric refrigerator/freezer can be deployed from basement storage when the fun moves outdoors.

money saved over a custom-built chassis saved a considerable amount of money, enabling the team to equip the coach with all the luxury amenities they envisioned. "I think of it as IQ compounding," commented Lyle Reed, executive director and chairman of Foretravel Motorcoach. "We combined our 47-year history as a manufacturer, with Spartan's experience as a chassis vendor, with Motor Home Specialist's mastery of RV marketing and customer knowledge as the world's largest dealer."

And it shows. When vying for attention from consumers who have nearly \$1 million in discretionary income to spend, the first impression is crucial — and the Foretravel MHSRV team nailed it with styling that is at once impactful and subtle. Think Mercedes-Benz S Class or Bentley Mulsanne; you don't have to be an auto expert to know these cars are special, and the Realm's imposing presence works to similar effect — except on a much grander scale. In fact, much of the Realm's aesthetic details are designed to echo premium automobiles. Consider its chrome grille, automotive Xenon headlights with LED accent lighting, fog lights and REALM FS6 script emblazoned on the rear cap — the F standing for Foretravel, the S for Spartan, and the 6 for 600 horsepower.

And the paint. Oh, the paint. Applied by the artisans at Foretravel, the Mystic Bronze scheme (pictured) is a spectacular combination of colors, fades and stripes that reportedly takes up to 675 hours from prep to completion. Not only are the slideout rooms painted to match on their sides, but even underneath. Combined with the unique REALM<sup>AI</sup>R integrated fairings above the windshield, and luxury coach standards like polished Alcoa wheels and roofline-integrated Girard awnings, the overall effect is truly striking.

Of course, the Realm also features all the other conveniences you would expect of a luxury coach, such as automatic hydraulic leveling and cavernous pass-through basement storage, but here again, details make the difference. The baggage doors lock

**BELOW:** Clockwise from below: Sculpted ceiling incorporates offset air intakes for the three 15,000-Btu air conditioners, which significantly reduces sound. Exterior flat-screen TV is housed in a locking compartment. Dual vanity in the rear master bath offers large, deep cabinets.



or unlock with a key fob, and the bays are equipped with power-operated cargo trays as well as motion-sensing LED lights. Operate a tray, or simply put your arm inside a baggage door, and the lights come on automatically. At night, visibility is further enhanced by LED entry door and patio lights, not to mention cool blue exterior ground-effects lighting that adds a touch of drama.

A key feature of Foretravel's products is what the company calls Fore-Slide technology, and the Realm benefits from it as well. First, the hydraulically operated, flush-fit slideouts begin to deploy almost silently, and perform a mechanical magic trick as a panel in the floor opens up, and the edge of the slide settles in, creating a perfectly flat floor. Then, once the slide is deployed, a pneumatic bladder

around the circumference of each slide creates a seal that is literally airtight. Perhaps just as important, the coach was designed so that it's still fully functional even when the slides are in. "The journey should be part of the experience," O'Banion explained. "So we started with the slide rooms in and built outward. That way passengers have access to the kitchen, the bathroom. They should have fun while they're traveling. Be comfortable, be entertained."

One of four floorplans in the Realm lineup, the bath-and-a-half Luxury Villa 1 (LV1) floorplan we sampled offers an expansive living area featuring the traditional opposing slide layout with some untraditional details. The curbside slideout, for example, houses not the two-place expandable table you're probably accustomed to, but a fixed

dinette that, while smallish for four adults, is thickly padded and features a natural quartz table. It's also positioned right next to a large window so you can take in the views, or just watch the kids (or grandkids) play. Right next to the dinette is the galley area, which offers plenty of space on the natural quartz countertop, which is also home to a large, undermounted stainless-steel sink with residential fixtures, induction cooktop, a residential stainless-steel convection microwave above, and a drawer dishwasher concealed below. The galley also features a countertop extension, which is a feature we're usually not fans of; we've found they make a lot of noise during travel, and can extend with an alarming crash while cornering. Foretravel solves both problems elegantly and effectively by equipping the extension, as well as both rear pocket doors, with electromagnets that are energized whenever the key is on, holding everything tightly in place.

On the streetside is a large Villa Ultraleather couch with pillow-top air mattress and pullout extension, at the end of which is a cabinet featuring a 52-inch Sony LED flat-screen TV, drawers for movies and other knick-knacks, plus a large cabinet for all of the audiovisual equipment, which includes a Blu-ray player that's viewable from all televisions, a custom surround-sound system with a subwoofer in the living area, and a professionally programmed universal remote control. Directly adjacent is, get this, a small wine chiller. Aft of the TV cabinet in a 21-cubic-foot stainless-steel refrigerator and a large pantry with pullout drawers, followed by a stackable washer/dryer in its own cabinet.

Often in a coach of this caliber, the interior can bear a closer resemblance to a nightclub than a residence, but the Realm's living area is tastefully decorated — in fact, some might say it's on the conservative side — and the materials and craftsmanship are unsurpassed. As mentioned, natural quartz counters are used throughout, along with glass-tile backsplashes, solid, satin-finished African Mahogany

woodwork and porcelain-tile floors laced with dark accent stripes. Infinitely dimmable lighting is used throughout, all controlled by multiplex panels, which are logically placed in every area of the coach.

In the center of the coach on the curbside is the half-bath, which is beautifully finished with more African Mahogany cabinetry, quartz and glass tile, along with a porcelain macerator toilet, powered roof vent and multiplex lighting. Countertop space should be more than enough for your guests, and above the small sink is a mirrored medicine cabinet. Plenty of lighting, plus a large window prevent the area from feeling like a closet.

Step out of the half-bath and look to your left, and it's a clear shot to the back of the coach and the beautifully appointed master bath, which was arranged not just for comfort, but visual impact. "Normally, when you look to the back of the coach, you see a closet," O'Banion explained. "When you look at the back of the Realm, you see the dual vanities and cabinetry. The prettiest part of the bathroom is facing forward." The design also adds 2-3 feet of visual depth to the interior, and allows the vanity to be flanked by a huge cedar-lined closet (replete with shoe storage and a personal vault) on the streetside, and a magnificent shower on the curbside. This 60-by-31-inch space is finished with natural stone in the pan and large tiles on the walls, accented by thick bands of gorgeous glass tile. It's plenty big

**WHAT'S HOT** 

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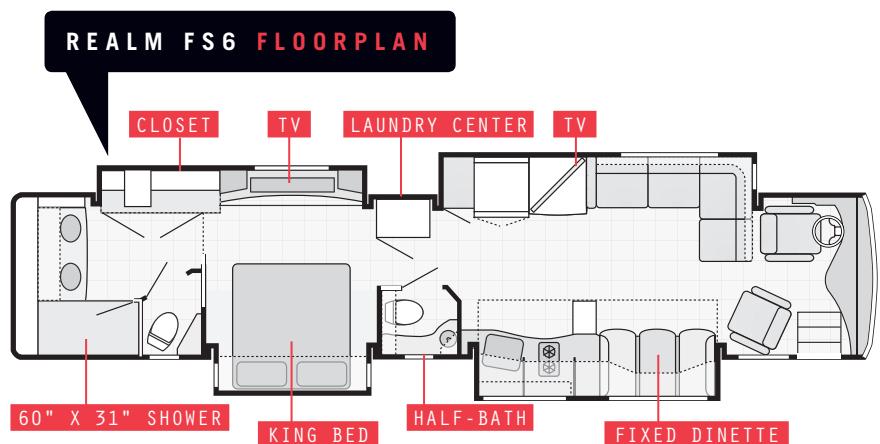
**WHAT'S NOT** 

Smallish dinette, TV angle may be odd for some



enough for two, and is equipped with a residential, detachable showerhead, built-in seat, towel bar and skylight. Unless you're Donald Trump, you couldn't wish for more. Some other unusual details: The step-up height into the bath is only 2 inches (compared to the typical 5 inches or more) which makes the area feel roomier, and the toilet itself is enclosed in its own room for more privacy.

The bedroom, while spacious, again seems conservative until you begin to notice more subtle nuances. The walls around the bed at hip level are tiled so, in O'Banion's words, "They stay looking nice even after you've walked past them a few times." The built-in cabinetry at the foot of the bed has a large window, and at your command, a 52-inch flat-screen TV will rise from the surface. There is plenty of room for your belongings, and like the rest of the coach, it is very well-lit and thoughtfully arranged.





Master suite features a king-size bed, padded headboard and plenty of light. All cabinets, as well as sliding pocket doors, are solid African Mahogany.

Clearly, a coach like this is intended to be driven as much as it is lived in, and we were given the opportunity to put the Realm through its paces on both Texas superslabs and country backroads. As you slip into the driver's seat, you feel like a king on a throne, with the world outside the massive one-piece windshield at your command. Regardless of your size or stature, getting comfortable in the cockpit shouldn't pose a problem, as the steering wheel offers both power tilt and telescoping functions, the seat is six-way power adjustable, and the throttle and brake pedals are power adjustable as well. The instruments are backlit analog, and the dash panels are painted to match the exterior, which we thought was a nice touch. There's a central monitor that will display both side- and rear-camera views, but what we really loved is that the rear camera isn't fixed; you can control it remotely from the cockpit. This same monitor also displays the SilverLeaf driver information center, while a separate touchscreen houses the Rand McNally RV Navigation system. And just because your co-pilot should always be pampered, he/she is treated to a power footrest and step-well cover, plus a personal DVD player/navigation unit mounted on a flexible stalk.

Fire the massive 15-liter diesel and

there's little more than a momentary shake as it comes to life, then a barely audible thrum as it idles more than 40 feet behind you. Merging onto the interstate, the big coach moved along almost silently, with nary a squeak or rattle to be found anywhere. In fact, the only thing that intermittently broke the relative silence was the beep of the standard Mobileye Collision Avoidance system, which thankfully can be muted and still retain its function as a useful safety device.

Exiting the highway and merging onto a two-lane country road, the ride remained compliant even over rough roads, and the steering provided good feedback, which is important on a coach of this size. The disc brakes on all eight wheels provide confident stopping power, which can be supplemented by a three-position engine brake if needed. Certainly, you're never lulled into forgetting that you're driving a 45-foot coach, but at the same time, you always feel confident that you're in control.

In terms of standard equipment, fit and finish, drivability and overall value, this unique motor coach may truly be in a Realm of its own. **M**

**Foretravel**  
800-955-6226, [www.foretravel.com](http://www.foretravel.com)

**Motor Home Specialist**  
800-335-6054, [www.mhsv.com](http://www.mhsv.com)

## Specifications

### Chassis

Model	Spartan K3GT
Engine	Cummins ISX 15-liter
SAE Hp	600 @ 1,800 rpm
Torque	1,950 @ 1,200 rpm
Transmission	Allison 4000MH 6-speed
Axle Ratio	4.30:1
Tires	365/80R22.5 front, 315/80R22.5 rear/tag axle
Wheelbase	292"
Brakes	Air-actuated disc with ABS, all positions
Suspension, Front/Rear:	Independent/ self-leveling air
Fuel Capacity	200 gal
Fuel Economy	6-8 mpg
Warranty	3 years/50,000 miles

### Coach

Exterior Length	45'
Exterior Width	8' 6"
Exterior Height	13' 3"
Interior Width	8'
Interior Height	7'
Construction	Steel framing in walls, outriggers and sub floors; vacuum-bonded and laminated side walls, floors, roof and subfloors; one-piece CosmoLite exterior roof material
Freshwater Capacity	127 gal
Black-Water Capacity	56 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	115 gal
Water-Heater	Aqua-Hot hydronic
LP-Gas Capacity	N/A
Air Conditioner	(3) 15,000-Btu with heat pump
Furnace	Aqua-Hot hydronic
Refrigerator	21.6 cubic foot, residential
Inverter/Charger (2)	2,800-watt inverter/ 125 amp
Battery (6)	8G4D gel cell
AC Generator	12.5 kW diesel
MSRP	\$1,026,650
MSRP as Tested	\$1,026,650
Warranty	2 years/24,000 miles

### Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	17,820 lbs
Rear Axle	18,980 lbs
Tag Axle	11,980 lbs
Total	48,780 lbs

### Chassis Ratings

GAWR, Front/Rear/Tag	20,000/20,000/ 14,000 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	54,000/74,000 lbs
ROCCC	5,220 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity

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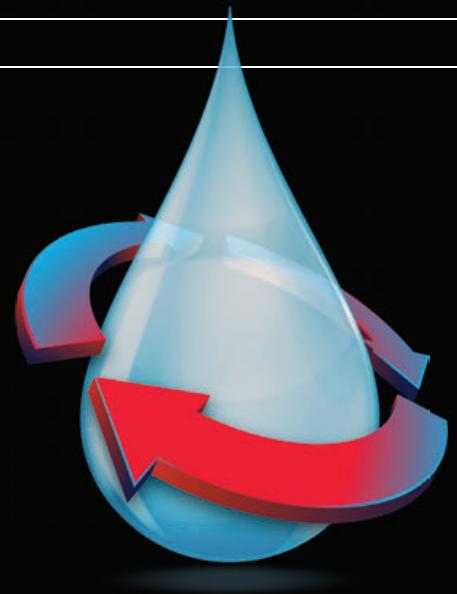
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By Bob Livingston

# QUIET HEAT, CONTINUOUS HOT WATER



All motorhomes can now be fitted with an Aqua-Hot hydronic system, which was formerly reserved for diesel pushers

**S**elf-containment is the key to making an RV as livable as a home, and two of the most important elements in that regard are the water heater and furnace. Commonly, supplying hot water to the faucets and shower — and keeping the interior warm — has been relegated to independent components. Hot water usually comes from a 6- or 10-gallon gas or gas/electric appliance, and heat is provided by a forced-air furnace. But there are limitations to both.

Standard water heaters do the job with little complaint, but don't plan on taking long showers. Most people find out the hard way that the hot-water stream is not unlimited — especially when trying to rinse shampoo out of long hair. Typical furnaces supply warm air, but most people experience large swings in room temperature between cycles, and in the middle of the night the fan and combustion chamber can sound like an airplane taking off from your patio.

For years, a number of Class A motorhome builders have circumvented the use of standard RV-issue hot-water tanks and furnaces with

the use of hydronic water and comfort heating. Since these systems relied on diesel fuel to power the burner, they were reserved for diesel pushers, and usually only in the higher end of the market. Aqua-Hot is a major supplier of hydronic systems, and the introduction of its LP-gas/electric counterpart to the diesel models is changing the paradigm when it comes to heating and hot water.

Now that diesel fuel is out of the equation with the Aqua-Hot 400LP heating system, all motorhome builders are able to take advantage of hydronics. The benefits of using hydronic components are dramatic. On the heating side, the warm air is

moist enough to eliminate the use of a humidifier, which prevents cabinetry and other wood items from drying out, and, of course, the same for our skin. And the big point: Temperature stability and the distribution of heated air are much more even.

The system has two pumps, which can circulate heat to eight registers, four in each of two zones, controlled by dedicated thermostats. This type of flexibility makes the distribution of heat extremely versatile and complete. For example, registers can be placed in the bedroom, bathroom and storage bay. The other pump could service registers in the kitchen, living room and utility bay, and in places where the water manifold and water pump are located. The best news: It's quiet. In fact, it's so quiet that newbies will likely get out of bed in the middle of the night to make sure the warm air is actually flowing, although the fact that they are comfortable is all the confirmation they need.



[1] Rather than using standard-issue heat ducting, the Aqua-Hot relies on a network of 5/8-inch PEX tubing that's routed to individual heat exchangers. [2] Typically, a heat exchanger is installed inside the utility bay. [3] Here the backside of the heat exchanger can be serviced from inside a neighboring compartment.



[4] The boiler tank is fitted in a prepared cabinet. The control panel is mounted above the main box. It provides all the diagnostic information. [5] Access to this heat exchanger is through the floor of a cabinet structure. [6] Nice-looking heat exchanger grilles are used to blend in with cabinetry.



On the water side, a tankless system produces 90 gallons per hour of continuous hot water, on demand. Even those who lollygag in the shower will have a hard time running out of hot water.

The heart of the system is a metal box that measures 29½ by 18½ by 12 inches and houses a burner and an array of tubes and fittings, and weighs 184 pounds when the boiler tank is filled with a 50/50 mixture of propylene-glycol antifreeze and water (distilled, deionized or soft water is best). While the propylene-glycol-based antifreeze is safer than ethylene-glycol-based antifreeze used for automotive use, it's not the same stuff used for winterizing RV water systems. RV antifreeze is not able to transfer enough heat and has no rust inhibitors. Therefore, boiler-type propylene-glycol-based antifreeze must be used for proper operation of the system.

Tied to the boiler unit is an electronic control panel installed in close proximity that keeps tabs on critical functions via status lights. The control panel performs electronic

diagnostics in the event of a power deficiency or malfunction. An interior switch plate, mounted in a convenient location inside the RV, turns on the burner and controls the hot-water function. Continuous hot water can be supplied only when the burner is activated using LP-gas.

Unlike a typical RV furnace that forces heated air through a network of ducting, the Aqua-Hot 400LP utilizes individual heat exchangers that are strategically placed and plumbed, in series, via PEX tubing with a 5/8-inch outside diameter (OD). Fans in the heat exchangers run on 12-volt DC power.

So here's what happens: The heat source is selected from the interior switch panel. Once the burner switch is on, the boiler tank heats the antifreeze and water to 190 degrees F. When one or both of the zone thermostats call for heat, the heated antifreeze and water flows from the tank to the heat exchangers where internal fans blow the heated air into the interior of the RV. The cooled antifreeze-and-water solution returns

to the tank where it is reheated.

When a faucet is opened, the water is heated on demand and remains continuous until the aforementioned 90-gallons-per-hour flow is exhausted. Since it's highly unlikely anyone will use up that much hot water in an hour, the supply effectively remains unlimited.

While the previously mentioned dimensions and weight suggest that the Aqua-Hot system will occupy a sizable amount of space, keep in mind that it replaces two fairly large components: the standard hot-water tank and the furnace. Beyond the swap for space, installation of the boiler requires a single-point location, and there are no vents required on the side walls of the motorhome. Unlike a standard water heater that uses a large (and not-so-pretty) access door on the exterior and, depending on the unit, intake and exhaust vents or a large panel for the furnace, the Aqua-Hot vents and exhausts through the bottom. Normally, a compartment door to the boiler and control panel is provided,



[7] Heat exchangers are strategically placed to provide the best distribution of warm air. [8] A common location for a heat exchanger is at the bottom of a cabinet drawer. [9] Switches for the system are installed in a central cabinet with other controls.



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but when closed there is no unsightly hardware to break up the exterior look.

To install the Aqua-Hot, the space must be designed so that a special mounting plate can be bolted to the framework. This plate accepts the boiler housing and an exhaust pipe that is routed to the outside, underneath the motorhome. As part of this requirement, the plate must be installed so that the underside is exposed to the outside. Therefore, special consideration must be given so that the plate will not be covered.

Once the boiler housing is bolted in place, the PEX tubing, propane supply line and electrical wiring are connected. Access to the components in the boiler housing is provided by a panel that can be removed for service.

The designers and engineers recommend using a two-zone system, controlling heat exchangers in the bedroom and bathroom with one thermostat and the galley and living room with the other. Heat exchangers can be placed in cabinet structures at floor level in strategic locations with PEX tubing routed to each one.

Routing the PEX tubing is easier than working with traditional heat ducting, which is much larger and bulkier, because less space is required for runways. Heat exchangers can also be installed in the main storage bay and utility center, to prevent freezing in cold weather. To achieve the same two-zone coverage with a standard RV furnace would require two systems, and that would suck up additional space for the installation and ducting.

Plumbing for the domestic



10



11



12



13

[10] PEX tubing is much easier to route than standard-type heat ducting. Here the tubing is easily threaded inside the frame cross members. [11] The system must be exhausted to the outside. This one is adjacent to the generator exhaust pipe. [12] Heat exchangers are compact and easy to handle. [13] Antifreeze-and-water mixture can be monitored — and replenished — via an expansion tank that is mounted near the boiler.

hot-water system uses PEX tubing in sizes up to 5/8-inch OD, depending on the number of fixtures. There's not much difference between hooking up a standard hot-water tank and the Aqua-Hot, except that there is no longer a need for a winterizing bypass valve on the back of the unit because the system is tankless.

Although the Aqua-Hot 400LP is a fairly complex assembly of components, regular maintenance of the system is not that complicated. It's suggested that the system is run monthly to ensure proper operation of the burner. This requires running all the heat zones until warm air is blowing out of the heat exchangers.

The only other "watch" is to keep an eye on the level of antifreeze and

water in the expansion tank. When filling, it's important to release any air pockets, which is a simple procedure. The manual provides instructions for winterizing the system and getting it ready again for service when it warms up. A refractometer can be used to measure the proper amount of propylene glycol in the antifreeze solution.

Obviously, there is an upcharge for an Aqua-Hot system, but living with even, almost silent heat — and continuous hot water on demand — is pure bliss. **M**

**Source**

**Aqua-Hot Heating Systems**  
800-685-4298, [www.aquahot.com](http://www.aquahot.com)



14



15



16



17

[14] A brass tube is inserted into the end of the PEX tubing to provide rigidity for the clamps. [15] The PEX tubing is connected to the heat exchanger's rubber hose using a very strong clamp installed by a tool designed for this purpose. [16] Very specific instructions are provided for positioning the mounting plate that secures the boiler housing. [17] The boiler housing is heavy, so two installers are needed to carefully position it into a compartment dedicated for this purpose.

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# A for AFFORDABLE

This baker's dozen of Class A motorhomes offer top-notch amenities without busting the budget

**I**n the art of sales, few words are as open-ended as "affordable." From vacuums to appliances on up to RVs, the A-word is thrown around with seemingly reckless abandon, and is often used as a sales tool that roughly translates to "bare-bones" or "entry-level." As you know, those terms have traditionally meant that very few options, if any, are included, and the product will perform as advertised, but do little else. There is plenty to be said for a well-performing unit that only contains the essentials, but we're always on the lookout for fun, exciting ways to spend our vacations, and "adequate" doesn't seem to cut it.

As the RV market continues to evolve for the better, the word "affordable" has shed its previously duplicitous meaning to mean simply that it costs a bit less than comparable models. And as manufacturers discover that buyers are more likely to trade in their "affordable" models for a like-branded heavily outfitted model down the road, appointments heretofore found exclusively in big-bucks units are popping up in these "real-world" motorhomes. Things like solid-surface countertops, improved ride and handling, premium insulation and even upgraded exterior graphics are becoming the norm, and the true winners are the consumers.

Following is a true baker's dozen of "affordable" models that, when compared to many others in their price range, quite simply take the cake when it comes to value.



## ALLIED RECREATION GROUP



### TREK

The TREK is back, and better than ever: The 2016 26HM has a host of features that many high-dollar motorhome manufacturers would drool over. Chief among them are two innovative uses of space, the TREK-Trunk and the TREK-Room.

The TREK-Trunk is a huge multi-functional storage area accessible from the outside, which is the result of raising the master bed inside. The Trunk is ideal for large, bulky items such as patio furniture, grilling accessories, recreational equipment and fishing rods. The TREK-Trunk space is actually created in the master bedroom area, where the queen bed is lifted to the ceiling to reveal a spacious walk-in closet with a full wardrobe and two dressers. Once the Trunk is unloaded and the bed lowered, the master transforms into a comfortable retreat with plenty of walkaround bed space. Allied Recreation Group has adorned the TREK with numerous other appointments, from full-body paint to a soft-touch ceiling to solid-surface countertops to a handy pullout drawer in the base of the dinette.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	27' 10"
Exterior width	8' 4"
Exterior height with A/C	12'
Wheelbase	158"
Freshwater capacity	50 gal
Black-water capacity	35 gal
Gray-water capacity	35 gal
LP-gas capacity	14 gal
GVWR	16,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$107,155

TREK, 877-211-8135,  
www.trekmotorhome.com

COACHMEN



**Pursuit 29SB**

The all-new Pursuit is built on a Ford chassis with a gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of 18,000 pounds and features a fully redesigned front end for a sleeker, more stylish look than previous models.

Inside, you'll find a surprising amount of appointments, including a power drop-down bunk for additional sleeping room, a soft-touch jackknife sofa and a 32-inch LCD TV. The galley features hardwood cabinet doors, ball-bearing drawer guides, a flush-mount double-door refrigerator, backsplash and a large double-bowl stainless-steel kitchen sink. The master bedroom offers another, optional, 32-inch TV, wainscoting and an integrated headboard.

Other highlights include optional 50-amp service, dual 13,500-Btu air conditioners and a 5.5-kW AC generator. The 2-inch-thick side walls and heated enclosed tanks will allow the owner of the Pursuit to travel in colder weather, while mega rear storage makes it easy to pack extra gear for the journey.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	32' 6"
Exterior width	8' 4"
Exterior height with A/C	11' 11"
Wheelbase	208"
Freshwater capacity	45 gal
Black-water capacity	28 gal
Gray-water capacity	40 gal
LP-gas capacity	20 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$104,168

Coachmen RV, 800-353-7383,  
www.coachmenrv.com

FLEETWOOD



**Flair 26D**

At less than 28 feet long, the Flair is just the right size for a relatively nimble, easy-to-drive motorhome that's packed with amenities. Outside, unexpected highlights include dual electric leveling jacks, bus-style cargo doors that open to reveal a large amount of storage, roto-cast molded boxes and full-body paint.

Inside the Flair, owners are treated to an open living space that feels anything but "affordable." Full vinyl flooring, flat-panel hardwood cabinet doors, LED lighting and premium furniture immediately catch the eye, while thoughtful inclusions like a central monitor panel, deluxe roller bearings on the drawers, a whole-coach filtration system and a bath door with a residential-type lock are not immediately realized but appreciated nonetheless.

The laminate countertops in the Flair's galley feature residential-type bullnose edges, while the bedroom's integrated headboard and sunken reading lights add a touch of home.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	27' 10"
Exterior width	8' 6"
Exterior height with A/C	12'
Wheelbase	158"
Freshwater capacity	50 gal
Black-water capacity	35 gal
Gray-water capacity	35 gal
LP-gas capacity	14 gal
GVWR	16,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$88,480

Fleetwood RV, 800-854-1344, www.fleetwoodrv.com



**Storm 26P**

The Storm is also designed for easy operation, combining the maneuverability of a Class C with the amenities of a Class A. The cockpit alone offers a host of features usually reserved for higher priced motorhomes, including a sideview camera package, a rear-vision camera, halogen headlamps, power heated remote mirrors and plush Flexsteel driver/passenger reclining captain's chair. But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the Storm is the Nesta Hide-A-Loft, a patent-pending bed-lift mechanism that converts a raised bed into a full walk-in closet with dual mirrored doors and dressers. (Check it out on the website, which offers a great graphic of the unit in action.) Residential-type features include a 30,000-Btu furnace with wall-mounted thermostat, a complete PEX plumbing system, hidden cabinet door and Euro hinges, raised-panel refrigerator doors and a dual-basin sink. Outside, full-body paint, an LED TV, power awning with LED lighting and tinted frameless windows put owners in a high-class state of mind.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	27' 11"
Exterior width	8' 6"
Exterior height with A/C	12'
Wheelbase	178"
Freshwater capacity	60 gal
Black-water capacity	35 gal
Gray-water capacity	35 gal
LP-gas capacity	14 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$101,500

## FOREST RIVER



### FR3 30DS

Forest River has badged the FR3 as a “crossover,” meaning owners can realize the easy handling characteristics of a Class C in a coach that lives like a Class A. This affordable motorhome features a push-button cabover power front bunk that hides against the ceiling over the cockpit when not in use. Continuing the “hidden theme,” there is a storage compartment in the nose cone overhead, which is a great place to store blankets and pillows. The FR3 is adorned with a gray gelcoat fiberglass exterior, a brown Ultraleather interior with tan baseball stitching and Trekk flooring throughout the unit. The FR3 comes standard with everything (you’ll see), with no available options.

Deep slideout rooms, residential king-size beds, a power front sun shade, Ultraleather deep-seating sofa with integrated footrest and sofa bed, plus flush-floor construction, a comfort lounge dinette booth, exterior entertainment center with LED TV, hydraulic leveling jacks and oh so much more are jammed into this 31-footer.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	31' 10"
Exterior width	8' 4"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 2"
Wheelbase	190"
Freshwater capacity	57 gal
Black-water capacity	41 gal
Gray-water capacity	41 gal
LP-gas capacity	24.5 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$111,749



### Georgetown 364

If you’re looking for surprising features in a relatively affordable package, how about a Class A with a private bunk bed for the kids? Oh, and did we mention it’s near a full bathroom? OK, how about the fact there’s also another, separate full bathroom off the master? The new Forest River Georgetown 364 offers an industry-first floorplan with two bedrooms and two baths. Finally, the king and queen can avoid the grubby handprints and splattered mirrors so often associated with a kids’ bathroom. Imagine your own clean, folded towels and unmolested bars of soap.

As if that wasn’t enough, the 364 also features a durable fiberglass roof, frameless windows, an exterior LP-gas grill hookup, LED lighting, solid-surface counters with under-mount sink, whole-coach filtration and heated holding tanks. A 32-inch LED TV on a swing arm makes watching the cooking channels a breeze while preparing dinner, and the king bed in the master will no doubt look even more inviting after a nice, warm shower.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	37' 6"
Exterior width	8' 6"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 1"
Wheelbase	228"
Freshwater capacity	50 gal
Black-water capacity	82 gal
Gray-water capacity	82 gal
LP-gas capacity	24 gal
GVWR	22,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$137,288

## ITASCA



### Tribute 26A

According to Itasca, the Tribute 26A is all about multipurposing for maximum utility and floor space. The “A” in Class A here may stand for adaptability, as the Tribute features a multifunctional Flex Bed module with a sofa bed that flips up against the wall to provide wide-open floor space, or opt for a unique powered table that flips up to provide a large 22½-by-64-inch serving table or work space. A swivel lounge chair with a three-point seat belt is located so as to provide additional seating by the dinette for a convenient conversation area with those sitting in the front cab seats, which swivel toward the living area and has a removable pedestal table positioned in between. The forward-facing dinette also has seat belts and tether anchors to securely fasten child seats. A powered StudioLoft bed is available in the front cab area, while a rear corner queen bed is provided along with an additional StudioLoft bed available above it. The inside forward corner of the queen bed also flips rearward to provide additional floor space when needed.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	27' 8"
Exterior width	8' 5.5"
Exterior height with A/C	11' 9"
Wheelbase	158"
Freshwater capacity	40 gal
Black-water capacity	42 gal
Gray-water capacity	42 gal
LP-gas capacity	18 gal
GVWR	16,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$96,599

Forest River Inc., 574-389-4600, [www.forestriverinc.com](http://www.forestriverinc.com)

Itasca, 641-585-3535,  
[www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com)

JAYCO



**Precept 29UR**

Although comfort is always at a premium, Jayco offers on-the-road coddling at an affordable price. The Precept comes with the Jayco exclusive JRide handling package, resulting in what Jayco calls the best ride in the market. The JRide package includes Bilstein shocks, a stabilizer bar, Hellwig helper springs and rubber isolation body mounts.

Other wallet-friendly features include frameless windows; slideout cover awnings; electric patio awning with LED lights; backup and sideview cameras with monitor; automatic hydraulic leveling jacks; touch-screen, in-dash sound system with built-in GPS, CD/DVD, MP3 and input jack; and six-way power driver and passenger seats. The Precept is available with the standard graphics package or the optional Beachstone or Splendor premium paint packages.

The 29UR offers plenty of sleeping positions, with bunks amidships, a convertible U-shape dinette and overhead bunk option at the front of the motorhome.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	32' 1"
Exterior width	8' 6"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 5"
Wheelbase	190"
Freshwater capacity	71.5 gal
Black-water capacity	51.5 gal
Gray-water capacity	41 gal
LP-gas capacity	13.2 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$115,279

Jayco, 574-825-5861, [www.jayco.com](http://www.jayco.com)

NEWMAR



**Bay Star 3401**

The first thing you'll likely notice about the Bay Star is the beautiful full-paint exterior graphic treatment, matching mirrors and Diamondshield front cap, characteristics generally reserved for motorhomes at twice the price.

The optional BriteTEK roof, one-piece windshield and coated aluminum wheels all up the wow factor. Inside, a gigantic streetside full-wall slide opens up the interior to reveal scores of living space. A plush 84-inch L-shape sofa offers a jackknife sleeping area and a great view of the large flat-screen TV.

In fact, the entire collection of furniture has been restyled for 2015. Throughout the interior, elegant touches can be found, including upgraded laminate material for the countertops, chrome cabinet hardware, LED lighting in the vanity and side-wall area and upgraded appliances. The master features a king-size bed, a chest of drawers, dual shirt wardrobes and plenty of overhead storage, which will come in handy while stowing the exterior gear you were able to purchase thanks to the Newmar's reasonable price.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal.
Exterior length	34' 11"
Exterior width	8' 5"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 8"
Wheelbase	220"
Freshwater capacity	75 gal
Black-water capacity	60 gal
Gray-water capacity	60 gal
LP-gas capacity	25 gal
GVWR	22,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$131,222

Newmar Corp. 800-731-8300, [www.newmarcorp.com](http://www.newmarcorp.com)



**A.C.E. 30.2 Bunkhouse**

The A.C.E. (which stands for Class A and Class C Evolution) started with a simple concept of redefining the motorhome by creating a coach with the best features of a Class A and a Class C, at an affordable price. But it's the A.C.E.'s features that have made this model a popular selection since its introduction. Standards like the HD-MAX exterior with graphics package and premium gelcoat side walls, automatic hydraulic leveling jacks, MEGA Storage compartment and frameless windows catch your eye on the outside, while the 84-inch ceiling height, leatherette jackknife sofa, Better Homes and Gardens RV fabric collection and laminate countertops are sure to please on the inside. The EZ-Clean entry steps with utility storage and mudroom compartment for dirty shoes is a great use of space, and the A.C.E. is pet-friendly, with vinyl flooring, Pet-Link multipurpose tie-downs and a pullout kibble station. The bunkhouse model has a 32-inch LED TV in the living area, with an option for dual 13-inch LED TVs with DVD player in the bunk area.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	31' 4"
Exterior width	8' 2.5"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 2"
Wheelbase	190"
Freshwater capacity	50 gal
Black-water capacity	29 gal
Gray-water capacity	44 gal
LP-gas capacity	20 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$99,800

## THOR



### Hurricane

Besides budget-friendly sticker prices, highly livable floorplans are what get people excited, and the Thor Hurricane fits the bill. With large living-area slides and uncluttered floorplans, the wide-open spaces in the Hurricanes' interiors are bound to impress. The dual-slide 31S shown here has a streetside slide housing a Dream dinette with a 42-by-70-inch sleeping area, in addition to a sofa bed with air mattress that measures 60-by-80 inches. There's also an overhead drop-down bunk for more sleeping options, and the amidships split bathroom keeps occupants from bumping into one another during grooming duties/bathroom breaks. In the cockpit, there's a dash workstation, and LED ceiling lights keep things lit up when the sun goes down. The galley features solid-surface countertops, while select floorplans add an exterior kitchen. Raised-panel cabinetry, nickel-finished hardware and full-extension drawer guides are tough to beat at this price, as are the Denver queen mattress and foot-flush porcelain toilet.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	31' 9"
Exterior width	8' 2.5"
Exterior height with A/C	12' 2"
Wheelbase	190"
Freshwater capacity	49 gal
Black-water capacity	44 gal
Gray-water capacity	24.5 gal
LP-gas capacity	20 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$109,250



### Vegas RUV

The Vegas RUV, or Recreational Utility Vehicle, is compact, easy to drive and easy on the bottom line. Thor has billed it as the SUV of RVs, and with good reason: It's easy to envision piloting this motorhome to soccer games or any activity that may require multiple-occupant transportation (up to seven in the 24.2 shown here) and a nice place to eat, change or use the facilities. The leatherette furniture looks great but is quite durable, and the included 28-inch LED TV and DVD player in the living area are sure to entertain between games. The three-burner gas cooktop and convection microwave oven will likely get a workout, while the MEGA Storage compartment outside should easily hold sports gear. A dash workstation, stow-away coffee table and flat-panel cabinetry with rattan inlay are all welcome additions for the kid-friendly floorplan, which also boasts a power drop-down bunk and comfortably sleeps four (the comfy air mattress in the sofa bed more than makes up for the lack of a master bedroom).

Chassis	Ford E-350
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	55 gal
Exterior length	25' 11"
Exterior width	7'
Exterior height with A/C	11' 3"
Wheelbase	188"
Freshwater capacity	39 gal
Black-water capacity	30 gal
Gray-water capacity	41 gal
LP-gas capacity	10 gal
GVWR	12,500 lbs
Base MSRP	\$89,850

Thor Motor Coach, 877-855-2867, [www.thormotorcoach.com](http://www.thormotorcoach.com)

## WINNEBAGO



### Brave 31C

While the Brave may sport the easily recognizable eyebrow appearance of the late 1960s and early 1970s, this Class A still features modern conveniences not found in the flower-power era, from LED lighting to an electric awning to a backup camera. The new 31C pictured here features a driver's-side full-wall slide, which combines with the curbside dinette slide to make a spacious, open living area inside. With an available StudioLoft bed over the cab area, sofa bed, and a rear queen or optional king bed, there is sleeping available for up to six.

The 31C also has plentiful storage, including a large wardrobe across the bedroom wall. The split bath expands when the full-wall slide is deployed, which provides for a spacious bathing and private dressing area when the two sliding pocket doors are closed.

The 31C also comes standard with a residential refrigerator, dual air conditioners, and a 5.5-kW generator, all appointments you may not expect in such an iconic motorhome at this price point.

Chassis	Ford F53
Engine	Triton 6.8-liter V-10
Fuel capacity	80 gal
Exterior length	32' 11"
Exterior width	8' 5.5"
Exterior height with A/C	11' 11"
Wheelbase	208"
Freshwater capacity	52 gal
Black-water capacity	45 gal
Gray-water capacity	62 gal
LP-gas capacity	18 gal
GVWR	18,000 lbs
Base MSRP	\$121,379

Winnebago Industries, 641-585-3535,  
[www.winnebagoind.com](http://www.winnebagoind.com) **M**

By Bill and Jenn Gehr

# A KING OF THRONES

Dometic's 320 Series toilet make an RV bathroom feel more like home

**R**V toilets have come a long way in recent years, and while flushing mechanisms are better, the smaller size models leave something to be desired. Most RVs are fitted with basic toilets, with models made of porcelain highly desired over plastic. But there are other issues to deal with when selecting a toilet, including bowl depth, seat height, seat type and quality and, of course, the effectiveness of the flushing mechanism and how much water it consumes.

Dometic went back to the drawing board to come up with a new design for its 320 and 321 series toilets, considered the top of the company's line without opting for a vacuum-flush model. The ceramic-bowl, residential-style toilet not only looks great but offers high functionality as well. Residential styling means that the toilet has an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)-compliant seat height of 18½ inches, and the deeper, elongated bowl emulates that of most stationary home-style toilets. Coupled with a full-size wood seat with a very comfortable surface, you just might think you're still at home in the "reading room."

Dometic's high-gloss 320 Series ceramic bowl is not only stain-resistant but it's scratchproof as well. The specially designed rim makes cleaning easier and is splash-free. The new model features an easy-to-use foot pedal with multiple functions. When the foot pedal is pushed all the way down, it flushes the contents; halfway allows the bowl to fill with



[1] The new flange seal is attached to the toilet before mounting to the floor. The old seal must be removed if it's stuck to the flange in the floor. [2] The foot pedal is positioned ergonomically and seems to be durable. Holding the pedal down halfway will allow the bowl to fill with water.

Photos: Bob Livingston

fresh water before using. The flushing mechanism is designed for long, trouble-free operation. A series of discharge holes concealed under the lip of the bowl allow the water to cover completely during flushing. That means the contents are flushed efficiently, without the use of an auxiliary spray nozzle in most cases. Failure to add water to the bowl before, well you know, can encourage staining. Perhaps the best perks of the new design is that the 320 toilet only uses 1 pint of water per flush and the fit and finish are excellent.

Installation is fairly simple, but it will vary depending on the make and model of the toilet being replaced. It's important to verify the spacing between the hole in the floor and the wall to make sure the new toilet will fit. The toilet requires 11 inches between the center of the floor flange and rear wall, which is the dimension found in most RV installations. Dometic's bolt-on mounting system sets the flange bolts at 9 and 3 o'clock, which is the configuration for most modern RV toilets. This mounting system is designed to last 10 to 15 years. Attaching the water supply line can be a bit more of a challenge, as different model toilets locate the water valves in myriad places. In some cases, the water valves will be higher or lower than the one on the new Dometic toilet being installed. Fortunately, the use of flexible, plastic water lines makes it possible to tweak the existing lines to fit the replacement toilet about 90 percent of the time. Should the waterline need to be modified — as it was in the test RV — most RV parts stores will have a wide variety of elbows and unions to complete the task.

The test installation was straightforward and went very smoothly with a total labor time of only 35 minutes. The tools needed for the job: ½-inch open-end/ratcheting wrench and Channellock pliers.

The first step requires the removal of the existing waterline from the toilet. Make sure the hookup water faucet is closed and/



**[3]** New bolts that come with the toilet are slid into the groove in the existing flange. Bolts are at 9 and 3 o'clock positions, which are common in RVs. **[4]** Bolts are tightened down with a ½-inch wrench. **[5]** Bolt/nut covers give the final installation a finished look. **[6]** Although the Dometic 320 is a little longer than the stock toilet, the loss of floor space is worth the comfort of the larger bowl and ADA-compliant height.

or the onboard pump is turned off. Flush the toilet to relieve water pressure. After removing the flange bolts, the toilet will lift off the flange in the floor. This, of course, can be the messiest part of the job, depending on how long the existing toilet was in use. Be sure to remove the old seal if it's stuck to the flange in the floor. The old toilet can be discarded since no old parts are needed.

Once the flange bolts are in place and the new seal attached to the toilet (not to the floor, which can cause a leak), the toilet is carefully put in place and bolts tightened. The bolts should not be over tightened. Before using the toilet, the water is pressurized and the area checked for leaks.

The new toilet took up a little more space in the bathroom, but the swap was well worth the increased comfort and flushing efficiency. Since the bowl is bigger, adding water before use will increase consumption, which will only be an issue when boondocking. Those who spend time disconnected from hookups — or those who prefer to wash down the bowl after use — should consider the optional hand sprayer for use when conserving water during any outing.

The Dometic 320 is a nice upgrade to any motorhome bathroom and a low-profile model (321) can be ordered if mounting on a raised platform. Street price for the 320 is around \$255. **M**

**Source**

Dometic, 800-544-4881, [www.dometic.com/USA](http://www.dometic.com/USA)

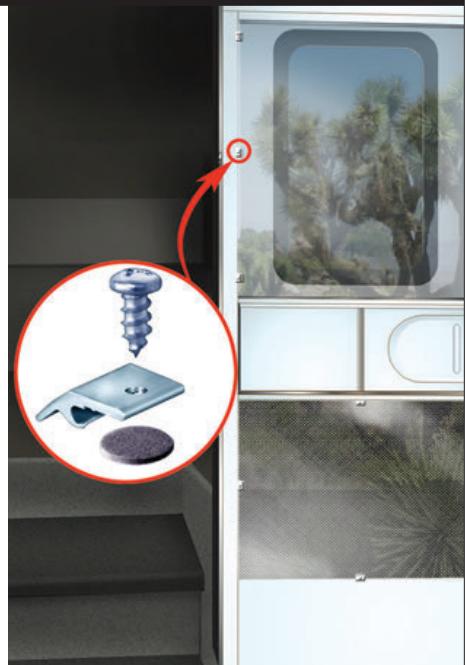
## A View Without the Chill

I wanted the ability to keep the door open on chilly days to enjoy natural light, and my dog shared that sentiment, so I attached acrylic sheeting to the inside of the screen door. First, I took exact measurements of the inside dimensions where the screen spline meets the frame. At Lowe's I bought an OPTIX 44-by-32-inch clear acrylic sheet that is .080 inches thick and qualified for two free cuts. The salesman cut two pieces per the layout and dimensions I provided.

I used 10 storm-door panel clips and small felt self-stick pads as a cushion between the sheeting and screen spline using sheet-metal screws. I filed down the curved part of the panel clips to allow more offset between the frame edge and the screw hole. Then, I spray-painted the clips white to match the door frame.

After measuring the screw hole position for each clip, I used an auger to create a dimple in the aluminum frame. Using the smallest drill bit available, I started a pilot hole and then proceeded with the drill size needed to accommodate the screws.

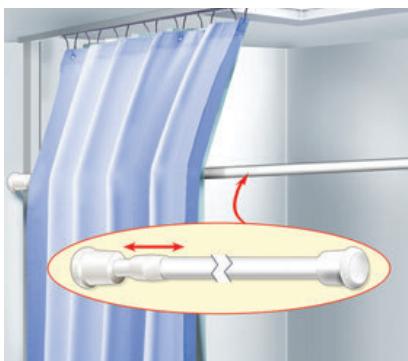
**Jacquelin Leonard** | Livingston, Texas



## Galley Towel Bar

My coach came with a small towel bar affixed to the underside of the front lip on the stovetop. When I open or close the drawer directly underneath, I have to move the towel to the side. I fixed this by buying an 18-inch towel bar and mounting it on the wood panel on the refrigerator door. I unscrewed and discarded the large trim plates from the bar's end pieces and the mounting hardware. Then I bought two flathead machine screws of the proper thread to fit the end pieces, and just long enough to go through the panel thickness and screw into them. I removed the top trim from the door and the retaining screws, and slid the panel up far enough to allow access to the back of the panel (have a helper hold it in place). I measured the distance between the end pieces, drilled and countersunk the screws, mounted the bar, slid the panel down into position, and replaced the top trim and screws.

**Tom Becker** | Bernalillo, New Mexico



## More Elbow Room

As a larger than normal size human, I find it challenging to fit in the limited confines of our motorhome's shower. My wife devised a solution that gives me enough room to actually turn around without inadvertently sticking to and wrapping the shower curtain around my shoulders as I move. She obtained an extra-long curtain and liner — enough to stay inside the edge of the shower pan at the bottom to facilitate safe drainage — and on top she used a spring-loaded curtain rod to push out the fabric at shoulder height, securing it against the regular wall (outside of the shower) and giving me several inches of additional space where it counts. Now if we could only increase the size of the little room.

**Larry Barrett** | Deerfield, Illinois



**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](mailto: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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# Never Alone

Newly upgraded Magellan RoadMate RV9490T-LMB takes the guesswork out of RV travel

By Bill and Jenn Gehr



The new Magellan RoadMate has a 7-inch high-definition touch screen.

## NAVIGATION

Cost: **\$379<sup>99</sup>**

Time: **10 minutes**

Difficulty: **1/10**

**T**raveling in a motorhome takes precise planning and a keen sense of awareness to keep surprises — and embarrassing moments — at bay. Unexpected occurrences along the route such as hazardous weather, traffic jams,

low bridges or lane closures can cause delays on even the most carefully planned trip. To equalize the playing field, many RVers use a GPS for guidance and Magellan has been making units that are RV-specific for a while. The RoadMate RV9490T-LMB is the latest model and the improvements are substantial.

Designed solely with the RVer in mind, the new Magellan RoadMate provides upgraded RV-specific navigation, roadside information and valuable content in one easy-to-use device. Unlike generic GPS devices earmarked for the general public, the RoadMate allows the user to enter individual RV profile information that is used for calculating directions and providing road information, including safe places for large RVs to negotiate, like fuel stations. Specific information that can be loaded includes RV type, weight, height, width and length. The RoadMate can also be switched over to automobile mode when traveling in the dinghy vehicle.

The new Magellan is sleek and responsive and utilizes a glare-free, 7-inch, high-definition, bezel-free touch screen with fast and powerful Android OS navigation software for calculations made in seconds. The device is loaded with 9 million points of interest (POI) including 30,000 RV-specific locations and fuel stations. Additional

data includes 4,000 Wal-Mart locations and more than 13,000 RV parks and campgrounds, which includes 2,100-plus Good Sam RV Parks. There are even 12,770 dump locations that can be called up at a moment's notice.

Weather can change rapidly and catch RVers off guard, which makes the unit's forecasting ability a valuable tool on the road. Overlays include temperature, rain and snow, and allows the user to see conditions ahead, in real time.

The Magellan RoadMate also provides a virtual dashboard with the touch of a finger. The dashboard displays information on the upcoming two turns, remaining time and distance, mile markers, direction, elevation, grade change and traffic information.

Through the years, Magellan has pioneered a number of innovations that differentiate its product. These innovations include Geo-tag navigation by simply inputting latitude and longitude when an address is not available. "OneTouch Favorites" is a Magellan exclusive feature that allows the user to locate personal favorite locations by touching the screen. Speed can also be managed by using the speed limit warning.

One of the most practical features is the junction view and highway lane assist, which displays realistic images of upcoming highway signs. Lane arrows, superimposed in the image, help with lane merging before it becomes difficult to negotiate. We found this takes some of the stress out of traveling on unfamiliar roads. Destination routing can be used to plan a trip with multiple stops in the order you choose, or the Magellan navigator can select the most efficient route. Audible instructions allow the driver to keep their eyes on the road.

Magellan offers free lifetime updates with the most current maps and points of interest, including free lifetime traffic warnings.

Magellan's GPS RV9490T-LMB truly lives up to its name as a "RoadMate." The device has an MSRP of \$379.99 and is protected by a one-year warranty. **M**



Above left: Mounting hardware and cables (power and for downloading upgrades) are provided with the kit. Above right: An articulating arm with suction cup holds the mounting bracket firmly to the windshield. The plug goes into a nearby 12-volt DC accessory power port.

**Magellan**, [www.magellangps.com](http://www.magellangps.com)



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## A Long Time Coming

Unhappy with an unreasonable delay in receiving a camping directory, a reader enlisted the help of Hot Line. He wrote:



“ For the past seven years I have paid membership fees to Passport America, but I have never received a copy of the campground directory. When I sent in my most recent request, I was told that if I wanted a directory, I would have to send in \$5. I have sent in \$5 at least four times already and haven't received the book; I don't think an additional \$5 will help. I have only used the membership card once because I don't know where the parks are.

**Fred Lucht III | Salem, Oregon**

Hot Line contacted Passport America on Lucht's behalf. Soon thereafter we received the following update from Lucht:

“ Thank you for your help with Passport America. After many phone calls and letters to the company, I wrote to Hot Line and finally received the campground directory.  
F.L. III

### Faulty Recall Rewiring

Finding it difficult to work out a recall issue with a manufacturer, a reader asked Hot Line for help. She wrote:

“ I have a Thor Four Winds Hurricane that was part of a safety recall on the coach's battery control center (BCC). According to the recall, Thor would have the BCC rewired at no cost to me. I took the coach to RV World of Lakeland to have the repair made, but after the recall work was done, I had ongoing wiring issues, power loss and battery failures.

I took the motorhome to Camping World in Tampa, Florida, to assess the problem. The mechanic there told me that the wiring work had been done incorrectly. Camping World corrected the wiring per

Safety Recall Notice 13V-265, but I had to pay for the repairs out of my pocket.

I have made numerous requests to Thor for reimbursement, however my attempts have proven fruitless.

**Sherry Trunzo | Lakeland, Florida**

Thor Motor Coach was contacted to see if there was anything else it could do to resolve Trunzo's concerns. A company representative responded as follows:

This letter is in response to Hot Line's correspondence on Sherry Trunzo. As you already know, we are always interested in hearing about our owners. We have submitted the request and will reimburse Trunzo \$125. In reviewing the documents that were provided, that is what it cost to correct the original recall repair performed by RV World of Lakeland.

**Jennifer Paczkowski**

**Consumer Affairs Administrator**

**Thor Motor Coach | Elkhart, Indiana**

### Door-Lift Dilemma

Concerned that a door-lift system he ordered never arrived, a reader asked Hot Line to get involved. He wrote:

“ I ordered two Hatchlift kits from Hatchlift LLC in August 2014, but the company only shipped me one. Despite five attempts, I have not been able to get the company to ship me the second kit. Both kits were paid for with the original order. The top-hinged basement doors on my Class A need something to prop the door open when in use. I installed the one kit that I received and it has been a big help. I had ordered two as a test to see if they work as advertised. They do and I want to order more, but not until Hatchlift sends me the second kit.

**Howard Girer | Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania**

Hot Line relayed Girer's disappointment to Hatchlift LLC. About two months later, we received a follow-up from Girer that filled us in on the outcome:

“ A Hatchlift representative sent me the following email. "I apologize on behalf of our company. A series of communication and shipping department errors were the cause for not having your order fulfilled correctly. The second half of your order will ship tomorrow. A full credit for that portion of the order has been applied to your PayPal account."

I am certain that Hot Line's help made all the difference. It's great to have Good (Sam) friends!

**H.G. M**

### Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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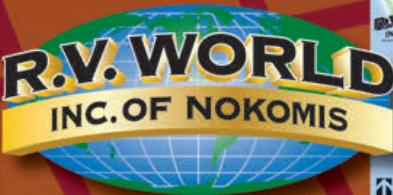


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By Ken Freund

## TV Vibration

**Q** We own a 2005 Phoenix Cruiser 2350 motorhome. It has a flat-screen TV that is mounted on a swivel arm located over the cab area, between the driver and passenger seats. When traveling, the TV vibrates and rattles; this gets worst at highway speeds. We have tried a number of ways to stop the vibration. I have tried putting padding around the area and even stuffing a pillow behind the TV when we are traveling. However, none of these has been very effective. In addition to being very distracting, I'm sure this vibration is not good for the TV. I hope you have a solution to this problem.

**Chip Bradstreet | Stockton Springs, Maine**



**A** Whenever you have a TV on an extension arm, unfortunately it magnifies the road vibrations. Other than mounting it elsewhere, which wouldn't be easy in a compact motorhome, you might try using nylon straps and brackets that can pull it toward the bulkhead and stabilize movement while driving.

### A Challenge

**Q** In a previous column you said you love a challenge. Here's one for you. We have a 2005 Fleetwood Jamboree GT on a Ford E-450 chassis with 11,000 miles. The problem is a harsh noise coming from the engine/transmission area. The symptoms are as follows:

First, when traveling at exactly 58 MPH, a grinding/scraping noise (similar to driving over a steel grid bridge deck) can be heard.

Second, when traveling at 62 MPH (with cruise control on) and entering a slight incline (1-2 percent grade) there is a chugging, pulsating sound that disappears when the transmission downshifts to a lower gear.

Third, when traveling at 62 MPH (with cruise control on) and entering a slight decline (1-2 percent grade) there is a bucking motion that's felt until the terrain becomes level.

A Ford truck dealer checked it out and found no problem with the U-joints, driveshaft center support bearing or differential pinion bearings. I also visited two shops that specialize in driveshaft problems and they were unable

to offer a solution. I checked with Fleetwood RV service and they told me they have not had reports of this type of problem. Do you have any ideas?

**James Kunik | LaGrange Park, Illinois**

**A** Finding a problem, or set of problems such as this can be very difficult to diagnose, as you have discovered. Understand that without having the motorhome to drive and check over, I can only offer a guess.

Vehicles give off frequencies during operation, which change with load and RPM. Tire vibrations and driveline imbalance both become prominent as these highway speeds are reached. Assuming you trust the dealer's diagnosis, my best guess on the first problem is that something like an exhaust heat shield is vibrating when it hits a certain frequency, which is why it doesn't do it at other speeds. It's necessary to do a very careful, thorough inspection of heat shields top and bottom, using inspection mirrors where necessary. Move them around by hand (when cool of course). Look for telltale rub marks where they vibrate against floors, exhaust pipes, mufflers and catalytic converters.

The second problem is likely that the engine is lugging very slightly at that speed and this vibration frequency is being felt through the lockup-torque converter through the drivetrain and into the vehicle. An easy way to verify this is to have a technician ride along with a scan tool connected to the vehicle, which can command the converter clutch to lock and unlock.

On the third problem, I believe it is likely that the cruise control is causing the bucking motion as it adjusts throttle position. Slight variations in gradient, which may not even be visible to the driver, can cause this. Again, a scan tool (available at the Ford dealership and other shops) can verify cruise control operation and throttle position changes during a test drive to confirm this as a cause.

Finally, and this sort of goes back to basics, have the balance checked on all of your wheels. If one is out of balance its vibrations can cause a feedback through the drivetrain and chassis at certain speeds and that can affect the rest of the rig. I'd be happy to hear from other readers who have experienced and solved similar problems with their motorhomes.

## Big Batteries

**Q** I own a 1988 Bluebird Wanderlodge powered by an 8V92 Detroit Diesel. These beasts were equipped with six batteries; I'm not sure what the original configuration was, but mine has six 12-volt batteries wired in parallel, servicing both the engine and the coach. They're no longer holding a charge so I'm upgrading. Reading your columns, the way to go seems to be 6-volt batteries in series for better life when boondocking. So should I go with three pairs of 6-volt batteries, or separate the engine from the house and use a pair of 12-volt high CCA batteries for the engine and four 6-volt golf cart-type batteries for the coach?  
**Mike Williams | Fruit Heights, Utah**

**A** I definitely recommend using two pairs of 6-volt golf-cart batteries to power the coach when you are off the grid. I was working for a GMC truck and Detroit Diesel franchise

when this engine came out, and I can still remember how much power they required to get them started on a cold morning! As you note, the original equipment was 12-volt batteries in parallel for engine starting. There are a lot of diesels running around the country with a pair of 12-volt batteries for starting and I recommend going that route, using the original equipment size and type.

## RV Leans While Driving

**Q** My wife is an avid RVer and I am an occasional RVer. To satisfy her gypsy spirit, she has a friend with an RV that goes on road trips with her. She drives a 2012 Thor Challenger 37-foot motorhome. Generally, my wife tows a Honda CR-V and follows her friend down the road. Since her friend purchased the RV, my wife has noticed that the vehicle leans to the passenger side while driving. Lately her friend has been complaining about

the back end wagging when turning or when a truck passes the RV. When the RV is parked, it appears to be level. Recently, while getting the door step repaired, the service man mentioned to her that a TruTrac suspension stabilizer for the rear and a TruCenter for the front would cure this problem. To me, it seems like the suspension on the F53 chassis' leaf springs or shock absorbers are the real problem, but I am not sure. What is your opinion?

**James Rodda | Orange, Texas**

**A** Shock absorbers (unless they are air shocks or have coil springs wrapped around them) don't support weight and therefore don't affect ride height. So we can eliminate them as a cause of this problem. Most roads have a "crown," which means the center of the road is slightly higher than the edges, to facilitate water runoff and proper drainage for safety. This crown causes tall vehicles such as motorhomes to lean outward slightly,

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## COACH & POWERTRAIN

and it can be several inches as it is accentuated by the height. If the coach appears straight-up level when parked in level areas, this is likely the culprit. This can be verified by measuring the ride height when it is parked on a flat level pad. Measuring from the pavement up to the center of the wheel openings directly above each axle is a rudimentary method. It is possible that the body was not formed exactly the same on both sides. If you want to be more accurate, measure from the ground to the bottom of the frame in the same spots on both sides, near the axle centerlines.

If you find that one side is significantly higher than the other, weigh the coach on a truck scale. Get individual wheel weights if possible. Often, the coaches are built with substantially more weight on one side or corner although the manufacturers have been better about this in recent years. It is also possible that one spring has sagged more than the opposite one.

## Quixx Fix

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However, if there's several hundred pounds of difference from side to side, it may be necessary to add a short leaf, install all new leaves, or otherwise prop up the lower corner(s). A spring shop that works on trucks can help you get this sorted out, but before doing that you might be able to shift items that are loaded in the motorhome.

The swaying is a separate issue that has to do with chassis design. We get many complaints from readers about the F53 swaying and tail wagging. The Davis TruTrac is a type

of Panhard bar that helps position the rear axle more solidly so it doesn't move side to side as the springs flex. The Blue Ox ([www.blueox.com](http://www.blueox.com)) TruCenter goes on the steering linkage and allows the driver to adjust steering wheel pull, sort of like rudder trim on an airplane. Blue Ox also offers the TigerTrak, which is designed to do a similar job as the TruTrac, and SuperSteer ([www.supersteerparts.com](http://www.supersteerparts.com)) also offers a Trac Bar designed to handle tail-wagging issues. In our experience, installing a rear-end

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### Air-Pressure Gauge Problem

**Q** I have a problem with my 2006 Newmar Mountain Aire on a Spartan ISL chassis. My service people can't figure it out, nor can Spartan. Both of my air gauges go to the high peg and stay there. I put an inline gauge in the airline and it reads 120 PSI. I have replaced both Stewart-Warner sending units and have replaced the VDO computer control. I recently installed 40-ohm resistors to substitute for the sending units and the gauges read one value constantly as expected. This has been going on for two years. Do you have any ideas?

**Edward Houk** | Sioux Falls, South Dakota

**A** With the VDO electrical gauges you have, all they are measuring is resistance. Typically when you take

the wire off the sender, the gauge should go to maximum pressure. This would normally lead me to believe the wires between gauges and sending units were open (no continuity or connection). However, since the fixed 40-ohm value registers cause both gauges to read the same, this indicates that part of the wiring is OK. You could run a new temporary wire externally,

directly from pressure sender to the gauge to verify this. You may have a problem with incompatible gauges and sending units, designed for different ohm values. It may also be that the voltage going to the gauges is not correct due to a faulty gauge voltage regulator, or that there's some kind of grounding problem in the dash cluster. You could try temporarily **(continued on page 77)**

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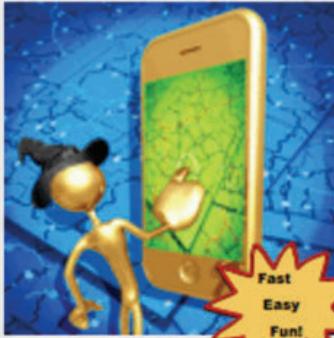
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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

(continued from page 73) moving the gauges near the sending units and testing the hookup with jumper wires. The simplest and most reliable setup is to install mechanical gauges with flexible tubing to them.

**Stained Shades**

**Q** One of the day-night shades in our coach has a coffee stain on it. We had a reputable company clean the upholstery and rugs. I asked the fellow and his answer was that he'd had experience with these shades and if he tried it, it would make them more yellow. How do I treat this stain?

**Bob Prue | Plainville, Massachusetts**

**A** If a professional says it can't be done, it probably can't. However, if you plan to replace it anyway, you don't have much to lose, so why not give it a try. I've had good results using a handheld steamer that plugs into a 120-volt AC outlet. You fill it with distilled water, so it can't leave any stain itself. Allow it to heat up and start steaming, then direct the hose tip on the stained area. Blot up any moisture with a clean, soft white rag. Allow it to air dry. I have also had very good luck with a spray-on stain remover called Spot Shot ([www.spotshot.com](http://www.spotshot.com)). The company website offers tips on removing stains.

**Flair for Fuel Pumps – Comment**

This is regarding the letter "A Flair for Fuel Pumps" in the October 2013 issue. I have a 1997 Fleetwood Bounder on a Chevy P-chassis with the 7.4-liter V-8 engine. In 2001, it would not start so I had it towed to a Chevy dealer and they replaced the fuel pump. A month later, with less than 800 miles on the pump, it would not start again. The coach was towed to a shop. They replaced the pump, but the next morning it would not start. They took it apart and found there was no power at the fuel pump. The problem was a 90-degree wire connector at the top of the tank, which made intermittent contact. They replaced the connector and since then I have had no more problems.

**Leonard Priel | Livingston, Texas**

Fuel pumps are an ongoing problem, and I've heard of similar situations with faulty and intermittent connectors on Ford and GM chassis in this area of the connections to the tank sending unit and pump. Anyone with problems in this area should inspect the wiring here before replacing an expensive fuel pump that may not be faulty.

**Battery Charging Question**

**Q** I have read your advice on keeping batteries charged during storage, but I'm not sure I'm doing it right. I own a motorhome with two 12-volt batteries for the coach plus one 12-volt for the chassis. I have tried Battery Tenders to keep them charged, but I get sulfation on the coach batteries. I don't use the battery disconnect switch when in storage; everything is still hooked up ready for travel when I plug into my 30-amp service at the house. I use the breaker box in my house to turn on and off the power to the motorhome (once a week). Will this process keep the batteries charged or overcharged?

**Don Brugman | Seminole, Florida**

**A** By keeping the power cord plugged in and connected to 120 volts AC at home, and the disconnect switch closed (completing the circuit to the coach batteries), the power converter is running and charging the coach batteries. Unless you have a "smart" charging circuit in the converter (it will say that on the panel if it is) it can't condition the batteries properly since the converter only has a float mode. The higher output voltage from the converter overrides the effect of the Battery Tender. **M**

**Have a Tech Question?**

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Email [tech@motorhomemagazine.com](mailto:tech@motorhomemagazine.com) or write to *MotorHome*, 2750 Park View Court, Suite 240, Oxnard, CA 93036 (please include your name, city and state). Selected letters will be answered in the magazine, but time does not permit individual replies.

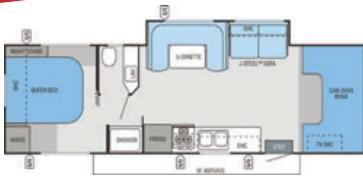
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# Give Me a Break

As winter begins to loosen its icy grip, here are three places for a thoroughly grown-up spring break

By Alan Rider

**L**et's face it: As much as we all would like to duck out on our everyday lives and join the annual motorhome migration to Florida or Arizona for the winter, some of us just have to suck it up and tough it out when the thermometer drops and the snowflakes start to fly.

This endurance test does have an upside, however, namely that it makes the arrival of spring all the sweeter. Especially if we can work in a grown-up spring break getaway of our own.

Of course, if you accept this premise, it still leaves open the question of where to go on your vernal vacation. Well, after years of crisscrossing the country by motorhome, I have some suggestions for destinations that are all but guaranteed to help you wring maximum enjoyment out of this much-anticipated season.

## Flower Power

Remember the scene in the "Wizard of Oz" where Dorothy and her friends are traversing the seemingly endless field of poppies as they approach the Emerald City? If you think that flowery visual was a mere figment of the filmmaker's imagination, you need to visit the Antelope Valley California Poppy Reserve (661-946-6092, [www.parks.ca.gov](http://www.parks.ca.gov)) outside Lancaster, California. Every April, the rolling hills of this 1,780-acre preserve are covered in bright yellow and orange flowers in a display so eye-poppingly beautiful you

might actually begin to believe you've been transported to Oz.

## Dancing Shoes

Shakespeare once wrote, "April hath put a spirit of youth in everything." For a truly visceral understanding of what the Bard meant, I heartily recommend a visit to the annual New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival (504-410-4100, [www.nojazzfest.com](http://www.nojazzfest.com)). This year's Jazz Fest takes place April 24 through May 3 and features nearly 100 performers on a dozen different stages, in musical styles that range from Cajun and zydeco to rhythm-and-blues to old-school jazz belted out by traditional brass bands. In short, if the lively music and fantastic food here doesn't put a spring in your step and a smile on your face, you might want to take a moment and check for a pulse.

## Flying South

If there's a member of the animal kingdom that knows something about springtime travel destinations, it would be the birds. Which says something about Dauphin Island, Alabama, as it's a magnet for more than 400 migratory species that need to catch their breath after a long flight across the Gulf of Mexico from Central and South America each spring. There are several wildlife preserves on this 14-mile-long barrier island at the mouth of Mobile Bay, the largest of which is the 164-acre Audubon Bird Sanctuary (251-861-3607, [www.dauphinisland.org](http://www.dauphinisland.org)) that features an amazing range of habitats from forests to marshes. Add balmy temperatures and white-sand beaches that allow you to walk for miles in the gentle surf and you have a spring break destination that's hard to beat, even for the featherless among us who'd prefer to drive south for the winter.

Though this idea of taking a spring break road trip is a relatively recent invention, the urge behind it is anything but. For as Mark Twain once observed, "When you've got [spring fever], you want — oh, you don't quite know what it is you want, but it just fairly makes your heart ache, you want it so!"

To which I can only add that I know the feeling he's describing and where to find the cure: It's out there waiting for us all along The Road Ahead. **M**

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## Blues & Golds ☺

New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival draws big-name artists such as Earth, Wind & Fire (right). Peak poppy viewing in Antelope Valley is usually mid-April (far right).

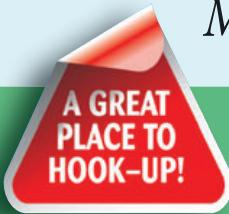


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