

WATERTIGHT: HOW TO USE THE RIGHT SEALANTS

MotorHome

Travel, Tech, Lifestyle – For the RV Enthusiast

December 2016

SEEING DOUBLE

Winnebago Vista Class A
and Minnie Winnie Class C
Bunkhouses Face Off

TAKE A HIKE

HIT THE TRAIL FOR
A HEALTHY HOBBY

FIRE AND ICE

WINTER BRINGS
A BLAZING SIGHT
TO YOSEMITE
NATIONAL PARK



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10 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE ADVENTURES

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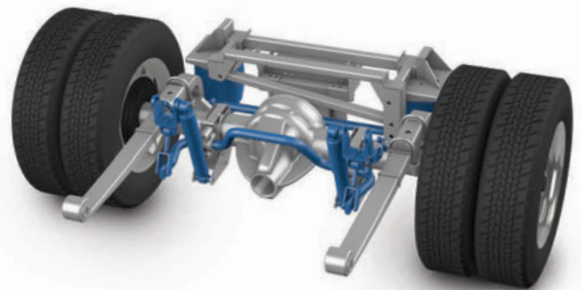


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The beauty of Yosemite National Park's famous Yosemite Valley is enhanced by a unique late-February event known as the firefall (see page 18).



Fleetwood's Discovery LXE is available in three 40-plus-foot floorplans, all featuring open spaces and luxury appointments. Pg. 14

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It's Showtime

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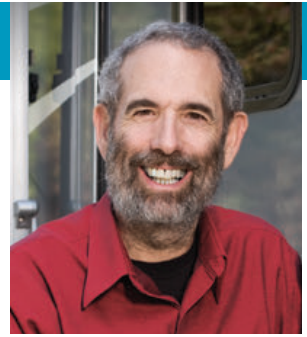
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A 2007 Newmar Dutch Star 4324 proves to be "The One" for this RVing family



ON THE COVER

These Winnebago motorhomes may feature the same floorplan, but the spacious Class A Vista 31BE and the smooth-driving Class C Minnie Winnie 31G have a few notable differences beyond their body types (see test on page 42). Photo by Scott Hirko Photography.



By Bob Livingston

It's Showtime

Wandering around a couple of big events in September, the Hershey RV Show in Pennsylvania and the RV Open House (trade only) in Elkhart, Indiana, made it clear that the upcoming year will be another transitional period when it comes to motorhome comfort and livability. While getting away from the daily grind may be a major reason why we travel in a motorhome, leaving the amenities of a stationary home is no longer a necessary compromise.

The mantra adopted by virtually every manufacturer is to make sure owners don't get homesick while on the road. And, from the look of where they're going, manufacturers are right on target. Everything from how well and where we sleep to an array of electronic gadgetry has been massaged and upgraded in the new models that are working their way to dealers' lots.

From a personal point of view, I'm more enamored by technology, but it's hard to overlook how sleeping quarters have been creatively integrated into limited square footage. For example, bunk and overhead beds are becoming more commonplace, as more families adopt the RV lifestyle. And, what were once amusingly called "mattresses" have transcended into memory foam and high-grade sleeping surfaces.

Illustrating the need to house growing families is our comparison test of two Winnebagos — one a Class A and the other a Class C — that are

almost identical in their bunkhouse configurations (see page 42). I think you'll discover some interesting observations, as we did when we put the two motorhomes through their paces. For one, the Class A, which typically draws more panache in the eyes of enthusiasts — especially neophytes — was not as drivable as the Class C. Obviously, suspension systems on these Ford chassis have delivery-truck DNA, which shortchanges road manners.

Customers have been loud and clear on this front, and a few manufacturers have moved forward with suspension upgrades. REV Group, for example, developed its Control Ryde suspension in partnership with MorRyde, and touts superior ride comfort as the beneficiary. Surely, others will follow, as suppliers, like SuperSprings, offer retrofit components to motorhome builders.

Floorplan creativity continues to amaze with Euro styling, cushy

furniture and more stylish — and functional — appliances. Changes are evident on both ends of the spectrum, with diesel pushers leading the charge when it comes to glitz and glamor, while motorhomes built on compact chassis supplied by Mercedes-Benz, Ford and Ram balance out the field.

Touch-pad panels for controlling the lights, awning, entertainment systems, leveling jacks, HVAC and other electronic gizmos were energetically demonstrated at the above shows. Admittedly I'm smitten by all this wizardry, but my instincts remind me that operational perfection may still be a ways off. Fancy electronics can even relegate many of the system controls to smartphones and tablets through wireless integration. Controlling system function through a cellular data network may even be right around the corner. At this juncture, it might take some time for those who still use flip phones to embrace wireless technology, but rest assured, the industry is going in that direction at a rapid pace.

The year ends with the RV industry's biggest trade show in Louisville, Kentucky, and while most of the new offerings have already been revealed, I'm confident there will be a few more rabbits popping out of hats during the upcoming show season. **M**

Contributors | December



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



Bobbie Hasselbring is an award-winning travel and food writer and editor of www.realfoodtraveler.com, which covers authentic food and travel. Bobbie owns a 2003 Jayco Greyhawk SS Class C.



Rhonda Ostertag is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to *MotorHome*. She travels and collaborates with her husband, George, a photographer. They live in Oregon when not on the road.



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



Dawn Wilson is a professional photographer and writer specializing in photography of high altitudes and high latitudes of the Rockies and Alaska. She currently travels full-time in her motorhome.



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).

MotorHome

Publisher Bob Livingston
Editorial Director Eileen Hubbard
Managing Editor Kristopher Bunker
Technical Editor Chris Dougherty
Art Director Rick Damien
Production Director Bob Dawson
Production Manager Brenda Hutchinson
Business Manager Katey Purgatorio

Consulting Editors Wes Caughlan, Ken Freund, Jeff Johnston

Contributors Ann Eichenmuller, Chris Hemer, Scott Hirko, Kevin Livingston, Rhonda and George Ostertag, Alan Rider, Dawn Wilson

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

Advertising Sales Representatives
 Sue Seidnitz (Southwest Region)
 847-229-6813, sue.seidnitz@goodsam.com

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

Lou Cicirelli (Northeast Region)
 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, Michigan)
 Tel 334-546-7243 Fax 334-356-7740; scottcrompton@mac.com

Customer Service

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

Website www.motorhome.com

Editorial info-motorhomemagazine@goodsam.com

GS MEDIA & EVENTS

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



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

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

Smoke and Mirrors?

We purchased a 2008 Winnebago Sightseer 29R equipped with sideview cameras. I thought this would be a good idea ... until I drove it. In my estimation, sideview cameras are of no value, and I consider them to be hazardous. Well-adjusted mirrors are far better and safer to use. For example, when checking to see if the lane to the left is clear before making a lane change, I need only to look into the mirror and check traffic to the left. When using the camera, I have to take my eyes off the road and look to the right to check the lane to the left.

Frankly, I consider these side

cameras just smoke and mirrors designed to make sales, and would prefer that the money invested in the side cameras be used to install better latches on the cabinets to prevent them from opening while traveling.

Joe Robel | Olympia, Washington

A Whole New World

We recently upgraded from an older Holiday Rambler Endeavor to a Newmar Mountain Aire. The Endeavor did not have sideview cameras. After driving my Mountain Aire, which was so equipped, I don't know how I ever survived without them. Maybe this 45-foot bus is just that much more in-

timidating, but they sure make me feel a lot more comfortable. I have always tried to be very cautious when changing lanes, but this added tool is completely worth it. Now that I have used the cameras, I wouldn't go without them.

Michael J. West | Via email

Delayed Response

Our last two coaches have had side cameras, and I never used them. As far as I am concerned, they are a waste of money. I can see everything I need to see in my sideview mirrors much faster than with the cameras. The cameras have a delay after activating the turn signals, and when having to

Featured Letter

Secure View

After purchasing our 1996 Winnebago Vectra 34RQ, one of the first improvements made was the addition of security/driver-assist cameras. Since we owned a security business, it was only natural to install our own cameras. To date we have five cameras installed on the eight-camera DVR: two rear-facing, (distant and close-view), one on the passenger-side mirror (which completely removes the blind spot), one front-facing (dash camera) and one hidden inside the coach up front as a security camera. Additional cameras to be added include a rear bumper camera to monitor the dinghy and maybe one on the driver's side mirror. There is a drop-down 13-inch monitor that allows for easy viewing of any of the cameras while driving or in a campground as security for us and our belongings. The right side and distant rearview cameras toggle on

the monitor every 5 seconds while driving, which provides an excellent view of the road. The system records everything seen on all cameras on a hard drive for security and accident re-creation. As this is a home-security system, I have made sure that the cameras were sealed extra well due to driving in the rain, but cameras are cheap and easy to replace if needed. Total spent was less than \$400, and installation took approximately 10 hours. We also installed a GSM (cellular) security system that calls our phones to report any intrusion of our coach.

Tom and Wanda Christenson | Pinellas Park, Florida



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make a sudden evasive maneuver I can glance in my convex mirror and take action before the image appears on the monitor. The mirrors are in my line of sight and I can use them without having to turn my head down like I do when using the monitor.

Daryl and Bonnie Beck | Archbold, Ohio

Well Worth It

I have owned three motorhomes, and all three came with sideview cameras. I can't imagine being without them. It never occurred to me that they weren't on all Class A's. I believe they should be required on all Class A motorhomes as a safety measure. Whatever the cost, they are worth it.

Robert Martin | Nacogdoches, Texas

Low-Cost Views

We have a 1994 Winnebago Vectra with 28,000-plus miles on it. I offer this because the value of expensive add-ons like sideview cameras, etc., is not economically prudent. However, that

doesn't mean we can't have a low-cost, quality DIY upgrade like a color backup camera, and sideview cameras too.

When the black-and-white CRT backup-camera monitor failed, I found a 7-inch color system on eBay that fits in the instrument-panel space. It also has options for adding other devices — like sideview cameras, a DVD player, etc. Further, I also found two small chrome cameras and mounted them to the bottom of my outside rearview Velvac mirror housings, which extend outside the sides of the motorhome. The wiring was installed through the mirror arms and into the instrument panel, and to independent left and right rocker switches and indicator lights above the backup camera. They are color cameras, as is the LCD flat-panel backup-camera monitor.

The only disadvantage is that I have to select the left- or right-side



cams or the backup camera for the view I want. Advantages, however, are cost, size, weight, finish, clarity, easy install, verification of mirror view and that they are out of the rain and road grime. The total cost of both cameras in 2013 was \$22.92. The cost of the backup camera, cables and LCD flat-panel monitor in 2011 was \$209.99.

Doug Warnecke | Harwood, North Dakota

Eyes on the Road!

My motorhome has sideview cameras, but I rarely look at them. To see the picture, you must take your eyes off the road when making the turn or lane change, and I find this unsafe. I use the two main mirrors the most. The idea of the sideview cameras is last on my list

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of things I want. They might be useful when backing into a parking spot, but you have to activate the turn signal for each side — not too handy at all!

Bob McDonald | Quinton, Virginia

Hands-On Advice

Our 2013 Itasca 37F came with sideview cameras built into the Velvac mirrors; you monitor the view through a Jensen radio built into the dash. The cameras work manually by pushing an on-screen “button” on the radio, or automatically by turning or backing up.

I’m very pleased with this system, and I use it while driving to see what’s happening around the coach going down the road and when driving through campsites. When driving, I keep the left camera on all the time, and the display only changes when I use the turn signals to make lane changes. The reason for having the left camera on is so I can look down the highway to traffic coming from behind and judge where I want to be.

The biggest issue I have with sideview cameras is that the monitor is located down in the dash, and I have to take my eyes off the road to view what’s happening. This means when traveling in congestion you want to make sure your co-pilot keeps their eyes open to see down the road and offer suggestions to you. Another negative is that the co-pilot can’t see the monitor.

Always look in your mirrors first and use the cameras second. Also, buy mirror covers to protect the cameras from direct light while you are parked at a campground.

Stephen Calderwood | Via email

Old Reliable

When I hit the blinker switch to change lanes, my eyes go to the mirrors, not the center of the dash where the camera screen is located. I’m sure there must be some merit to this feature, but I have yet to find it. Give me great mirrors every time.

Patrick Buchanan | Fort Worth, Texas

Cold-Weather Travels

I am asking for help in my search for the best motorhome for use in cold weather. I have comfortably camped at minus 20 degrees Fahrenheit in a camping van conversion, but have found that most motorhomes are not designed for, or are comfortable in, extremely cold weather.

Gary Gapen | Via email

Question of the Month

If you stay in your motorhome during extremely cold weather, which brand/model allows you to remain in comfort without battling the elements? Are there any particular options installed to combat the cold, or do you have any tried-and-true methods of keeping the motorhome’s interior toasty?

Send your comments to:

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ESCAPES

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12 ROAD FOODIE | 14 WHEELS & GEAR | 16 CROSSROADS



Sin City Refuge

Minutes from the bright lights of Las Vegas, Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area offers RVers a natural outdoor-adventure oasis

By Morey Edelman

Las Vegas, Nevada, is a world-class destination, but at some point you may need a break from the slot machines, neon lights and hustle and bustle of the Strip. Less than 30 minutes (about 17 miles) west of downtown Vegas, you'll find Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, a recreation site managed by the Red Rock Canyon Interpretive Association (RRCIA) and the Bureau of Land Management, and a welcome respite from the fast-paced Vegas lifestyle.

Begin your stop at the visitor center, which is right past the fee station (\$7 per vehicle). Artistic and informative displays at the center depict how wind, water, sun and geology created this unusual Mojave Desert landscape that includes Aztec Sandstone cliffs jutting thousands of feet into the sky. Once your curiosity has been piqued, head out on the 13-mile-long scenic paved loop road with stunning red-rock vistas. The sights are absolutely amazing, and there's no problem making the loop in a large motorhome.

Along the loop road there are 19 hiking trails as listed by RRCIA, ranging from less than 1 mile to up to 6 miles in length, with difficulty levels from easy to strenuous. Rock climbing is permitted (with trails from beginner to advanced), which is fun to watch even if you choose not to participate. Numerous trailhead parking lots allow for large motorhomes, and some even offer designated RV/bus parking spots.

Stay for the night at the Red Rock Canyon Campground, which is 2 miles east of the visitor center and has large and level sites featuring picnic tables and fire pits, and many with covered shade structures as well. Water is available, but there are no hookups nor dump station, and generator use is allowed between 6 a.m. and 10 p.m. The campground is open September through May, and sites are \$15 per night.

For more information, call 702-515-5367 or go to www.redrockcanyonlv.org.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Hammond's and Holiday Peppermint Bark

Candy comes to mind at this sweet time of year, and no one does holiday treats better than Hammond's Candies (www.hammondscandies.com), an old-time candy maker in Denver, Colorado, that's been hand-making candy for more than 90 years.

You've likely seen the company's handcrafted candy canes, ribbon candy and lollipops at stores such as Bloomingdale's, Cracker Barrel, Nordstrom, Shopko, Whole Foods and other retailers. But it takes visiting Hammond's Candies in the Mile High City to really appreciate its craft.

Located in an industrial section of Denver, Hammond's offers plenty of RV parking. Its factory features a retail shop and an "Oops!" shop for not-quite-perfect candies at discounted prices.

Take a free, 30-minute factory tour (Monday through Friday, 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.; closed Sundays). The tour leads visitors through a bit of Colorado history, tidbits about nostalgic candy and scientific insights into candy making. While health regulations prevent visitors from actually going through the factory, video screens and large viewing windows allow guests a first-hand look at the company's candy-making experience.

We found candy-cane making fascinating. At Hammond's, workers pull, twist and shape the candy canes by hand — just like in 1920. And it's amazing to see how they perfectly incorporate ribbons of color into the white candy base.

Hammond's employs more than 120 people, many of whom have worked at the company for decades, and uses recipes and techniques developed by the original founder,



From top: Each candy cane at Hammond's is made by hand. At the Hammond's factory retail store, visitors can buy all types of candies.

Carl T. Hammond. Hammond apprenticed at a candy company and, after inventing his first candy — Honey Ko Kos, a chocolate-coconut confection — he launched his own company. At first, Hammond did everything — developed recipes, made candy and sold it — always with the motto, "Nothing is more important than quality."

Today, the company still makes candies the old-fashioned way. In addition to the popular tours (which draw more than 100,000 people annually), Hammond's sponsors a Candy Cane Festival, generally held the second weekend in December (as of press time, the 2016 dates had not been finalized). The free event includes a visit from Santa Claus, carolers, trolley rides, mini-tours, free cocoa and more.

Have a holiday candy recipe or destination you'd like to share?
Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com with "holiday candy" in the subject line.

PEPPERMINT CANDY BARK

This easy-to-make peppermint bark, which I make with Hammond's candy canes, is delicious. Using high-quality chocolate helps result in a silky-smooth texture.

- 12 ounces high-quality semisweet chocolate, broken into pieces
- 6 ounces high-quality white chocolate, broken into pieces
- 1½ teaspoons vegetable or canola oil, divided
- ½ teaspoon peppermint extract, divided
- ⅓ to ½ cup candy cane, crushed

▶ Line the bottom and sides of an 8-inch-square baking pan with aluminum foil, smoothing out any wrinkles.

Add 1 teaspoon of the oil to the semisweet chocolate and melt in a double boiler or in the microwave (on 30-second bursts, stirring frequently).

Once melted, stir in ¼ teaspoon of the peppermint extract. Pour chocolate onto the baking sheet, spreading with spatula, and refrigerate for 10 minutes.

With the remaining ½ teaspoon of oil, repeat the chocolate-melting and peppermint-extract (¼ teaspoon) process with the white chocolate, and spread evenly over the semisweet chocolate layer.

Crush candy canes in a food processor, or in a plastic bag with a mallet. Sprinkle over the white-chocolate layer. Refrigerate until completely set. Break apart. Store in refrigerator (or candy cane will get soft).





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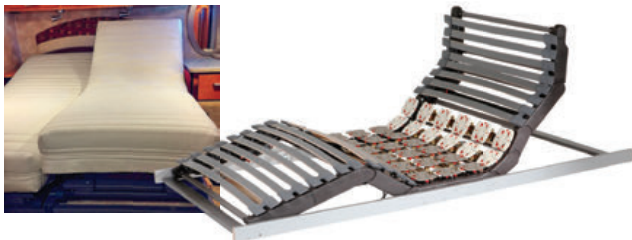
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Flat Bed

One of the most effective ways to improve the overall comfort of the RVing experience is to upgrade the standard bed with an adjustable sleeper. With more than 15 years supplying German bed systems, Axel Bloom offers flat, adjustable-bed systems with a frame that's only 5 inches thick. Because the motors and adjustable mechanisms that raise the mattress (at the head, shoulder, back, knees and legs) are integrated into the frame, the system can be placed on top of a flat wooden (RV bed) platform, meaning no holes or other modifications need to be made in the platform base to make room for a motor. Axel Bloom offers a variety of frame sizes (from twin up to king), and can also custom-fit a bed system to your motorhome's specifications. The frames are backed by a three-year warranty. In addition, Axel Bloom's low-profile, 7-inch-thick hypo-allergenic mattresses are made with natural fabric covers that are machine-washable and dryable. The core is made from a "cold-foam" material, and the entire mattress is backed by a 10-year warranty.

Frame prices start at \$898; mattress prices start at \$870.

Axel Bloom LLC, 866-696-8387, www.axelbloom.com

API Double Play

As engine manufacturers begin to create a new generation of lower-emission, more fuel-efficient diesel engines, higher-performing oils are necessary for enhanced protection. Shell Rotella offers a pair of motor oils that not only comply with new American Petroleum Institute (API) CK-4 emission-reduction standards, but offer more wear protection than required, according to the company. New T4 Triple Protection 15W-40 heavy-duty engine oil is said to deliver an average of 50 percent more protection than required, and is also designed to help defend against deposits and keep engines cleaner by reducing the rate of lubricant-related diesel-particulate-filter (DPF) blockage. New T5 10W-30 Synthetic Blend is said to offer 44 percent more protection than required by API CK-4 tests, and is formulated to deliver the benefits of a low-viscosity synthetic-blend oil, as well as overall deposit control and cleanliness. T5 is said to provide protection against oil breakdown and sustains emission-control system durability in particulate filters and after-treatment systems. MSRP varies by retailer.

Shell Rotella, www.rotella.shell.com



Decked-Out Discovery

Fleetwood has added even more premium features to its luxurious Discovery Class A diesel pusher for 2017. The Discovery LXE is built on Freightliner's Power Bridge XC-M Series chassis and is powered by a 380-horsepower ISL9 8.9-liter diesel engine. All four LXE floorplans are longer than 40 feet. Whole-coach, high-gloss solid hardwood cabinetry, an integrated electronic control system and high-gloss tile flooring in the living area combine with a dishwasher, a third air-conditioning unit and a residential fridge to offer a truly upscale experience. Entertainment highlights include multiple LED HDTVs and a sound bar and Blu-ray player in the living room. When the party moves outside, a 20-foot Girard awning with an LED light strip and wind sensor creates a space for RVers to enjoy the exterior entertainment center with 32-inch LED HDTV. MSRP starts at \$306,685.

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

Mood Lighting

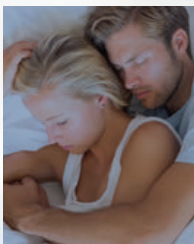


Sometimes, the bright interior lights can be too much when you're looking to soften the ambiance inside the motorhome. New Three Way G4 bi-pin bulbs from SalVinCo's Bee Green LEDs offer the option to choose between three levels of lighting from one bulb by simply toggling the light with the wall switch.

The three-way LED bulbs are available as a retrofit G4 bi-pin bulb for existing fixtures, or may be purchased in new fixtures. Drawing a maximum of 2 watts, the LEDs offer three lumen settings of 197/129/65 (the high of 197 lumens is comparable to a 12-watt halogen bulb), and are available in side- or back-pin configurations with a diameter of 1.18 inches. MSRP: \$23.99. A slightly larger (1.3-inch diameter) LED offers brighter high- and medium- intensities at 275/220/55 lumens (high is comparable to a 20-watt halogen bulb). Maximum power draw is 3 watts. MSRP: \$25.99.

SalVinCo LLC, 941-378-9727, www.salvinco.com

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ESCAPES CROSSROADS

San Angelo, Texas

Fort Concho Christmas

Fort Concho National Historic Landmark in San Angelo, Texas, is a great place to visit any time of year. Part of a trail of forts constructed throughout Texas to protect settlers and commerce, the 40-acre Fort Concho site and its 24 buildings are considered to be one of the best preserved forts of the Indian War era. But during the Christmas season the fort pulls out all the stops and, for three days (December 2-4), visitors can enjoy an entertaining seasonal celebration.

Christmas at Old Fort Concho, which can attract 8,000 to 10,000 people on Saturday alone, offers something for everybody. Visitors can wander through stalls of the merchants, visit food booths, entertain children with special activities and enjoy special displays. Every hour there's a living-history demonstration.

Traditional holiday music is played in the fort's chapel, and visitors can attend a Sunday morning cowboy breakfast and church service. The Gingerbread House Contest and the Cookie Contest are big favorites. Period music wafts from several locations around the fort, including the Frontier Brigade Band performing arrangements of music of the time, dressed up in the appropriate uniforms. The Winter Rendezvous features 1880s re-enactors setting up their tents and camps on the huge parade ground, bringing in horses, mules, a line of canons that they fire (using blanks) and artillery demonstrations. Parking is available in several lots surrounding the fort.

For more information, call 325-481-2646, or visit www.fortconcho.com/christmas.htm — Neala McCarten



Photo: Neala McCarten

Mojave National Preserve, California

Desert Depot

A stark contrast to the desert vistas in the middle of Southern California's Mojave National Preserve, Kelso Depot offers visitors some insight into the turn-of-the 19th century railroad-building era. Beautifully restored beginning in 2002, the depot now serves as the visitor center of the 2,400-square-mile preserve managed by the National Park Service. There is an excellent 30-minute video detailing the preserve, displays of wildlife and fauna, and a museum explaining why the Union Pacific Railroad built this particular depot. Kelso Depot also houses restored rooms including the ticket office, the baggage room and the lunch counter (which is still looking for a new concessionaire to operate).

A drive to the depot, located east of Barstow, can be accessed from Interstate 15 (head south), or from



Photo: NPS

Interstate 40 (head north). Both drives travel over desert landscapes (including the largest Joshua tree grove in America), sand dunes and cinder cones.

Hole-in-the-Wall Campground is the only facility in the park that can accommodate larger motorhomes. There are 35 primitive sites, but there is a dump station and potable water, plus some amazing desert scenery. The parking lot at Hole-in-the-wall is the trailhead for the Rings Loop Trail, a 1.5-mile roundtrip hike that includes descending narrow Banshee Canyon with the help of metal rings mounted in the rock.

For more information, call 760-252-6100 or visit www.nps.gov/moja — Morey Edelman

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Capture the Firefall

Ideal wintertime conditions lead to a unique sight at Yosemite National Park in California

By Dawn Wilson

Many motorhome owners head south for the winter to spend it in the warmth of the sun and for some relief from the snow. But I generally embrace the cold and look for great locations in the winter where my motorhome may be the only rig in the RV park, and where I can photograph unique natural events and amazing wildlife.

One such event that has captured my attention for years has been the annual natural event known as firefall, a phenomenon that only happens each February in Yosemite National Park, and only when

Mother Nature dictates that the components will align just right. But my travel plans had not aligned, nor had Mother Nature provided the right ingredients, for more than four years.

Last winter, I finally made it to Yosemite to photograph this spectacular beauty in nature, and found my motorhome to be only one of a handful of rigs in a campground just outside of the entrance to Yosemite. It was heaven on earth.

Making a Firefall

Firefall is one of Yosemite National Park's most amazing spectacles, but conditions must be just right for it to appear. The phenomenon only

Photos: Dawn Wilson Photography

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

Getting There

Traveling to the Sierra Nevada in winter requires special consideration and proper planning for snowy road conditions. The State of California requires chains to be carried in all vehicles, including RVs, traveling through the mountains in winter. Most of the high mountain passes coming from the eastern side of Yosemite National Park are closed in winter due to snowy roads. Therefore the best entrance for taking a motorhome into Yosemite Valley will require entering the park through the west entrance along California Highway 120. The California Department of Transportation provides an excellent brochure about winter driving at www.dot.ca.gov/hq/roadinfo/winter_driving2015.pdf.



Capturing images of the firefall in Yosemite National Park requires precise planning, as the event only occurs for about 10 minutes before sunset for about 10 days in mid-to-late February, weather permitting.

happens for about 10 days in mid-to-late February when, on clear days, the sun aligns at a particular angle to illuminate the rock wall of El Capitan. In years where there is enough snowfall — like in 2015, when an El Niño weather pattern brought frequent snow to the Sierra Nevada — and rising temperatures fuel the snow to melt, the runoff cascades down the west wall of 3,000-foot-plus high El Capitan to create Horsetail Fall.

That illumination on the rocks reflects back onto the water of the falls and creates a scene of what appears to be lava running down the rock wall.

“The Horsetail Fall phenomenon appears when the angle of the setting sun sets the waterfall ablaze with reds and oranges, like a fire was falling down the cliffs on the shoulder of El Capitan,” reads the Yosemite National

Park website.

The spectacle attracts hundreds — maybe even thousands — of photographers, visitors and sightseers each year. The event, which only lasts about 10 minutes just before sunset, was particularly crowded in 2015, however, because the falls hadn’t materialized in the four years prior because of the drought in California.

The onlookers line up hours before the big event — some as early as 8 a.m. — in order to get the perfect location.

Parking is at a premium at the best locations to view firefall, so plan on arriving by 2 p.m. at the latest. Park rangers will ticket improperly parked vehicles. Due to the limited parking and heavy road traffic, motorhome drivers should consider using their dinghy vehicle (be sure to check the website for vehicle length and height restrictions). Another option is to park at the lodge or Yosemite Village and walk, although either option will require a long walk to view firefall and a walk back in the dark.

To brave the crowds and to pass the time, bring a chair or blanket, a friendly personality, some refreshments and snacks, and entertainment, such as a magazine or e-reader. With so many people standing around for so long you are bound to make some new acquaintances and maybe even some new friends.

Location, Location, Location

Because the fall cascades down the west side of El Capitan, you must be positioned on the east side to catch a glimpse. A direct view of the falls will not produce the reds and oranges, so it is best to be at an angle of the setting sun.

There are two locations that offer the best views of the firefall. The first is at the El Capitan picnic area on the Northside Drive, which is the most popular — and the most crowded — site for viewing. It is also the spot where nature photographer Galen Rowell made what is believed to be the first

color photograph of firefall in 1973.

This location is the closest to Horsetail Fall and a little farther east. Since the sunlight moves from west to east on the face of El Capitan, this location is a little more brilliant later in the two-week time period for firefall.

You can also walk a little farther east into the woods to get a different perspective. Walk in about 200 to 300 yards and find an opening in the trees. Set the camera facing toward El Capitan and you may have the view all to yourself. This location is on the Southside Drive just before the Sentinel Beach and Swinging Bridge picnic areas.

This location offers the best wide-angle view of El Capitan, including the snow on top of El Capitan, the surrounding trees and firefall. If you are really adventurous, you can bring waders or hip boots and take the photo of the firefall reflecting in the Merced River.

Although parking a motorhome at one of the best firefall viewing locations may be difficult, finding a spot to stay in a motorhome will be an easy option in the winter.

There are three primitive campgrounds in Yosemite that are open in February. The first is Upper Pines Campground, near Yosemite Village. The second is Hodgdon Meadow Campground, near the west entrance to the park. And the third is Wawona Campground, south of Yosemite Valley. These campgrounds were about



Right: The mild climate and mixture of plant species that comprise the coniferous forests at Yosemite provide for a diverse population of animals such as the bobcat seen here.

GETAWAY

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK, CALIFORNIA

Right: Yosemite Lakes RV Resort is located approximately 5 miles outside the park's west entrance and offers 254 full-hookup sites and free Wi-Fi. The lodge at Yosemite Lakes RV Park is large and comfortable for a little downtime from exploring Yosemite National Park.



two-thirds full during the 2015 firefall.

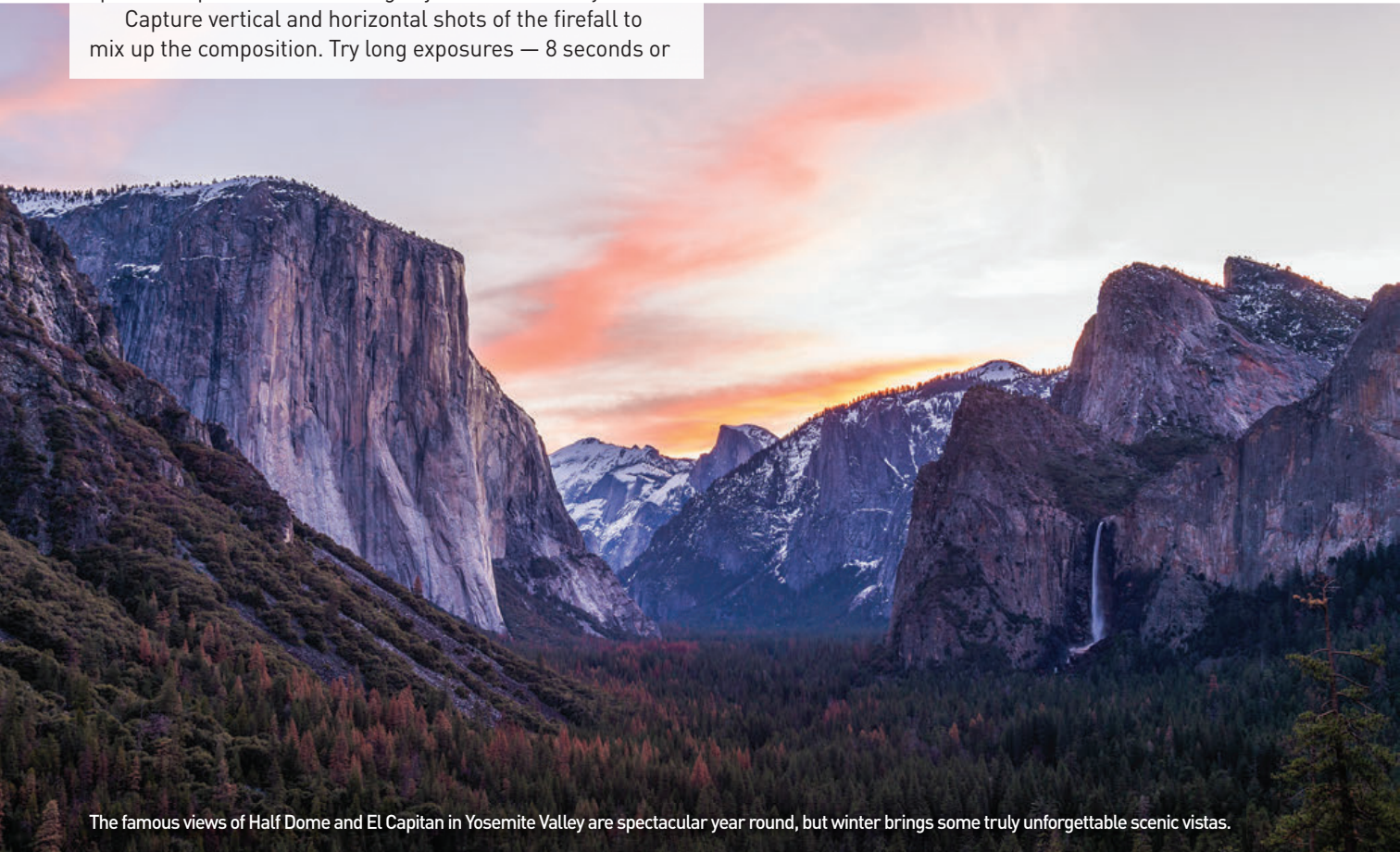
Approximately 5 miles outside the west entrance to Yosemite National Park is Yosemite Lakes RV Resort (www.rvonthego.com/california/yosemite-lakes-rv-resort). This comfortable park provides a lodge, free Wi-Fi, 254 full-hookup sites and a putt-putt golf course. Although a few seasonal employees in the area use this park as a base, it is primarily empty during the firefall event, offering a quiet, nearby alternative to more crowded campgrounds within the park.

Photographing the Event

Obtaining the best shots of the firefall takes more patience than unique technique. Blurring the water and obtaining the richest colors will require a DSLR camera set on a sturdy tripod to take a long-exposure photo. Start out with the aperture on the camera at its sharpest point — typically f8 — and then try different settings after capturing that photo. Stopping down the aperture — changing the setting to f16 or f20 — will provide a greater depth of field and sharpness throughout the scene. Opening up the aperture by changing the setting to f6.3 or f4 will bring more focus to a specific spot in the photo while blurring objects farther away.



Capture vertical and horizontal shots of the firefall to mix up the composition. Try long exposures — 8 seconds or



The famous views of Half Dome and El Capitan in Yosemite Valley are spectacular year round, but winter brings some truly unforgettable scenic vistas.

longer — to blur the water of Horsetail Fall, but not so long as to lose all detail in the water. Try faster shutter speeds to freeze the water and the blowing mist coming off of the falls.

Most of the iconic photos of the firefall are taken at longer focal lengths, such as 200mm or longer, to compose the shot with just the water of Horsetail Fall and the rock face. This longer lens length allows the photographer to zoom in on the detail of the glowing water cascading down the rock face of El Capitan. The longer focal lengths will also compress the shot to make farther elements seem closer and larger.

A wide-angle lens, such as one with lengths of 14-24mm, will allow the photographer to capture more of the environmental scene. This composition may include the snow on top of El Capitan, clouds high in the sky illuminated in warm colors of sunset and the trees framing El Capitan as well as Horsetail Fall in its glorious shades of red and orange.


Point-and-shoot cameras will also capture photos of the scene, but ensure the camera has a zoom feature so that the composition only contains the most vital elements to the scene.

In addition to the camera and lenses, a sturdy tripod is a necessity to obtain a sharp photo of the scene. Because the photos are taken close to sunset, you will need longer shutter speeds to get enough light on the scene, something that cannot be accomplished handholding the camera. A remote shutter release will also help with keeping the camera steady for a sharp photo. And don't forget to bring a warm jacket, hat, and gloves, as the temperatures will drop quickly at sunset, and a flashlight or headlamp for the walk back to the vehicle.

Enjoy your viewing of the firefall and be sure to explore the other iconic locations in Yosemite Valley and the surrounding area in winter, one of the most beautiful seasons for the park. **M**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Yosemite National Park
209-372-0200, www.nps.gov/yose



The light from the setting sun sets Horsetail Fall ablaze with reds and oranges during the must-see firefall event.

“That illumination on the rocks reflects back onto the water of the falls and creates a scene of what appears to be lava running down the rock wall.”

NEW GUIDE FOR THE NEW YEAR

Don't hit the road without Good Sam's 2017 RV park and campground directory

Good Sam members can save big with the latest edition of the *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide*. Members pay just \$6.95 for the 2017 directory of RV parks and campgrounds — more than 60 percent off the \$19.95 non-member price.

Topping that off, the impressively thick publication comes packed with \$1,000 worth of money-saving coupons redeemable at Camping World SuperCenters.

The annually updated guide provides information on nearly 12,500 North American RV parks and public campgrounds, including the 2,100-plus Good Sam Parks that offer members the 10 percent nightly discount. For 2017, campground listings include Wi-Fi-at-site availability and expanded hookup and amperage information. Good Sam's exclusive RV park ratings and articles on everything

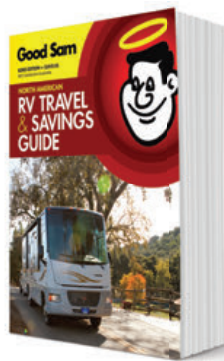
from family-camping vacations to snowbird destinations help RVers decide where to stay, and state and provincial maps help them get there.

► The 2017 *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide* will be on sale at Camping World SuperCenters in early December. Orders placed on the Camping World website will start shipping in early December (shipping and handling fees apply to online orders).

www.campingworld.com/2017guide



Florida's Bay Bayou RV Resort is one of more than 2,100 Good Sam Parks highlighted in the latest *Good Sam RV Travel & Savings Guide*.



February in Phoenix

Good Sam gears up for a new event in Arizona's Valley of the Sun

RV enthusiasts will roll into Phoenix International Raceway, February 23 through 26, 2017, for the Good Sam RV Super Show, a first-of-its-kind event that organizers hope to expand from Arizona to other regions of the country. Beyond shopping for RVs and RV gear, Good Sam members get the added benefits of mingling with fellow members and saving on overnight parking and day passes.

The slate of activities and sense of community elevate the Phoenix event above other RV shows. Young families will particularly appreciate the lineup of kids' activities, from carnival rides to a scavenger hunt. Adding to the fun, live music from the RealTones and Swing Tips and Saturday's fireworks show will bring members and other show-goers together.

Of course, RV dealers will be on hand to give tours of new and used motorhomes, travel trailers and fifth-wheels, and merchandise displays will showcase the latest RV equipment, outdoor gear and camping supplies.



► For information about member discounts and to reserve a parking spot, call 866-838-5299 or visit www.goodsamrvshow.com.



Step into a new RV in Phoenix.

MORE WAYS TO SAVE AT CAMPING WORLD

ONLINE COUPONS: For the holidays and year-round, Good Sam members can save hundreds of dollars on RV supplies and outdoor gear at Camping World with members-only retail coupons on the Good Sam Club website. These exclusive online coupons are updated every quarter, so check often to find the latest offers at www.goodsam.com/coupons.

LP-GAS DISCOUNTS: Good Sam members can save 25 percent off the regular retail price on up to 40 gallons of liquid-propane gas every Tuesday and Wednesday at Camping World SuperCenters. LP-gas is available at most Camping World locations throughout the United States. To find participating stores near you, go to www.campingworld.com/stores.

HOLIDAY SAVINGS: Be on the lookout for the latest Camping World sales flyer featuring huge savings on RV accessories and supplies at the Big Year-End Sale.



SEASON'S GREETINGS FROM GOOD SAM As the Good Sam Club wraps up its yearlong 50th-anniversary celebration, we'd like to extend a warm holiday greeting to members and say thank you for your years of loyalty and patronage. We wish you all the best in 2017 and look forward to another 50 years of happy camping.



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HAPPY TRAILS!

Go take a hike; there are thousands of options across the country to enjoy the scenery, history and recreation of the great outdoors

Trails. The mere mention of them conjures the full range of emotion, from all-out celebrations of spirit, self and the great outdoors to tepid dismissals to cold shudders and disdain. But, they unroll the gamut of possibility. And, if you haven't given them a chance, I

offer you a friendly invitation to go take a hike.

National Trails are good places to start. They represent an untapped wealth for many travelers. Trails run through forests, wildlife refuges and urban settings, and along rivers and rural outposts. What's more, you don't need to be a confirmed hiker to take advantage of their renewal, beauty and history. In fact, for some, you need not hike at all. The hard work was done by our ancestors; we can follow in their footsteps in the air-conditioned

comfort of our motorhomes.

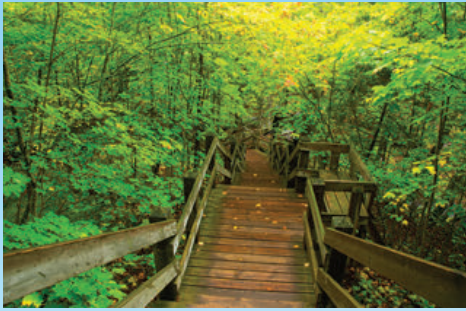
When President Lyndon B. Johnson called for trails for "citizen recreation," the resulting National Trails Act of 1968 set the bar for excellence in three trail categories: scenic, historic and recreation. The growing system touches all 50 states and covers more miles than the Interstate Highway System.

The treasury includes 11 national scenic trails (NSTs) and 19 national historic trails (NHTs), both of which are authorized by Congress, and more than 1,250 national recreation trails that are designated by the Departments of Interior or Agriculture. Water trails, like Oregon's Willamette River Water Trail or Florida's Apalachicola River Paddling Trail System, grow the prospects. Conveniently, many national trails pass through sites easily accessed by vehicle and within reach of popular campgrounds and vacation destinations.

Adding to the government-



Above: The author hits the Appalachian Trail in Baxter State Park, Maine, near Mount Katahdin's Baxter Peak, the northern terminus of the 2,190-mile-long national scenic trail.



sponsored trails, the advocacy of the nonprofit Rails-to-Trails Conservancy has banked another 20,000 miles of repurposed abandoned rail line for recreation.

With such a portfolio, there's bound to be a match for you, for just about anyone. As a fan for quite a while, I've barely brushed the surface. Here's just a small sampling of what's in store.

National Scenic Trails

These are the alpha trails, the ones people bucket-list or "find themselves" on — the premier arterials of the land. The filaments lay along mountain ranges, highlines and divides, and across deserts and land-water routes. All are long (100 miles or greater in total), most are for hiking, and the majority are multistate. Single-state exceptions include the Florida NST, a celebration of Florida's ecodeiversity, and the Ice Age NST, which traces the glacial advance and retreat across Wisconsin.

But long-distance doesn't have to mean long. Multiple trailheads allow for shortened walks or hikes and sneak peeks at what's special.

Appalachian Trail (AT). This hiker-only route through the 14 Appalachian Mountain states — first envisioned by Benton MacKaye in 1921 and, along with the Pacific Crest Trail in California, the first to be recognized as an NST in 1968 — strings 2,190 miles between Mount Katahdin, Maine, and Springer Mountain, Georgia. Access points in communities, popular parks (including New York's Bear Mountain State Park — site of the first completed stretch of the AT and, as of Earth Day 2016, site of the AT's first fully interactive learning exhibit, "Trails for People"), and other public areas

Above from left: A picturesque boardwalk along the North Country NST in Michigan's Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park. An eclectic Patit Creek Campsite silhouette sculpture along the Lewis and Clark NHT in Columbia County, Washington. Oregon's Fort Stevens State Park, located in Lewis and Clark National Historical Park, offers 170 full-hookup sites situated in a forest of spruce and hemlock.

allow for sampling the vistas, wonder, beauty, challenge and history of this bridge through time.

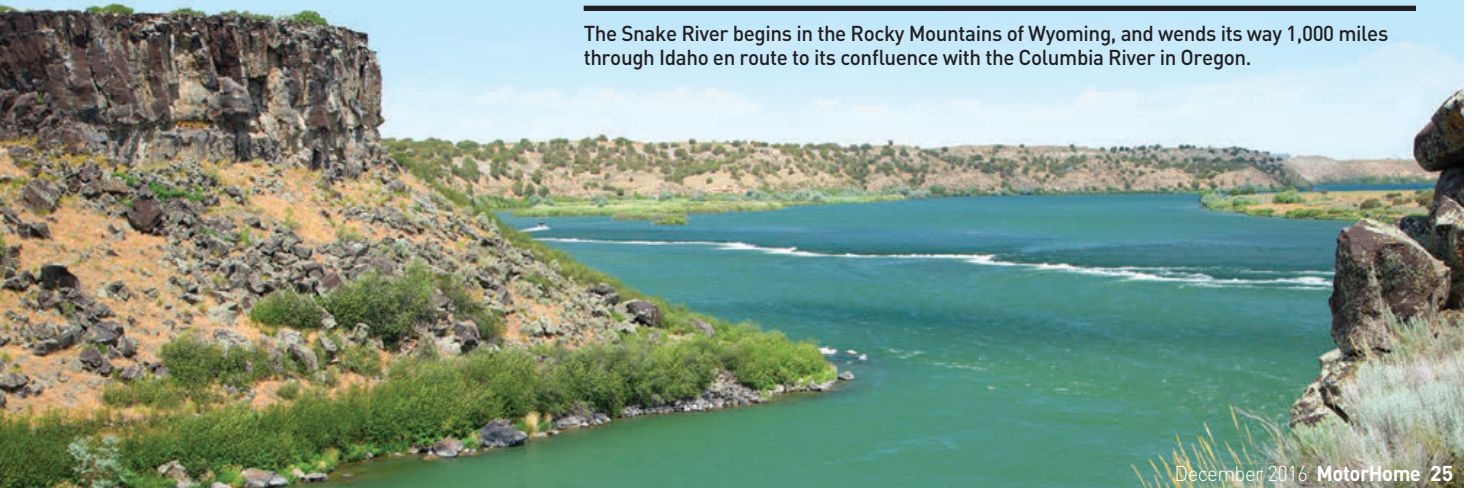
The AT's western counterparts stretch from Mexico to Canada. The Pacific Crest NST strings through the West Coast mountain ranges, while the Continental Divide Trail tackles the Rockies. Together, the trio makes up the Triple Crown of hiking trails.

North Country Trail (NCT). Changing the compass orientation, this ambitious, not-yet-complete NST trends 4,600 miles east-west through the northern tier states from Crown Point, New York, to Lake Sakakawea State Park in central North Dakota. To date, it's the longest national scenic trail. Visitors can pick up stretches in New York, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota. Its passage takes followers through deep forest, along waters, across wildlife refuges and game areas, and past historic sites. The NCT offers great opportunities for viewing the seasons and wildlife ... and also for swatting a few bugs.

National Historic Trails (NHTs)

These consequential trails celebrate the ancestral paths, momentous events and cultural beginnings of the nation. Where NSTs primarily involve hiking, NHTs have more mixed discovery. Motorized travel is common, along with

The Snake River begins in the Rocky Mountains of Wyoming, and wends its way 1,000 miles through Idaho en route to its confluence with the Columbia River in Oregon.



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HAPPY TRAILS!

walking paths, stops at historic museums and sites, and even boat travel.

The collection introduces the Iditarod musher lifeline to the Alaskan gold camps and native villages, the mail routes of the Pony Express and the overland migration routes of the California Trail, the Mormon Trail and the Juan Bautista de Anza Trail. Heavy sadness pairs with the Native American paths: a forced relocation march on the Trail of Tears and a desperate flight for freedom on the Nez Perce Trail. The heartbeat of human rights embraces the Selma to Montgomery Trail. The commercial route of the Old Spanish Trail and the military paths of the Washington-Rochambeau Revolutionary Route and the Star-Spangled Banner add to the breadth.

Lewis and Clark NHT. This combination motorized route, foot trail and water path traces the westward exploration of the Corps of Discovery. Between May 1804 and September 1806, 31 men, one woman, a baby and Seaman, Lewis' black Newfoundland dog, undertook the arduous journey into a virtual unknown to all but the Native Americans who lived there. The NHT takes you across the U.S. map — from St. Louis up the Missouri River over the Rockies and out the Columbia River to the quested



“Ocean in view!” Illinois, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, the Dakotas, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington have trail-related sites. Visitor centers, museums, parks and route interpretive panels bring the players and adventure to life.

Oregon Trail. This more-than-2,000-mile overland route marked the western migration of families and an unwavering belief in a better life. In places, foot trails follow along actual wagon ruts; elsewhere, motorized routes carry modern prairie schooners past landmarks of the original trail and its associated bypass routes. At interpretive sites, museums, parks and visitor centers, journal entries give moving descriptions of the hope and despair of the trail. You can meet the NHT in Idaho, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming. Because this was an “everyman” journey, it continues to court today’s “everyman.”



North Falls at Silver Falls State Park in Oregon cascades for approximately 136 feet onto huge blocks of basalt.



Above from left: At 46 miles in length, Withlacoochee State Trail is one of the longest paved rail-trails in Florida. Potawatomi Falls, along the North Country NST in Michigan's Ottawa National Forest, spans 130 feet in width and drops 30 feet. The Carlsbad Caverns NRT includes the paved, self-guided Big Room Trail at Carlsbad Caverns National Park in New Mexico.

National Recreation Trails (NRTs)

These are the local and regional heroes that stand out in the vast network of trails webbing the country. They emerge because of great natural merit, history, interpretive value or recreational value. They measure from a fraction of a mile to many miles in length. Touring durations can range from less than an hour to multiday treks. Nature trails; flat, paved rail-trails; and conventional hiking trails add to the roster. Some are foot-use only; others welcome multiple use.

Oil Creek State Park Multi-Use Trail, Pennsylvania.

In northwest Pennsylvania (off state Route 8 near Titusville and Oil City), this state park and its popular hiking/biking trail celebrate the oil boom and the birth of the petroleum industry. Paralleling quiet-bending Oil Creek, the paved, approximately 9½-mile trail presents the natural beauty of the steep wooded canyon, which represents a great success story of recovery and renewal and relates the riveting history of a modern-day industry. Interpretive panels explain life and work in the 1860s along these banks: oil wells, boomtowns, refineries, transportation centers and cemeteries. To the park's north, on the site of the first oil well — brought in by Colonel Edwin Drake in 1859 — Drake Well Museum (www.drakewell.org) fleshes out the story.

Withlacoochee State Trail, Florida.

In the Withlacoochee River Valley

between Citrus Springs and Trilby, this paved rail-trail makes the grade (so to speak), serving walkers, cyclists and birders. It stretches 46 miles through Florida's quiet interior with wildlife-management areas and state forest as the backdrop. Small towns, a general store and citrus stands bid stopping for sustenance and swapping trail stories. You may meet travelers from Massachusetts; Texas; Washington, D.C.; and even Oregon. Hikers can choose to link up with the Florida NST. Silver Lake, adjacent to the rail-trail, offers camping. Find a printable trail map at www.rttwst.org/images/bikemap.pdf.

Potawatomi and Gorge Waterfalls NRT, Michigan.

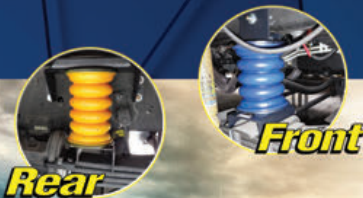
Hugging a conglomerate gorge of the Black River canyon in the western Upper Peninsula (12½ miles north of Bessemer), this ½-mile hiking trail extends views of two of the area falls: Potawatomi and Gorge. A dark woods of old-growth hemlock, cedar, birch and maple enfolds the path. Viewing decks accessed via stairs and boardwalks present the falls and twisting cascades.

Potawatomi Falls spans 130 feet wide and drops 30 feet. Gorge Falls spans 29 feet wide and drops 24 feet. Churned bubbles fashion foamy mats, accenting the black tannin waters. In developed areas, a high fence holds onlookers back from the edge. We encountered the falls at low water, with popcorn spills over bumpy cliffs. When brimming, the falls truly transform.

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HAPPY TRAILS!



Middle North Falls along Canyon Trail in Oregon's Silver Falls State Park is a photo-worthy stop on the park's Trail of Ten Falls.

NST allows visits to two other waterfalls, Conglomerate, ½ mile south (upstream), and Sandstone Falls, ½ mile north (downstream). A ¾-mile hike to Rainbow Falls begins across the suspension bridge at Black River Harbor. A U.S. Forest Service campground at the harbor provides an overnight base.

Carlsbad Caverns NRT, New Mexico.

This national-park representative takes the system underground. It includes the paved 1¼-mile self-guided Big Room Trail and the more challenging Natural Entrance Trail, a steep 1¼-mile descent. Elevator access to Big Room (generally available) allows visitors to forgo the more difficult entry trail. A section of the Big Room Trail is wheelchair-accessible.

The aptly named Big Room is roughly the size of six football fields. One-way travel is at your own pace. Pausing for over-the-shoulder looks enhances appreciation. The cavern is modestly lit to capture the underground experience with shadows, silhouettes and highlights. High ceilings, deep cavities and such named features as Bottomless Pit, Fairyland and Lion's Tail lend to the mystery. Interpretive boards and an audio tour pair with the trail.

Park fees apply; ranger-guided tours have additional fees. Commercial campgrounds at White's City and in the city of Carlsbad serve park users.

Silver Creek Canyon NRT (Trail of Ten Falls), Oregon.

Located about 26 miles east of Salem in Silver Falls State Park, Silver Creek Canyon is my backyard go-to trail, and the place I take visiting guests. Trail users find convenient year-round camping here. I walk this NRT at least four times a year to mark the changing seasons, and never cease to be amazed by winter's thundering plummets, spring's bleeding hearts and nesting dippers, summer's greenery and welcoming shade, and fall's golden outburst of bigleaf maple leaves.

The 7.2-mile loop, with its dips, climbs, stone stairs and waterfall-pass-behinds, can be partitioned into shorter hikes, and the 177-foot South Falls can be viewed from the canyon rim. The site blends Civilian Conservation Corps architecture and charm with nature's superlative water-statement. **M**

How to Find Trails

American Trails

www.americantrails.org/resources/statetrails/index.html

National Park Service National Trails System

www.nps.gov/nts/nts_trails.html

National Trails Guide

<http://nationaltrailsguide.com/visit-a-trail>

National Trails Map

www.nps.gov/nts/maps/National%20Trails%20map.pdf

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

www.railstotrails.org

TrailLink

www.trailink.com



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EXCEPTIONAL EXPERIENCES

Make the most of your upcoming national-park visits with these unforgettable adventures

Our yearlong celebration of the National Park Service's 100th birthday here on the pages of MotorHome magazine may be coming to an end, but we're not quite done yet. The final installment of our monthly "Find Your Adventure" series wraps up with a handful of the most diverse adventures — from mild to wild — we could find, all waiting for you in the 400-plus units watched over by the National Park Service.

Everyone knows this country's national parks are true American treasures. What most people fail to realize, however, is that there's more to them than just stunning scenery and watchable wildlife. If you've been following along with our "Find Your Adventure" series, we think by now you've realized just how many remarkable — and often truly once-in-a-lifetime — adventures our national parks have to offer. Flip back through this year's issues of *MotorHome* and we think you'll understand what we mean.

Better still, read on and we'll introduce you to a list of exceptional experiences that can only be had in America's national parks:

The Adventure: Paddling

What It Is: Whether you choose to navigate the ocean off the rocky coastline of Maine's Acadia National Park in a sea kayak or explore the more placid waters of its inland ponds and lakes by canoe, you're in for the paddling trip of a lifetime.

Why It's Cool: Combines a relaxed pace and postcard-worthy views with the freedom to go places where traditional motorboats can't.

Need To Know: Local outfitters in the towns of Bar Harbor and Mount Desert can supply rental boats and equipment and teach you the paddling skills you'll need. Many also offer group tours led by an experienced guide.
Acadia National Park, 207-288-3338.
www.nps.gov/acad

The Adventure: Caving

What It Is: Mammoth Cave National Park's Wild Cave Tour in Kentucky is six hours of scrambling up and down



Mammoth Cave National Park is home to the world's longest known cave system, with more than 400 miles explored.

rock falls, crawling on your belly and squeezing through what will seem at first like impossibly tight spaces — all designed to give you a taste of what the sport of caving is really all about.

Why It's Cool: You'll see part of this vast underground world most visitors will never experience, and do things they can scarcely imagine, both of which come with serious bragging rights.

Need To Know: Not everyone is cut out for the rigors of caving. You should be in decent physical condition, have a pair of sturdy lace-up hiking boots with

Photos: NPS, Will Greene

No motorized boats are allowed on canoe-friendly Jordan Pond in Acadia National Park. The clear waters feature an average visibility depth of 46 feet.

good tread, and lack any fear of heights or confined spaces. If you're unsure on those last two points, it might be wise to ask beforehand if there's an opportunity to bail out mid-tour should you feel uncomfortable.

Mammoth Cave National Park,
270-758-2180, www.nps.gov/macac



The Adventure: Beachcombing

What It Is: North Carolina's Cape Lookout and Cape Hatteras National Seashores offer a unique combination of long, empty stretches of pristine sand and strong offshore currents to provide some of the nation's best beachcombing.

Why It's Cool: If Mother Nature is an artist, the seashells that turn up on the beaches here are near the top of her list of masterworks.

Need To Know: Always check with the park whether gathering (and/or keeping) shells is allowed; some may allow you to collect them, but prohibit you from removing them from the park. Get an early start, and remember that the best pickings are usually found near low tide and right after a storm. If none of the above opportunities present themselves and the beach looks picked over, try sifting through piles of sea grass that's washed up on the shore as it often hides some amazing finds.

Cape Lookout National Seashore,
252-728-2250, www.nps.gov/caloc

Cape Hatteras National Seashore,
252-475-9000, www.nps.gov/caha

The Adventure: Mountain Biking

What It Is: If there's such a thing as a mecca for mountain bikers, it would have to be Moab, Utah. Countless legendary trails surround the town, but none are more famous — or more challenging — than the 100-mile dirt track known as the White Rim Road in Canyonlands National Park's Island In The Sky district.

Why It's Cool: In a word: Views, views and more views as you circumnavigate the base of Island In The Sky mesa.

Need To Know: The White Rim Road is 100 miles long, so don't go in to this thinking it's a simple day ride. The safest and most enjoyable way to do this trip is over the course of several days, with an outfitter who will provide a four-wheel-drive support vehicle that can carry food, water, sleeping gear and everything else you'll need, not to mention obtaining the necessary permits for backcountry travel and overnight camping.

Canyonlands National Park,
435-719-2313, www.nps.gov/cany

White Rim Road is the most famous ride in Canyonlands. Bikes must remain on designated roads, as there are no single-track trails in the park.



The Adventure: Canyoneering

What It Is: On the surface, the deserts of the American Southwest look utterly unremarkable. Look a little closer in places like Utah's Zion National Park, however, and you'll find that many of them are shot through with narrow, winding slot canyons just begging to be explored. Which is where the relatively new sport of canyoneering — think of it as a combination of hiking, rock climbing/rappelling and occasionally even swimming — comes in.

Why It's Cool: In short, it's a way to experience a hidden world of mysteriously beautiful slot canyons that have been carved by rushing water into elaborate natural sculptures.

Need To Know: Unless you're proficient in everything from technical climbing to backcountry navigation, this is not a sport to just go out and try on your own. Rather, go with an experienced outfitter and guide who'll provide all the equipment and instruction you'll need. **Zion National Park,** 435-772-3256, www.nps.gov/zion





The Adventure: Mountain Climbing

What It Is: The Grand Tetons are one of the world's most dramatically beautiful mountain ranges. So it stands to reason that summiting any of the peaks in Wyoming's Grand Teton National Park would be the adventure of a lifetime.

Why It's Cool: You'll have to decide for yourself which is cooler: the feeling of accomplishment you'll get from having reached the summit or the view from the top.

Need To Know: Park concessionaire Exum Mountain Guides (307-733-2297, www.exumguides.com) will teach you everything you need to know to safely make the ascent. If you like the idea of mountain climbing, but aren't sure

you're ready to tackle a technical ascent, Exum has options for you too. They even have programs geared toward families and kids.
Grand Teton National Park,
307-739-3300, www.nps.gov/grte

The Adventure: Mule Riding

What It Is: An overnight trip down to the Grand Canyon National Park's Phantom Ranch aboard the same type of sure-footed mules that have been ferrying adventurous visitors from the South Rim into the depths of the canyon for more than a century.

Why It's Cool: Hello, you're going to the bottom of the Grand Canyon in Arizona and back while enjoying the jaw-dropping views along the way, all without breaking a sweat.

Need To Know: Reservations are made through Xanterra (888-297-2757, www.xanterra.com; or www.grandcanyonlodges.com). Mule riders must be at least 4 feet, 7 inches in height, cannot weigh more than 200 pounds (a 225-pound limit applies to the shorter, three-hour Canyon Vista tour), must be in good physical condition and must speak fluent

English. Unfortunately, pregnant women and those afraid of heights or large animals need not apply.
Grand Canyon National Park,
928-638-7888, www.nps.gov/grca

The Adventure: Snorkeling

What It Is: Nearly all of 270 square-mile Biscayne National Park, located just south of Miami, is underwater. Which would seem to be a hindrance to visitation if it weren't for the regularly scheduled snorkeling trips that provide a window on the Florida Reef, one of the largest in the world, and its more than 40 shipwrecks.

Why It's Cool: What's not to like about the sensation of leisurely floating through an environment that resembles an endless saltwater aquarium?



The mule trip down Bright Angel Trail to the Phantom Ranch is a 10½-mile descent that lasts about 5½ hours. The trip up South Kaibab Trail the following day lasts about 5 hours.



Photos: NPS

Owachomo Bridge is the smallest and thinnest of the three bridges at Natural Bridges. It is also thought to be the oldest, and is a great backdrop for an amazing stellar light show.

Photo: NPS, Jacob W. Frank, Bill Russ/VisitNC.com

Need To Know: The park's main facility is the visitor center at Convoy Point, located 9 miles east of the city of Homestead. Snorkeling trips leave from the visitor center based on the prevailing winds; contact Island Dreamer Sailing (561-281-2689, www.biscaynenationalparksailing.com) for more information. Commercial snorkeling trips leave from Miami daily. If you've never snorkeled before — especially if you have kids — it may be a good idea to pick up your rental gear (mask, snorkel, fins) a day early and practice snorkeling from the beach before you board the boat to head out to the reefs.

Biscayne National Park, 305-230-1144, www.nps.gov/bisc



The Adventure: Hang Gliding

What It Is: There's a reason Wilbur and Orville Wright returned to the Kill Devil Hills on North Carolina's Outer

Banks from 1900 to 1903: Wind, and plenty of it. The breezy conditions along Cape Hatteras National Seashore persist, making this a great place to learn the fundamentals of human flight for yourself, or to take a tandem hang-glider flight with a professional instructor.

Why It's Cool: The experience of flying like a bird — even if the distance covered is only measured in feet — is a thrill that won't soon be forgotten. That goes double for tandem flights with an instructor who can have you soaring up to 2,000 feet above the sand. Cooler still is a flight aboard a reproduction of one of the Wright Brothers' unpowered 1902 gliders.

Need To Know: Three-hour hang-gliding lessons include an hour of ground school and up to five flights of up to 100 feet at 5 to 15 feet off the ground, and require you to be fit enough to hike back up the dunes after your flight (your instructor carries the kite). Kitty Hawk Kites (877-359-8447, www.kittyhawk.com) runs the largest hang-gliding school in the world, and provides instruction and all required gear.

Cape Hatteras National Seashore, 252-475-9000, www.nps.gov/caha

The Adventure: Stargazing

What It Is: When we talk about seeing stars, we mean the real deal, not the Hollywood variety. One of the best places to do that is at southern Utah's Natural Bridges National Monument, the first place in the U.S. to be recognized as an International Dark Sky Park. Here, you'll have a chance to view as many as 15,000 stars, a superabundant stellar light show bright enough to cast shadows on a moonless night.

Why It's Cool: Until you visit a Dark Sky Park, you'll never realize how much of the night sky you're missing at home.

Need To Know: Park rangers at Natural Bridges put on astronomy programs several times per week from May through September. If your visit doesn't coincide with one of those programs, not to worry. Simply roll out a blanket, lay back and look up. Either way, remember that it can take at least 15 minutes for your eyes to fully adjust to the darkness, and that looking at any bright light source — even a cellphone screen — means you have to start the process all over again. Finally, don't forget to dress warmly, as temperatures can drop quickly after the sun goes down.

Natural Bridges National Monument, 435-692-1234, ext. 16, www.nps.gov/nabr



Pala Casino Spa Resort features a brand-new 10-acre RV park with 100 full-hookup sites outfitted with grass lawns and picnic tables.



DOUBLE DOWN

A first-rate RV park with an associated casino makes for a winning pair

Part of the motorhome lifestyle is enjoying the company of others, and traveling to places where like-minded adventurers may be gathered for experiences that can be enjoyed as a group. Year after year, hitting the casino is a popular choice among RVers, as it can be an affordable (if done responsibly) way to gather some of our closest friends and family for a few days of living the high life. Whether it's penny slots or craps tables, roulette or blackjack, responsible gaming can be a great diversion from the rigors of life (or vacation) on the road.

But, the thought of piloting a 40-foot luxury Class A down the confines of the Vegas strip may not be too appealing to most, nor is the prospect of leaving your motorhome or

dinghy vehicle relatively unprotected in a casino parking lot.

Ideally, a casino would have an adjacent or nearby RV park that offers all the amenities of its hotel accom-

modations, without the need to ditch your rig and pay for a room — that's why we started RVing in the first place. That same RV resort should offer the security you need for your coach, in addition to being just a short walk or shuttle ride to the gaming rooms should your night go a little longer than originally planned. After all, you can't walk away from a hot streak just because the sun is going down.

Well, these gems do exist, and many of the RV resorts exceed the casino's hotel accommodations in terms of convenience, pet-friendliness and even privacy. To help you hit the jackpot, we've gathered some of the top-rated RV park/casino combinations and listed them on the following pages.

For information on additional RV-park-and-casino pairings, please visit www.motorhome.com/feature-stories/more-rv-parks-with-casinos.

Right: Visitors to Jackson Rancheria Casino Resort are rewarded with 36 gaming tables, 1,700 slot machines and a variety of dining options. Pechanga's RV resort is home to 168 full-hookup sites, plus access to a walking/biking path and a fuel/convenience station.

CALIFORNIA

Jackson Rancheria Casino Resort

For RVers looking to press their luck in the Golden State, Jackson Rancheria Casino Resort, southeast of Sacramento, is currently celebrating more than 30 years in the gaming industry. The 24-hour casino offers 36 table games, six poker tables and 1,700 slot and video machines. Visitors will also find a restaurant/lounge, buffet, grill and bakery on-site. Across from the casino and separated by a garden terrace is the hotel, where you can grab a cup of coffee, use the gym or schedule a meet-up in the elegant Grand Oak Ballroom.

But the RV park is where Jackson really shines. "We take great pride in our RV park and providing a safe, fun, and relaxing environment for our guests," said Josh Bingham, RV park manager.

The RV park is located in a beautiful, secluded forest setting, just minutes away from the action at the casino (a free 24-hour shuttle service is included). Jackson offers 100 full-hookup sites with 20/30/50-amp power, oversize concrete pads, large lawns and picnic tables, free cable and free Wi-Fi. Pets are welcome at the off-leash pet park (two-pet limit per site). The resort hosts free seasonal activities, including outdoor movie screenings and ice-cream socials. Amenities include a clubhouse with a kitchen, a fireplace and a big-screen TV; a year-round heated pool and spa; and outdoor offerings like a walking path, horseshoes and a putting green. A nearby 24-hour general store caters to RVers with a touchless RV wash, groceries, sundries and food and drinks. A dump station is on-site, and LP-gas is available for purchase.

800-822-9466, www.jacksoncasino.com



Pala Casino Spa Resort

Pala Casino Spa Resort offers adult gamers 2,000 slot machines, a 13-table poker room and 87 table games designed to let RVers roll the dice the whole year round. The casino, located north of San Diego, is also home to a 10,000-square-foot spa and salon, 40,000 square feet of convention space and 11 restaurants, from buffets to international fare to CAVE, a unique dining and wine-tasting experience that also features an underground wine cave with nearly 500 wine labels.

Pala's brand-new 10-acre RV resort keeps your winning streak alive with 100 full-hookup sites with grass lawns and picnic tables. There's a heated swimming pool and two spas to help soothe your aching arms, in addition to five separate outdoor barbecue grill areas, a fenced dog park, a horseshoe pit and table tennis. Covered activities include a billiard table, watching the game on one of three flat-screen TVs and a 24-hour laundromat. There's also a mini-mart and deli, plus a fuel station, conveniently located across the parking lot.

The RV Resort provides 24-hour shuttle service to Pala's hotel and casino and a 10 percent discount for members of Good Sam and the military. For reservations, call 844-472-5278, or e-mail RVRESORT@palacasino.com. 877-946-7252, www.palacasino.com

Pechanga Resort and Casino

If you're looking for a bona fide Las Vegas-type experience, Pechanga Resort and Casino has the largest casino floor in California, totaling 188,000 square feet and offering more than 4,000 slot machines, 154 table games and a modern 700-seat bingo facility. Located just minutes off Interstate 15

between Los Angeles and San Diego, Pechanga is also home to a championship golf course — Journey at Pechanga — and is currently undergoing a \$285 million expansion. Visitors will find a spa, nightclub, big-name entertainment and 68,000 square feet of event and convention space, in addition to a number of dining options, from casual to formal to eat-on-the-go.

The RV resort offers 168 full-hookup sites with a 12-foot lawn on either side. There's a fenced dog run and play area, horseshoe pits, heated pool with two spas, game room and laundry facilities. The park also offers easy access to a nearby walking/biking path and sports courts, plus the resort's fuel station with an on-site taqueria, car wash and mobile RV detailer. RV resort guests are afforded free use of the golf course's driving range and discounted golf rounds.

877-711-2946, www.pechanga.com



MICHIGAN

Little River Casino RV Park in

Manistee, Michigan, is owned and operated by the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians. The casino first showed its hand in the summer of 1999 with 600 slot machines and has since expanded to a 292-room luxury hotel, a 1,600-seat event center, a spa and salon, five food outlets from a sports bar and grill to a steakhouse to a



buffet, and an ever-growing collection of slots and table games.

The RV park offers all the comforts you'd expect at a first-rate resort, including 95 spacious sites (45 full-hookup) with free high-speed internet access; a dog run and walking trail; outdoor pavilion with picnic area; access to the hotel pools (heated outdoor, two indoor), sauna and fitness center; and a shuttle to and from the casino. Good Sam members receive a 10 percent discount at the RV park. For more information or for reservations at the RV park, call 888-568-2244. 866-473-2538, www.lrcr.com



MINNESOTA

For those in the Great Lakes region in search of gambling nirvana, **Grand Casino Hinckley** in Minnesota delivers in spades with more than 2,000 video slots, keno and poker machines, not to mention 22 blackjack tables, the dedicated Royal Oaks Poker Room and a 300-plus-seat Bingo hall. The Grand Harmony Spa is on-site, and the Events & Convention Center hosts big-name entertainment acts including sports, comedy and musical headliners. Visitors can whet their appetite at a

variety of restaurants, including local and international menus from highly skilled chefs.

The year-round resort features a guest lodge with a convenience store, fireplace and laundry facilities, while the heated outdoor pool is open seasonally. To get your blood pumping, a basketball court, volleyball court and horseshoe pit area are available, as are two shuffleboard courts and a billiards table. There are two children's play yards, and also a pet-walking area.

The RV resort offers 271 full-hookup sites for motorhomes up to 60 feet in length, 20/30/50-amp power, cable TV and fire pits.

There is also a 24-hour shuttle service to the casino, and the RV park is monitored by security around the clock. 800-472-6321, www.grandcasinomn.com

Prairie's Edge Casino Resort

Located in southwest Minnesota, Prairie's Edge Casino Resort is owned and operated by the Upper Sioux Community and ups the enjoyment ante by offering more than 1,000 slot machines and table games. The on-site lounge, Showroom and comedy club will keep visitors entertained, and the buffet (special themed buffets are served for dinner Wednesday-Saturday), bar and grill, and deli offer the perfect cuisine to help you keep pace with the one-armed bandit. The convention center is 20,000 square feet of event space perfect for large



gatherings.

The scenic PrairieView RV Park & Campground is home to 55 spacious full-hookup sites with level pads, picnic tables, fire rings and personal lawn space. Wi-Fi is available at all sites, as is access to the pool, sauna, exercise facility and playground. LP-gas and fuel are available on the premises as well. There's even an 18-foot-diameter tipi on a raised wooden deck in the park's rustic area site for a unique camping experience, or maybe a place for the more adventurous in your party to spend the night while you enjoy the resort's many amenities.

866-293-2121, www.prairiesedgecasino.com

MISSISSIPPI

Hollywood Casino Tunica, in Robinsonville, Mississippi, mixes Southern hospitality with more than 1,100 of the newest reel, video slot and video poker games to scratch your gambling itch. Plus, more than 25 world-class table games and a dedicated poker room round out the gaming playground. Dining options include Fairbanks Steakhouse, voted *Southern Gaming*

Top: Hollywood Casino Tunica features some of the latest reel, video slot and video poker games along with more than 25 table games.

and *Destinations* readers' choice for "Best Restaurant" in 2016. There's also the Epic Buffet, or you can grab a quick bite at the Celebrity Grill.

The 123-space RV park is located just steps away from the casino. The park offers everything you need to feel right at home, including full hookups, Wi-Fi access, LP-gas and handicap accessibility. There are also shower and laundry facilities, and a picnic area with impressive golf-course views. Those staying at the pet-friendly RV resort are also granted access to the adjoining hotel's Hollywood indoor pool. 800-871-0711, www.hollywoodcasino.tunica.com



NEVADA

When you think of the true gaming experience, it's hard not to imagine Nevada, home of the famed Las Vegas and Laughlin gambling scenes. **Don Laughlin's Riverside Resort RV Park** is centrally located in the southwest corner of Nevada, near Arizona and California, and currently showcases more than 1,300 slot, video poker and keno machines, plus 31 live table games and a Bingo Paradise for visitors to go all in. There's also a 34-lane state-of-the-art Bowling Center, a 6-Plex Cinema, *U.S.S. Riverside* Boat Tour along the Colorado River, top-name weekly entertainment in a 740-seat indoor showroom, Laser Tag, two nightclubs and seven restaurants ranging from Fatburger to buffet-style to gourmet.

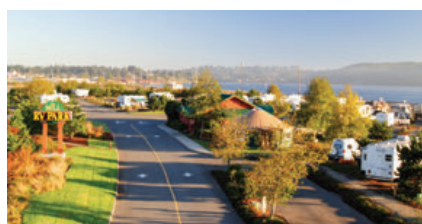
Riverside's RV Park has 740 full-hookup sites (30/50 amp), wide roadways for easy maneuvering and beautiful landscaping. The park offers abundant amenities such as newly renovated shower and bathroom facilities, laundry rooms and complimentary shuttles to and from the casino. 800-227-3849, www.riversideresort.com



NEW YORK

Those looking to let it ride in the northeast should set their sights on Verona, New York, and point their motorhome toward **Turning Stone Resort and Casino**. The world-class casino has it all, from 2,000 slot machines to keno to bingo, plus dozens of table games and a dedicated poker room. The Showroom offers big-name acts from musical to comedy and beyond, while a number of themed lounges and dining options ensure you'll be properly entertained and well-fed. And let's not forget the three championship golf courses and two recreational courses at the resort, offering a welcome distraction from going all-in at the casino.

The Villages RV Park at Turning Stone is a short shuttle ride away, and the hits keep coming with 175 full-hookup sites, free Wi-Fi and a full-house of outdoor activities. Visitors can enjoy themed weekends and various hiking, biking and water amenities the whole season (April through October). Other highlights include a heated pool, hot tub, on-site pond for fishing and paddleboats, wading pool, horseshoe pits and a playground. There's also a laundromat and general store on site, and Good Sam Club members receive a 10 percent discount. 800-771-7711, www.turningstone.com



OREGON

The Mill Casino Hotel and RV Park With the beautiful Coos Bay as its backdrop, the Mill Casino is just a

DIESEL TOWN TEXAS

Airstream Touring Coaches



Leisure Travel Vans



Exclusive Dealer in Texas!

Midwest Automotive Designs



Tiffin Motorhomes



Full-Line Dealer!

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The solitude of Seven Feathers RV park, set among scenic pines and Douglas firs, is a pleasant contrast to the hustle and bustle of the casino.

short walk or shuttle ride from the RV park and features 24-hour gaming with more than 700 slot machines. Vegas-style table games include craps, roulette, blackjack, poker and Pai Gow. The Casino also offers five dining experiences, ranging from romantic waterfront dining at the Plankhouse Restaurant, to the popular buffet at Sawblade, to the lively Warehouse 101 sports bar and finally to the upscale the Whitecaps lounge.

The Mill RV Park features 102 full-hookup sites including 72 pull-throughs measuring up to 99 feet in length. “A lot of our guests are full-timers, or are many miles from home, and being able to work with them to tailor their experience so that they feel ‘at home’ here is top priority,” said Heather Tatman, the RV park manager.

All guests are offered cable TV, high-speed wireless internet and a 24-hour shuttle with service to the casino, as well as into town and back. Guests are also welcome to enjoy the indoor pool, outdoor hot tubs, fitness center with a bay view and complimentary business center. Other amenities include showers with on-demand hot water, on-site laundry facility and a camp store with snacks, gift items and a selection of RV supplies including LP-gas. The park also features horseshoe pits, an off-leash dog park, driving range, mature landscaping, sweeping water views and a large yurt facility for gatherings.

800-953-4800, www.themillcasino.com

Seven Feathers Casino Resort

With more than 900 of the latest in

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The Umpqua Grand Ballroom hosts big-name entertainment and sporting events, while the River Rock Spa pampers visitors with a full-service spa.

Seven Feathers RV Park is a quiet and pristine retreat from the hustle and bustle of the world. Located among scenic pines and Douglas firs, the resort is situated on 23 acres of manicured lawns and lush landscaping. Each of the nearly 200 full-hookup sites have level concrete pads and aggregate patios, in addition to cable TV and Wi-Fi access.

RVers can enjoy the heated pool and spa, work out in the fitness room, read or use the computer in the Library/Media room, shop in the gift boutique or meet friends in the Gathering Room. There are common areas for walking and biking, and also pet and play areas for the family. Shuttle service to the casino is available around the clock, and the adjacent truck center offers a deli and ice cream. Good Sam Club members receive a 10 percent discount on their stay. Golf packages and winery tours are also available.

800-548-8461, www.sevenfeathers.com

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Sibling Rivalry

These two Winnebago motorhomes may look different, but they are more similar than you think

By Chris Hemer and Bob Livingston

Fraternal twins — those that are born just minutes apart yet look different from one another — are often mistaken for “ordinary” siblings. But if you were able to see below the surface, you’d find just how similar they really are. DNA defines us as individuals, providing the genetic instructions used in our growth, development and function — an inexorable link to our family’s traits and characteristics. No wonder, then, that the

automotive industry, and indeed the RV industry, often uses the letters DNA to demonstrate similarities in their products, or point out aspects that have evolved in some way to provide better performance, comfort, safety or all of the above.

Winnebago is the parent of the two siblings you see here — and its lineage is well established. The company’s extensive family includes everything from entry-level Class B

and C motorhomes all the way up to diesel pushers and even travel trailers and fifth-wheels. You don’t have to be an RV expert to see immediately that the two motorhomes featured here are different — but inside, they’re not only similar, they’re nearly identical. Call it a crazy experiment or a stroke of genius, but Winnebago is giving buyers a choice of the very same floorplan in its Vista Class A or Minnie Winnie Class C motorhomes. Naturally, we had to

ABOVE: The Minnie Winnie 31G was finished in the Bronze Mist deluxe graphics package, while the Vista 31BE was finished in the Solar Flare deluxe graphics package. As you might have guessed, these are not the only differences between these two motorhomes.



Above right: Located just aft of the galley and across from the bath area are the dual bunks. Both have enough room for children or young adults and are equipped with privacy curtains. In either motorhome, an optional television can be located on the opposing wall for viewing from both bunks. The bunks in the Minnie (top photo) are slightly narrower than those in the Vista.

test them both and compare.

Traditionally, Class C motorhomes have been considered the most family-friendly owing to their increased sleeping capacity, so it would make sense that the Class C Minnie Winnie came first, and the Class A Vista followed. In actuality, however, the Minnie Winnie 31G is the one that's all-new for 2017. Both motorhomes incorporate a fixed dinette, galley, bunk beds, a bedroom wardrobe and storage in a full-wall, streetside slideout. On the curbside, both feature a sofa bed to the right of the entry door, a refrigerator and a fully enclosed bath area. At

the rear, a horizontally opposed, walk-around 60-by-75-inch queen bed faces the street side.

There are subtle differences, however, that could influence which interior you would prefer. Starting up front, the Minnie Winnie has the traditional cabover bunk that measures 57 by 95 inches, while the Vista's 48-by-80-inch powered StudioLoft Bed, which lowers from the ceiling above the cockpit, is an optional feature (\$2,310). The dinettes are similarly sized, with the slightly wider Vista 31BE floorplan making use of a dinette that, at 73 inches long, provides 3 inches more

space than does the Minnie Winnie. The standard HDTV mounted on the dinette wall in both motorhomes is also larger in the Vista, at 39 inches versus 32 inches. The galleys, which both feature a semi-L shaped configuration, come equipped with cost-saving laminate countertops, a white acrylic sink with a residential-style high-rise faucet, a microwave oven and a three-burner range with oven. The Minnie comes standard with a three-burner cooktop, but the test unit was optioned with the oven (\$189) so that it would be as similar as possible to the Vista.

Everyone on our staff that entered



both motorhomes noted that the Vista felt bigger, and this is no doubt due to the larger front windshield that admits more light, in addition to the marginally wider body. The Minnie's living-area ceiling height is actually 2 inches taller than the Vista's, but that advantage ends once you walk past the galley. The Vista's ceiling height remains 6 feet 8 inches throughout, while a four-inch step in the rear of the Minnie reduces ceiling height to 6 feet 6 inches from the bunk/bath area rearward, and the aisle is slightly

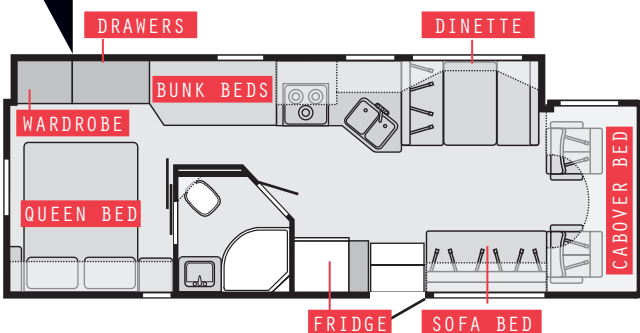
Above: Though the bedroom ceiling height is slightly lower in the Minnie Winnie (top left), the space actually felt larger due to the increased walk-around space. The living area feels larger in the Vista (above right), however. Both have overhead bunks (optional in the Vista) that are accessed via a ladder.

narrower than the Vista's. In spite of these drawbacks, one staffer noted that the Minnie's bedroom actually felt larger due to its extra walk-around space. Both bedrooms are comfortable and cozy, with nightstands on either side, wardrobe/storage at the foot of the bed and a perfectly placed 24-inch HDTV in the upper left-hand corner. A rear window in both motorhomes

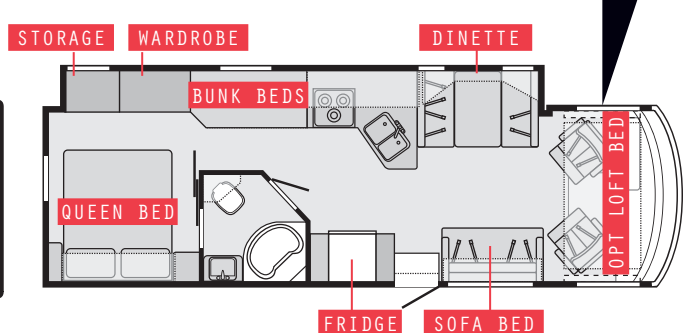
makes the area feel light and bright during daylight hours, and the MCD blackout roller shades do a great job of darkening the space at bedtime.

The bunks are in fact a little smaller in the Minnie (28 by 73 inches versus 30 by 73 inches), and both models offer privacy curtains as well as an optional 24-inch HDTV on the opposing wall (\$329) that is viewable

WINNEBAGO MINNIE WINNIE 31G



WINNEBAGO VISTA 31BE



Specifications

by occupants of both bunks. As an alternative in the Vista, you may opt for two DVD players with 10.1-inch LCD monitors and headphones (\$942).

The bathrooms are a push. Though there is less headroom in the Minnie, the deficit isn't noticeable unless you compare it directly to the Vista, which has a recessed wall near the toilet to provide additional elbow room. Both motorhomes offer access to the area via a standard door opposite the galley, or a sliding door off the bedroom, making bathroom visits easy for parents and kids. Once inside, both floorplans feature a plastic toilet in one corner and a neo-angle shower with sliding glass door on the other, which helps increase foot room. The vanity offers adequate counter space, a mirror and plenty of storage underneath the white acrylic sink.

As you might have guessed, living in both motorhomes is very similar, although we preferred the Vista for its more open feel, bigger TV, swiveling cab seats and couch that had a higher, more supportive back. The overhead bed, which can be a head knocker in a lot of Class C motorhomes, actually didn't pose a problem in the Minnie, as its half-moon recess on the living-area side provides the needed clearance. We did, however, touch our noggins on the edge of the StudioLoft bed in the Vista a few times, and felt that making and climbing into it was less convenient than in the Minnie.

The cockpits of both motorhomes were comfortable, but the Minnie, which features an engine doghouse and insulation by Ford, is much quieter than the Vista, especially under hard acceleration. Attenuating high-frequency sound through well-established Noise Vibration and Harshness (NVH) mitigation techniques really shows in the Minnie — so much so that you might think the two motorhomes had different engines. The Vista sounds as if a plastic kiddie pool was placed over the engine, exposing your ears to every unpleasant note the thrashy Ford V-10 can generate. We often had to shout at each other when climbing grades. If Winnebago could just add

Winnebago Minnie Winnie 31G

Chassis

| | |
|----------------|--|
| Model | Ford |
| Engine | 6.8-L V-10 |
| SAE Hp | 305 @ 4,250 rpm |
| Torque | 420 lb-ft @ 3,250 rpm |
| Transmission | TorqShift 6-speed automatic |
| Axle Ratio | 4.56:1 |
| Front Tires | LT225/75R16 |
| Rear Tires | LT225/75R16 |
| Wheelbase | 220" |
| Brakes | Four wheel disc, ABS |
| Suspension F/R | Twin I-beam IFS with coil springs and stabilizer bar/leaf springs and stabilizer bar |
| Fuel Capacity | 55 gal |
| Fuel Economy | 8.1 mpg |
| Warranty | 3 years/36,000 miles bumper-to-bumper, 5 years/60,000 miles powertrain |

Coach

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Exterior Length | 32' 9" |
| Exterior Width | 8' 5½" |
| Exterior Height | 11' 1" |
| Interior Width | 8' |
| Interior Height | 6' 10" (living area) 6' 4" (bed/bath) |
| Construction | Aluminum framing in walls, steel in roof, laminated fiberglass side walls, one-piece fiberglass roof, block-foam insulation |
| Freshwater Capacity | 44 gal |
| Black-Water Capacity | 37 gal |
| Gray-Water Capacity | 57 gal |
| Water-Heater Capacity | 6 gal |
| LP-Gas Capacity | 18 gal |
| Air Conditioner | (1) 15,000 Btu |
| Furnace | 30,000 Btu |
| Refrigerator | 6 cu ft |
| Converter | 45 amp |
| Battery | (1) 12-volt battery chassis, (1) 12-volt deep-cycle battery, house |
| AC generator | 4 kW |
| MSRP | \$91,549 |
| MSRP as tested | \$102,427 |
| Warranty | 12 months/15,000 miles (basic) 36 month/36,000 miles (structure) 10 year limited parts and labor warranty on roof skin |

Wet Weight

| | |
|---|------------|
| (Water and water heater, fuel and LP-gas tanks full, no supplies or passengers) | |
| Front Axle | 3,980 lbs |
| Rear Axle | 9,080 lbs |
| Total | 13,060 lbs |

Chassis Ratings

| | |
|-----------|-------------------|
| GAWR F/R | 5,000/9,600 lbs |
| GVWR/GCWR | 14,500/22,000 lbs |
| ROCCC | 1,440 lbs |

Winnebago Vista 31BE

Chassis

| | |
|---------------|--|
| Model | Ford |
| Engine | 6.8-L V-10 |
| SAE Hp | 305 @ 4,250 rpm |
| Torque | 420 lb-ft @ 3,250 rpm |
| Transmission | TorqShift 6-speed automatic |
| Axle Ratio | 4.30:1 |
| Front Tires | 245/70R19.5 |
| Rear Tires | 245/70R19.5 |
| Wheelbase | 208" |
| Brakes | Four wheel disc, ABS |
| Suspension | F/R Solid I-beam with leaf springs/solid axle with leaf springs |
| Fuel Capacity | 80 gal |
| Fuel Economy | 7.9 mpg |
| Warranty | 3 years/36,000 miles bumper-to-bumper, 5 years/60,000 miles powertrain |

Coach

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Exterior Length | 32' 3" |
| Exterior Width | 8' 5½" |
| Exterior Height | 12' 2" |
| Interior Width | 8' ½" |
| Interior Height | 6' 8" |
| Construction | Aluminum framing in walls and roof, laminated fiberglass side walls, one-piece fiberglass roof, one-piece fiberglass front cap, block-foam insulation |
| Freshwater Capacity | 70 gal |
| Black-Water Capacity | 43 gal |
| Gray-Water Capacity | 59 gal |
| Water-Heater Capacity | 6 gal |
| LP-Gas Capacity | 18 gal |
| Air Conditioner | (1) 14,800 Btu |
| Furnace | 30,000 Btu |
| Refrigerator | 8 cu ft |
| Converter | 45 amp |
| Battery | (1) 12-volt battery chassis, (2) 12-volt deep-cycle batteries, house |
| AC generator | 4 kW |
| MSRP | \$108,738 |
| MSRP as tested | \$112,686 |
| Warranty | 12 months/15,000 miles (basic) 36 month/36,000 miles (structure) 10 year limited parts and labor warranty on roof skin |

Wet Weight

| | |
|---|------------|
| (Water and water heater, fuel and LP-gas tanks full, no supplies or passengers) | |
| Front Axle | 5,660 lbs |
| Rear Axle | 10,760 lbs |
| Total | 16,420 lbs |

Chassis Ratings

| | |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| GAWR F/R | 7,000 lbs/12,000 lbs |
| GVWR/GCWR | 18,000 lbs/23,000 lbs |
| ROCCC | 1,580 lbs |



WHAT'S HOT

Minnie Winnie 31G: Comfortable cab, good driving dynamics, spacious bedroom.

Vista 31BE: Good entertaining space, bigger storage compartments, available StudioLoft bed that stows neatly in the cab ceiling.

WHAT'S NOT

Minnie Winnie 31G: Lack of exterior storage, especially if you opt for the tailgate package in the rear compartment.

Vista 31BE: Rough ride, loud engine, numb steering.



Above: The galleys are nearly identical, though the Minnie Winnie (top) does give up a little counterspace and the drawers are a bit smaller than the Vista's. However, we much preferred the Minnie's Stardust décor package to the Rockslide motif of the Vista.

extra insulation to the dog house and perhaps the flooring of the Vista, it would go a long way to making the driving experience more pleasant.

The Minnie also established itself as the far better driving of the two motorhomes, which came as somewhat of a surprise. Many larger Class C's we've tested in the past wallow excessively when the steering wheel is sawed back-and-forth, but this wasn't the case in the Minnie. On winding roads leading into and out of Southern California's Los Padres National Forest, the Minnie's handling was predictable, its steering accurate and braking confident. Obviously, this is no race car, but it can be hustled along surprisingly well if needed. By contrast, the Vista's chassis reveals

its delivery-truck roots. Its solid axle/leaf spring suspension rides rough, the steering is numb on center and it has to be guided deliberately through the corners. If we were to choose which one we'd like to drive all day, the Minnie would win, hands down.

Where the Vista excels is exterior storage. Though it isn't a huge amount, it does have larger compartments with bigger doors, and we found there is enough space for tables, chairs, exterior carpet, a small grill and most of the other necessities families would typically bring along. Both motorhomes have large storage compartments at the rear that can be optioned with tailgate packages containing a refrig-

erator, drawers and other equipment depending on the model, but frankly, we wouldn't recommend these. Considering the amount of stuff seven people can bring, you're going to need all the storage you can get.

When we tallied up our score cards, the two motorhomes were in a dead heat, but for different reasons. Both are a good value, both are family-friendly, and both will help you entertain your friends and family in comfort and style. Which one you choose depends on which aspects of ownership are most important to you. **M**

Winnebago Industries Inc.
641-585-3535, www.winnebagoind.com

Score Card

| | Minnie Winnie 31G | Vista 31BE |
|--------------|-------------------|------------|
| Interior | 3 | 3 |
| Storage | 1 | 2 |
| Livability | 2 | 3 |
| Drivability | 3 | 1 |
| Value | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 11 | 11 |

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MOTORHOME SEALANTS

PREVENTING LEAKS IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE FOR LONGEVITY

If there's one constant concern in the motorhome world, it's leaks and water damage. Over the years, owners have wrestled with taking care of their motorhome roofs and since they are tasked with the prevention of leaks and consequential repairs, it's important to know how to prevent them in the first place.

Motorhomes are rolling homes that have to put up with, effectively, an earthquake and a hurricane every time they go down the road. Put your house on a trailer and run it down some of our bumpier roads and interstates for 50 miles and see what's left. A motorhome has to do this, and withstand a constant bombardment from the elements, all while being light enough to go down the road legally, and also while remaining affordable and usable by the end consumer.

Leak prevention starts with the roof. Motorhomes have several different types of roofs, and the care and maintenance basics are the same on all of them, but the methods change depending on the roof type.

Keeping the roof clean is a priority, and making sure the seams and sealants are in good shape is an ongoing process. The sealants must be inspected for gaps, separations and cracks, and must be reapplied as necessary to prevent leaks. Some

motorhome manufacturers even require that this work be completed every 90 days to keep the warranty in effect.

Roof Types

Cleaning the roof requires use of an approved cleaner for your motorhome's particular roofing product. Motorhome roofs are made of aluminum, fiberglass, thermoplastic polyolefin (TPO), polyvinyl chloride (PVC) or ethylene propylene diene monomer (EPDM). The most common one today is TPO, which is a type of plastic, followed by EPDM, which is a synthetic rubber compound.

Fiberglass and aluminum roofs can be cleaned using any product that would be safe for the motorhome's side walls. From a maintenance standpoint, the most important elements to keep an eye on here are the seams. Seams on these roofs can be sealed using one of a couple of processes. In some cases, self-leveling

sealants are used. Self-leveling sealants come in a caulk tube, and just about any of the commercial products, such as C-10, Geocel Pro Flex and Dicor, can be used, although it's always best to stick with the same sealant used by the original equipment manufacturer (OEM).

Another commonly used product is sealant tape, like the one marketed by EternaBond. The tapes are very tough, with an elastomeric sealant, also known as a micro sealant, that pretty much provides a permanent seal on a seam. It's rare, but these can still fail, especially if the tape is not applied correctly. Some lesser-known brands on the market can fail, with the tape skin separating from the sealant. Application of these tapes can be effective as long as the directions



Right: Don't let this happen to you. Here, the seals around the plumbing vent were allowed to leak, rotting out the roof decking below.



Above from left: Plumbing vents and skylights are common culprits for roof leakage and damage. Motorhome roof ladders are especially susceptible to seam cracking, since movement and stress when someone climbs the ladder impact the sealant.

are followed carefully, including prepping the surface and having a roller to activate the sealant once the tape is applied.

Care of TPO, EPDM and PVC roofs is product-specific in that the manufacturers have cleaners and sealants specifically recommended for their products, and those should be used for maximum effectiveness, best appearance and to keep the warranty in full effect.

Many of these roofs have a 10- or 12-year warranty, which sounds great, but the fine print has to be understood and followed to fully realize maximum benefit of the warranty. The warranties are for the roof membrane only, not the seals, installation or underlayment, and if the roof is not installed correctly, and/or not maintained correctly, the warranty is void.

It is best to use a roof cleaner and protectant product on EPDM roofs because the material naturally weathers, resulting in a white film that comes off the roof, leading to black streaks on the sides of the motorhome. This streaking is ironic in that one of the selling points of the early EPDM roofs was a lack of the black streaks caused by oxidation on the then-popular aluminum RV roofs. The cleaner/protectant products not only do a decent job of cleaning the roof, but also include a UV protectant that minimizes the sloughing and black streaks. Spot cleaning can be

done using some stronger cleaners; however, never use citrus- or petroleum-based cleaning products. Refer to the roof manufacturer's instructions or website for more specific product information.

TPO and PVC roofs, like EPDM, are membrane roofs, but are made of a type of plastic. The benefits to these types of roofs are the light weight, and the fact that they don't degrade the way EPDM roofs do. You can frequently tell that your motorhome has a TPO roof by the texture of the membrane, in that the surface has an alligator-like feel to it (versus EPDM, which is smooth). TPO is made in a number of colors, as are its sealants. Dicor and Alpha Systems make TPO roofs, and market sealants specifically designed for their roofs. (PVC, which is used by few OEMs, is mostly an aftermarket product, and the company that makes it, LaSalle Bristol, recommends using only its

branded sealants.)

When in doubt, contact the motorhome manufacturer to find out specifically which roofing product was used. Then you can visit the roof manufacturer's website for care instructions, and to find out which products are available for servicing that product. This is the best way to proceed, as there are some roofing products that can't be firmly identified unless the underside of the membrane is accessed. (Hint: to see the underside of the roof membrane, remove the trim from a crank-up roof vent. Most of the time, an "X" is cut in the membrane to reveal the opening when the roof is installed, and there will be four-triangle flaps.)

Again, seam maintenance is critical. The seams are usually at the front and rear terminations of the roof, down the sides along the rain gutter if you have one, or whatever other termination is there and

"KEEPING THE ROOF CLEAN IS A PRIORITY, AND MAKING SURE THE SEAMS AND SEALANTS ARE IN GOOD SHAPE IS AN ONGOING PROCESS."

around every appurtenance on the roof, including antennas, roof vents, plumbing vents and more. Carefully clean and examine these seams at least four times a year, and immediately any time you think there may be a problem on the roof. If you suspect a leak, look into it immediately, stop the leak, and do what you can to dry out the area affected to prevent damage.

Also, membrane roofs are more susceptible to puncture or tear than a metal roof, so any time you suspect your RV's roof has been hit, be sure to get up there and have a look. Exercise due caution while working on an RV roof, including making sure your ladder is in good condition, the roof is dry and sound enough to hold your weight. It's best to carry a roof emergency repair kit to make repairs quickly if something should tear the roof's membrane while you're on the road. Dicor makes a roof-patch kit, and EternaBond is an excellent product to use, and is a permanent repair.

Never use any silicone-type sealant on a motorhome roof, or any sealant from your local hardware store or home center. These are fine on the sides, which we'll cover later, but these sealants are incompatible with RV roofing materials, will separate from the roof, and then will make the proper roof sealants ineffective.

There are now companies providing new, professionally installed liquid roofing, like RV Armor and RV Roofing Solutions. If you are experiencing roofing issues, these types of roofs may be good for you. These systems are not the canned liquid roofing products available at



Here, regular silicone was used in an attempt to seal the roof. It didn't work. Never use silicone on an RV roof because it is incompatible with the membrane and roofing sealants.

your local RV service center.

According to RV Armor owner Lee Thaxton, the company applies a commercial-duty roof over the existing roof and seams over the course of two days. It is a very precise process that, when complete, provides a permanently sealed, maintenance-free roof for the life of the RV. We detailed the process in "Seamless Solution" in the July issue (www.motorhome.com/rv-travel-news/seamless-solution).

RV Roofing Solutions applies a liquid-acrylic roofing that, according to the company, eliminates roof leaks and the need for caulking.

Side Seals

The sides of a motorhome need resealing too, on occasion, to prevent any water-related damage. In recent years, some RV manufacturers have

abandoned butyl or putty tapes for sealing windows, doors and awning extrusions, instead using a foam gasket tape, which is more susceptible to leaking in certain circumstances. To back up the foam tape, they will use silicone caulk around each window, door or extrusion to keep it sealed.

One way to keep these areas sealed is to use a good-quality pure silicone caulk, like GE Silicone II Window and Door, or equivalent. Do not use a latex caulk. Clear is best, but you can get a couple of colors if desired. There are other products you can use for the side seams on your motorhome, like Geocel's Pro Flex, a polymer-based sealant or Sikaflex 221, a polyurethane product often used by RV manufacturers. These sealants require more skill and care when using, but following the directions will result in an excellent seal.

Clean the surface to be caulked carefully, removing as much loose caulk as possible. Adhesive or caulk remover will help with this, along with non-marring automotive scrapers, available from stores like Harbor Freight.

Cut the end of the tube for a

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Above from left: On this old, neglected motorhome roof, the decking is buckling under the membrane. There's no sealant left on the extrusion around the outside of the roof. Television and radio antennas, air horns and roof-termination seams are among the locations where sealants should be examined and reapplied on a regular basis.

small bead of silicone. Carefully caulk the seam, then lightly spray over the bead and surrounding area with a tooling fluid made of water and a slight amount of dish soap in a spray bottle. Then use a caulk tool to dress the bead, and when it dries, you will have a nice, professional-looking seam.

Some motorhomes with front-facing windows and complex seams, like Class C cabovers, require more seam care and attention and over time, as those sites are often trouble spots for

leaks. Other often forgotten leak spots include the side-roof-termination seams that go down the length of the unit, and awning brackets on the side walls.

Whether it's a full-time home or a vacation motorhome, it's important to follow a regular maintenance schedule to prevent trouble later on. By spending some time on your motorhome's seals, water damage can be prevented, insuring your motorhome is ready to go and holds its resale value when it comes time to trade up. **M**

For More Information

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www.alphasystemsinc.com

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

LaSalle Bristol XTRM Ply PVC Roofing
800-718-7187, www.lasallebristol.com/products/building-products/xtrm-ply-pvc-rv-roofing

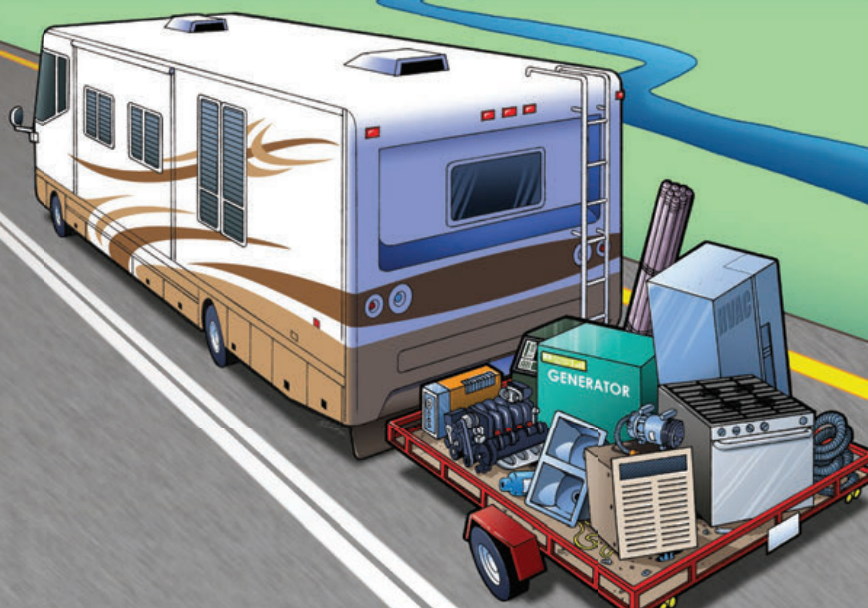
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FINDING "THE ONE"

ONE COUPLE'S 2007 DUTCH STAR 4324 HAS SERVED THEM WELL FOR MORE THAN A DECADE AND WILL LIKELY CONTINUE TO SHINE FOR YEARS TO COME



Robin and Jackie Barrack found "The One" in their 2007 Dutch Star 4324.

In our travels, it seems that everyone we meet has a long history of exes — RVs, that is, not spouses. We have met owners on their third, fourth or even 10th motorhome, all on the brink of moving up or moving on. The reasons are varied, ranging from size to layout, appearance to engine power. Yet every classic ride we have seen has one thing in common — its owners always tell us it is the last motorhome they will ever, ever own. For Robin and Jackie Barrack, it took a trailer and three motorhomes before they found "The One" — a 43-foot Dutch Star that they bought brand new a decade ago. For

them, it is a match that continues to satisfy, season after season, mile after mile.

The Barracks' first RV was a fifth-wheel trailer, purchased soon after they were married because they wanted to take their dog along on vacations, and few hotels at the time allowed pets. This was replaced by a succession of motorhomes as their family grew, but none of them seemed to be just right. The couple was disappointed with the reliability of their existing unit in November 2006 when they decided to look for another motorhome. They weren't looking for a specific make or model



Above: The living room has opposing jackknife sofa beds for an easy transition to sleeping area. The roomy galley is fully equipped, while the four slides allow ample space for moving about.

of RV, but they knew what they wanted: dependability and enough space to comfortably travel with their sons, then 9 and 15 years of age. They looked at Class A's from a variety of manufacturers, but were particularly impressed by two motorhomes: a 2005 Mountain Aire and a new model 2007 Dutch Star, both by Newmar. "They were just good rigs," said Jackie.

In the end, it was the comfortable, casual interior of the Dutch Star, with its warm wood finishes and biscotti color scheme, that tipped the scales. It just felt more like home, Robin said, calling the Mountain Aire "just too fancy" for a family with two growing boys. Though the Dutch Star 4324 was actually considered an entry-level motorhome by Newmar in comparison to the manufacturer's deluxe models, it had the attention to detail, workmanship and amenities usually reserved for luxury motorhomes.

The Dutch Star is framed with 16-inch on center studs like most stick-built residential homes. There are four slideouts, providing spacious dining, living and sleeping areas. The rear bedroom is roomy, with

ample storage, a queen-size bed with a Sleep Number mattress, and a combination washer/dryer. The Barracks did not like the daily hassle of converting a dinette into a bed for their children, so they loved the facing jackknife sofa beds, which allow for an easy transition from living room to bedroom for their sons. The galley is both functional and attractive, and includes a four-door refrigerator with an icemaker and water dispenser, a microwave convection oven, a gas range and a dishwasher, all set off by Corian countertops and a tile backsplash. The unit also features two flat-screen TVs and a Sony surround-sound home-theater system.

The exterior of the Dutch Star is luxury-class as well. Newmar was an industry leader in applying full-body paint to its coaches, with a trademark Masterpiece finish included as a standard feature on the Dutch Star. Other amenities include an outdoor TV, a basement refrigerator/freezer and lighted storage compartments, which include a large pass-through

compartment and one with a large built-in slide-out drawer.

Of course, it's the things you can't easily see that matter most. The Dutch Star was built on a Spartan Mountain Master chassis with a 400-horsepower Cummins diesel, which has a track record for durability, and which was much appreciated when they had a tire blow out on one of their trips.

"It never shimmied or shook. You hear about people losing control, but there was no problem handling it. You could barely tell we had lost a tire," Jackie explained.

The coach also features an 8-kW generator, a 4-kW power inverter, a bank of four 6-volt batteries on a pullout exterior tray and even a small rooftop solar panel. And since things you can't see can also get you in trouble, the coach also had a rearview color monitor and right and left side-view cameras.

While there was no question that this motorhome was the perfect fit for the Barracks when they bought it in 2006, there were less expensive

THE ONE

If you think a Newmar Dutch Star might be right for you, we've got good news. These motorhomes are recognized for their quality, and hold their value better than many other Class A's of similar age. While a 2006 Dutch Star can be found for less than \$90,000, well-kept units on the used market currently average around \$125,000, and those with low miles in mint condition can go as high as \$175,000. Given the Dutch Star's reputation, that still represents a solid investment.

► The original full-body paint exterior of the Dutch Star still shines.



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Above: Windows, mirrors and warm woodwork in the bedroom create a bright, comfortable environment. The open, spacious layout of the Dutch Star is perfect for families.

coaches on the market. Even with a final purchase price nearly 28 percent below the list price of \$324,000, the Dutch Star 4324 was a big investment. The question was whether it was one that would pay off in the long term.

Say what you will about hindsight, the Barracks' foresight when buying their Newmar was 20/20. The Dutch Star has become synonymous with quality and is one of the few models to be produced for more than 25 years.

The Barracks' Dutch Star has carried their family to Walt Disney World every Thanksgiving, and to sites across the U.S. including Las Vegas and Yellowstone three times, and on a more than 6,000-mile trip to Glacier National Park. On the rare occasions when their coach needed work, Jackie has been impressed by what he calls Newmar's "incredible support" both on the road and on visits to the factory in Nappanee, Indiana. It is a testament to Newmar's design that the only real modifications the Barracks have made in all those miles was to add window awnings and shade visors.

"We had to. It was 107 degrees on the black asphalt in Las Vegas," Jackie says with a laugh and a shake of his head.

With one son living in Richmond, Virginia, and another starting college, you might think the Barracks would be considering selling their 10-year-old coach. The days of big family vacations are behind them, and the couple is extremely busy between running Geo-Products, their building-supply store in Kilmarnock, Virginia; and Cedar Run Farm, where Robin breeds New Zealand Kiko goats and also produces

her own line of goat-milk soaps and lotions. Instead, their Dutch Star has fit right into this new stage of their lives. The Dutch Star now doubles as an office on the road, allowing one of them to log in and check the store cameras or do the paperwork while the other drives, as they attend goat auctions across the country.

In fact, when we saw their motorhome for the first time, it was heading to Georgia, pulling a livestock trailer.

"People do look at us, hauling goats with this big, beautiful motorhome," Robin smiles.

And their Dutch Star is beautiful. The exterior paint still shines, and the interior shows like a much newer unit. As it makes the transition with them to this new chapter of their lives, there are a few things they might like to change: hardwood floors perhaps, to replace the carpet, and an upgrade to new HDTVs. They would also consider adding a third air conditioner. Other than that, they can easily see using their motorhome into their retirement years. That is, of course, if they can ever slow down long enough to retire. For now, the Barracks are enjoying the comfort the Dutch Star offers while they work.

"And we can carry our dogs," Jackie adds, proving that some things never change.

Not all motorhomes have the design, workmanship or quality to carry us through the seasons of our lives with grace and style. The Dutch Star does, and that is why it is still "The One" for the Barracks, and a modern-day classic ride. **M**

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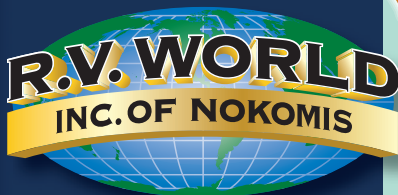
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Happy Storage Day

As new retirees, my husband and I purchased a 1999 Fleetwood Southwind with the idea that we would see if we were cut out for this form of travel. One thing I quickly discovered was that we did not have sufficient storage. To remedy this problem, I purchased some plastic drawers from a home-improvement store and installed them in one half of the closet. I now have room for shoes, extra linens, toiletries, etc., and plenty of space for everything I need.

Connie Fain | Ventura, California



Water Wonderland

For quick clean-up duties around the RV site, I found that it is often easier to bring the water source to the mess rather than dragging the mess to the hose bib or external shower.

For around \$20 I bought a garden sprayer that can be pressurized by a pump handle. While it comes in handy in a number of ways, most importantly, I use it to wash off muddy pet paws and shoes. It also works for watering plants, washing windshields and rinsing off any tight spaces that don't need a complete bath. The sprayers come in a variety of sizes, but I find the 1 gallon model fits my needs, and is light enough to carry most anywhere.

Kathleen Ondrasik | Myrtle Beach, South Carolina



Solar-Light Night

I always enjoy a well-lit campsite, but hate having electrical cords strewn everywhere. My solution involves solar lights and flower pots. My husband bored a hole into the base of a flower pot and inserted a solar patio-type light. I don't need to use the stakes that come with the lights, as the base goes through far enough that the lights stay in place. My solar lights can now be placed anywhere, even on a concrete pad or patio. All I need is a little sunshine during the day, and there is plenty of illumination once the sun goes down. I now have six of these lights, and I pack them in a plastic tub. The pots stack neatly so they can all fit in a compartment.

Debbie Hale | Goodlettsville, Tennessee



The First Dowel

After purchasing wheel covers, I found it difficult to feed the straps behind the wheels in order to secure the covers. This was especially true on the dual rear wheels. My solution was to buy a 3-foot dowel at the local building-supply store. After painting it with some leftover spray paint, I attached three sticky-backed lengths of hook-and-loop fastener to one end, making sure it was the opposite end of the strap. This allows me to feed the dowel behind the wheel, attach the strap to the fastener on the dowel then pull it back out, securing the wheel cover.

Since I made my own leveler jack pads out of 2-by-12-by-12-inch lumber, I also attached a small hook at the end of the dowel and one on each of the pads, making it easy to position the pads under the levelers. The dowel stores easy along the edge of one of the basement bins.

Rick Morrison | Saddlebrooke, Arizona



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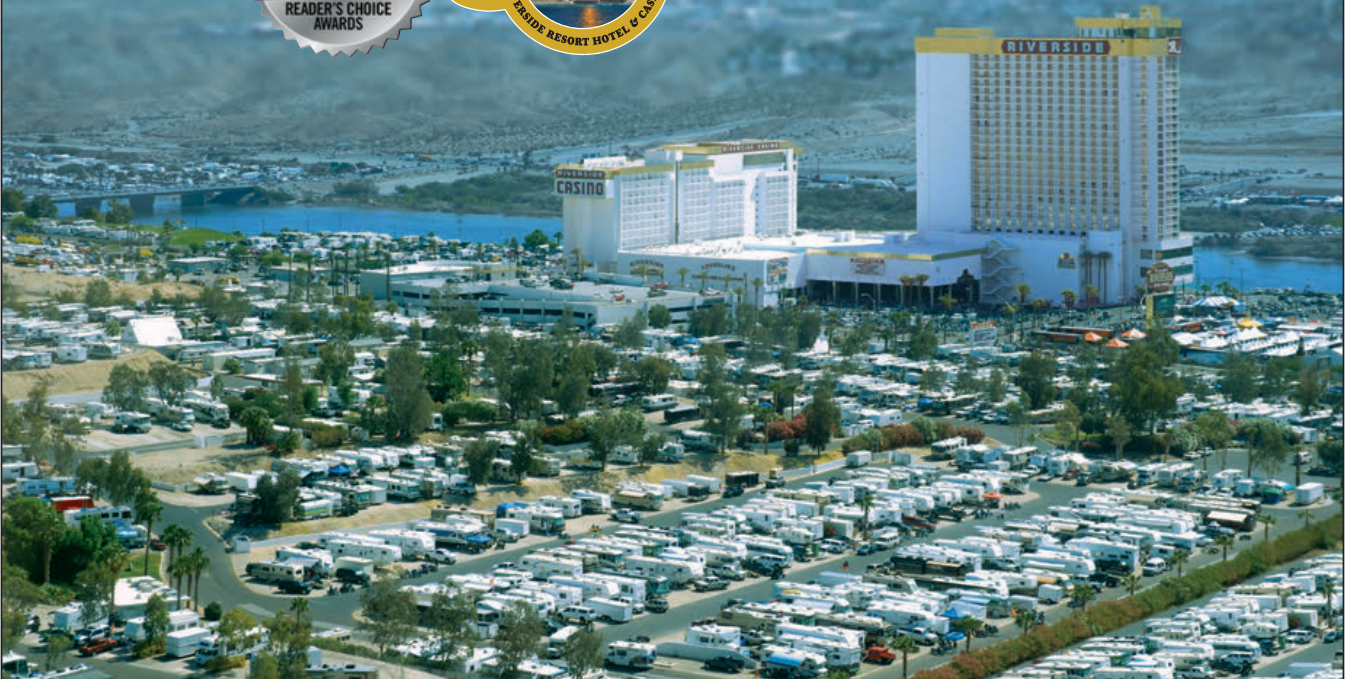
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Get the Sheen Back

Treating a motorhome's fiberglass exterior with Poli Glow removes oxidation and restores the surface to a shiny look

By Kevin Livingston



CLEANING

Cost: \$69.95

Time: 1 Day

Difficulty: 3/10

Fiberglass exteriors on motorhomes have a number of advantages that go beyond the shiny look that is visually appealing and exudes pride of ownership.

Fiberglass exteriors are also durable and somewhat resilient to the elements. There's little doubt that structurally, fiberglass will last a long time, but how nice it looks over time is dependent on preventive maintenance.

Fading due to constant exposure to the sun is common, and after a while the surface takes on a chalky appearance that can make any motorhome look older than its actual years. Once the surface is badly oxidized, bringing back the shine to the gelcoat can take several hours of labor-intensive buffing by someone who knows how to work with fiberglass, if it's not already too late. Poli Glow Products offers a cheaper and easier solution that can easily be done at home or at an RV park, even on a sunny day.

Poli Glow is a two- or three-step (depending on the surface condition) liquid-chemical process that revives the gelcoat. Included in the Poli Glow Kit is a bottle of Poli Prep concentrated cleaner that mixes with water; a scrub pad to remove old wax and light stains after the surface is cleaned; an applicator mitt; and a bottle of Poli Glow liquid for the final sealing, which leaves a shiny surface. For tougher conditions, Poli Ox powdered cleanser (not included in the kit) removes heavier oxidation and stains.

There's not a lot of information that comes with the kit, but after using it, we realized that the process was very straightforward. After making up the three-to-one mixture

The \$69.95 Poli Glow Kit comes with an applicator mitt, a 32-ounce bottle of Poli Glow sealer, a 32-ounce bottle of Poli Prep concentrated cleaner and a scrub pad with a handle.

of Poli Prep and water in a bucket or spray bottle, the prepping solution is applied to the surface. We preferred to use the spray bottle, since it was easier, and any leftover solution can be stored as a premixed cleaner for the next treatment.

For our test we found Poli Prep to work effectively on most of the motorhome. For the few areas where the stains could not be removed with Poli Prep, an application of Poli Ox did the trick. It's important to ensure that the surface maintains color uniformity while scrubbing away any oxidation or staining.

After the prescribed one-hour dry time passed, we treated the surface with Poli Glow by spreading the liquid with the water-dampened mitt. Choosing either a vertical or a horizontal pattern, the Poli Glow is spread evenly and allowed to dry for two minutes before applying subsequent coats. The company recommends applying four to six coats to get to the desired look. We found that it took five coats to reach a point where the surface was restored to our satisfaction.

The Poli Glow treatment is designed to last up to a year before reapplying, but that, of course, depends on conditions. There is enough in the \$69.95 kit to treat an RV up to 32 feet, and the sealer will not come off during normal washing. Poli Ox powder cleanser sells separately for \$12.95.

After completing the Poli Glow treatment, the transformation is amazing, and the process was easier than expected, which should encourage owners to take care of their rigs and protect their investment. While the kit may not be inexpensive, it does circumvent professional waxing, which can be much more costly. **M**

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

Scrubbing the exterior fiberglass and striping with Poli Prep and applying five coats of Poli Glow sealer removed the stains (right of green tape) and brought back the shine (left of green tape). The Poli Glow process is safe for decals and graphic elements.





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Reusable Roller Assembly



Looking for help after their extended-warranty claim was denied, two readers turned to Hot Line for assistance. They wrote:

“ Last year my wife and I purchased a used RV that had a transferable extended warranty administered by Interstate National Dealer Services. On our maiden voyage, the bedroom slide became unsafe due to a detached roller assembly, which I found on the bedroom floor. The screws that attach the roller assembly to the bulkhead had sheared off. We cut our trip short and I contacted the service department at Dillon’s RV City in Apache Junction, Arizona.

After describing the problem to Nick, the service manager, and giving him our warranty information, he said he would work up an estimate and get approval from the warranty company prior to beginning repairs. He called me a few days later and told me he had received the approval.

A couple of weeks later, Nick called to say that the repairs were finished. The next day, while en route to Dillon’s RV, I got another call informing me that National Dealer Services had rescinded its decision and had denied my claim. Apparently, when Dillon’s presented the final bill to the warranty company, they asked why a new roller assembly wasn’t on the invoice. Dillon’s told them the original roller assembly was utilized because it was undamaged. The representative said that even though the screws sheared off the roller and caused the problem, the company does not cover nuts, bolts and fasteners.

Dillon’s RV City gave me a 10 percent discount on the slide repair labor, resulting in a final bill of \$432. This expense is not the end of the world, but I am hopeful for a monetary resolution in this matter.

Larry and Carolyn Eppler | Payson, Arizona

The Epplers’ concerns were passed on to Interstate National Dealer Services with a request for further review. We received the following letter from the Epplers that filled us in on the conclusion to their case. They wrote:

“ We received a good-will check from Interstate National Dealer Services for \$432 to cover the repair of our slide. Their action was the result of your efforts on our behalf.
L. and C. E.

Mind the Gap

Needing help with warranty repairs on his new motorhome, a reader contacted Hot Line. He wrote:

“ I purchased a 2015 Pleasure-Way Pursuit in July 2015 from Carolina Coach & Camper in Claremont, North Carolina. I noted 10 problems that needed to be fixed, so I took the motorhome back to the dealer for repair in November 2015.

On January 21, I went to pick up the motorhome and found that there were two remaining issues: an outside storage compartment had some water

damage and the couch that converts into a trifold bed was misaligned from level, which made sleeping impossible.

The service technician agreed that additional work needed to be done and he would contact Pleasure-Way about the bed. The motorhome remains at the dealer for an indefinite time.

Can Hot Line please help?

Carl Koontz | Yadkinville, North Carolina

Hot Line contacted Pleasure-Way Industries and Carolina Coach & Camper on Koontz’s behalf. Shortly thereafter, we received the following from Carolina Coach:

Pleasure-Way has authorized all of the repairs Koontz noted except for the couch/bed. Our service department has completed all of those repairs and Koontz has picked up his motorhome. We contacted the warranty department at Pleasure-Way regarding Koontz’s complaint about the couch/bed, and this was the reply:

“By design, when the couch is converted to a bed, there are three sections and a slight gap between each section. There is no adjustment for the gap. The center section, which Koontz indicates is lower than the other two, could be shimmed with washers to raise it slightly.”

Koontz has been made aware of this option and declined to have it done. Note that you sleep side-to-side, parallel to the gap, not front-to-back across the gap.

Barry Blatz
Operations Manager
Carolina Coach & Camper
Claremont, North Carolina

Take Action Contact Hot Line for Help

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

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By Ken Freund

Oil-change Regimens

Q We use our motorhome for specific trips each year. We winter in the South, a trip of about 3,600 miles. The oil and filter are changed during the trip as it's black, and again on our return home. Early summer we take a 10-day trip, about 300 miles. Late summer we take another similar trip of about 300 miles. The motorhome goes into storage for three months after the late-summer trip. Should we do an oil change after the late-summer trip? In December we head south again. We're concerned about oil acidity. The oil used is 5W-20 and is conventional oil, not synthetic.

David Ginsberg | Via email

A Long highway trips are not as hard on oil as short trips and frequent cold starts. The two oil changes per annum should work for you. I would change it once before it goes into storage at the end of the summer, and

again before you return home from your trip down south. It's not just acidity that is a concern, but also the fact that more sludge forms if the oil is dirty when the engine is stored.



Batteries Keep Going Dead

Q I own a 2001 Winnebago Class C on a Ford E-450 Super Duty chassis with a Triton V-10 engine. While on a trip, I stopped to get gas, and then found all three batteries dead (coach and engine batteries). I jump-started the motorhome and left the fuel station, and had it towed to a shop, where they replaced the alternator. I spent the night there with the motorhome hooked up to shorepower, and checked the charge on the engine battery in the morning and all seemed OK.

I set off and went about 175 miles when I noticed the voltage gauge dropping off. I pulled over and all of the batteries were dead. I took the alternator to a NAPA store and they said it was good. I had them check all three batteries and they said they were good, but needed charging. I convinced them to give me another alternator, which I had installed.

About 150 miles later, the same situation happened. I finally made it to my destination by stopping

every 30 or so miles and charging the batteries with those in the dinghy vehicle. I decided to fire up the generator once I got enough juice in the batteries, and drove home with no problems. It seems to me that shorepower and the generator are working OK, but what is going on while driving under normal conditions?

Rodger Hermans | Seattle, Washington

A When you are running off shorepower or the generator, the batteries are getting charged by the onboard power converter. However, when you are running solely on the engine, all of the power has to come from the alternator. Apparently you have not been getting sufficient power from the alternator. Did the fellow who changed the alternator the first time test its output before and after he replaced it? What were the readings? I've seen cases where more than one rebuilt alternator was faulty, but it's rare. If in fact the alternators have been good, then the wiring harness and/or charging circuit has a problem. You

need to take it to an experienced auto electric shop. I suggest that until you get it sorted out, obtain an inexpensive digital voltage tester (from an auto-parts store) that plugs into the cigarette lighter/power outlet and monitor the running voltage. Running voltage should be above 13.4 volts and below about 14.8 if the alternator is working properly.

Workhorse That Whinnies

Q I own a 2003 Tiffin Allegro motorhome powered by a Workhorse gas engine. What type of fuel works best? The engine sputters when the accelerator is first applied, or when I put a load on the engine.

Dan White | Parker, Colorado

A These engines are designed to run fine on regular-grade gasoline, and do not have a history of being finicky about gasoline. Typically, what people blame on the gasoline's chemistry or quality turns out to be an ignition or fuel-supply problem. That's not to say it's impossible to be a gasoline problem,

but it's not likely. You might have a load of old fuel, or perhaps a dollop of water has accumulated from condensation or a contaminated supply tank. However, these engines are known to have two fairly common problems that lead to drivability concerns, and I suggest you check these first.

First, have the spark-plug cables and connectors carefully inspected. They're going on 14 years old, and are prone to heat damage near the exhaust manifolds, as well as from general deterioration. While you're at it, make sure all maintenance is up to date according to the service schedule in the owner's manual, and check the spark plugs for condition and replace as necessary.

Another area is fuel supply. When was the last time you replaced the fuel filter mounted underneath? Probably never. When I replace it, I pour the contents out backward (out the inlet) into a clear plastic container. This allows you to visually inspect for any accumulated crud in the fuel system that may be trapped in the filter, clogging and reducing flow. It's also a tip-off if water/dirt has gotten into the tank. When I install a new filter, I mark the housing with date and mileage using a black felt-tip marker, so it's easy to know how old it is the next time it's checked. I also enter all work into a vehicle logbook with date and mileage.

Bad Fuse, Huh?

Q My husband and I recently purchased a 2016 Winnebago Fuse, with a slide-out rear bed. For the first two days, the bed slide worked well. On day three, the slideout alarm continued to sound even after the bed looked completely pulled in. We brought the motorhome in for service and were told it was a bad fuse (no pun intended). Now, two months later, the alarm is going off again, which is supposed to mean the slideout is not fully in. It appears closed and we have tried changing the fuse but this has not worked. Should we have the alarm disconnected if the only purpose is to go off if the slide is not completely pulled in?



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COACH & POWERTRAIN

Is a bad fuse a common occurrence with slideouts?

Tricia Hayden | Cranston, Rhode Island

A Slideout problems are among the most common glitches we hear about across all brands. It stands to reason, as they are arguably the most complex part of a motorhome coachwork. When they said a "bad" fuse they should have differentiated if it was burned out, cracked, corroded or otherwise faulty, but not from electrical current overloading. If a fuse is "blowing" it likely means that the slide mechanism is binding and overloading the motor (which blows the fuse). The slideout installation on your coach uses a Schwintek in-wall slideout mechanism driven by a pair of 300:1 ratio motors.

According to Winnebago's tech services, there's no audible alarm or sensing equipment onboard that alerts the driver that a room is extended (or extending) while driving. The audible alarm that is employed on certain motorhomes alerts the owner that the driver and co-pilot seats are not locked in the forward-facing position. Another possible alarm would be for the leveling jacks being extended when trying to drive away, but your model motorhome isn't equipped with a leveling system. According to factory records, you or your dealer have not contacted Winnebago regarding this repair. This repair should be covered under warranty and I suggest you contact the dealer as soon as possible.

Another Problem With Batteries

Q I have an older Itasca motorhome that has a problem with the batteries going dead. I had the batteries tested, and they were OK. It has a Trik-L-Start module, which was installed at the factory and is supposed to keep the batteries alive. What can I do?

John T. Riley | Columbus, Ohio

A Motorhomes are subject to a lot of parasitic loads, and they can draw down the batteries over time. Winnebago and Itasca brands used to be equipped with a Trik-L-Start unit. These



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Cypress Trail, Circle 105 on Reader Service Card

are not chargers, and merely direct power to batteries needing a charge when power is available. However, they have some shortcomings, and Winnebago/Itasca has moved to a new system called Battery Isolation Manager (BIM). The BIM (Winnebago Industries part No. 174291-01-000) monitors the voltage of the house and engine starting batteries over a long period of time. If it senses a charging voltage, it connects the batteries together. If the charging voltage is overburdened by a heavy current draw, the batteries will be isolated. Once the batteries become fully charged to a "float" state for one hour, the BIM will disconnect the batteries from the charging source. If either of the batteries drops down to an 80 percent charge level, the BIM will reconnect it to the charging source. A BIM can be retrofitted to earlier motorhomes and is a good way to improve battery charging.

Noisy Cab

Q I have a 2012 Thor Citation Class C motorhome. It seems to me the cab is extra noisy from the engine during driving. Any ideas on how to insulate to reduce cab noise while driving?

Peter Braun | La Crete, Alberta, Canada

A Auto stereo shops have the solution on hand. It consists of thermal- and sound-barrier material which has a peel-and-stick self-adhesive backing, and can be cut to fit the exact contour of your motorhome's floor and firewall, and placed under the carpet and padding. I've had good results from Hush-Mat (www.hushmat.com) and Thermo-Tec (www.thermotec.com). These products are available online and from many auto parts stores, and can either be installed by you, or at car audio centers, etc.

It's a Jeep Thing

Recently, along with information on the Jeep Cherokee retrofit auxiliary wiring harness designed to correct steering wobble problems (most recently "Jeep Cherokee Wobble — Update" in the July issue), we provided contact informa-

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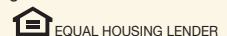
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tion for a Fiat Chrysler Automobiles (FCA) corporate employee. The correct number for the public to call for all technical queries is 877-426-5337 (877-IAMJEEP). We apologize for the error.

A/C Compressor Failure

Q The dash-air compressor went out on my 2000-2001 National RV Tropical with a Ford V-10. The Ford dealer can't find a replacement compressor with the right connections, or a new unit. The bolts do not match up.

Ray Ostensen | Tulsa, Oklahoma

A In a pinch, you can drive with the on-board generator running and powering the roof air conditioning. Dealers are often quite inflexible and not creative in adapting or improvising. I suggest you try an independent auto air-conditioning specialist. It should be able to either find another compressor that fits, get yours rebuilt or obtain a rebuilt unit if the exact new replacement isn't

available. There's also a lot that can be done with adapting fittings to make a similar compressor with equivalent capacity connect and work. Make sure the technician flushes out the system, as many times when a compressor fails, bits of metal and other debris comes out of it and circulates. You'll also need a new receiver-dryer, and I like to add an inline filter just downstream of the compressor so, in the case it fails again, it won't contaminate the system.

To Tow, or Not to Tow?

Q Can I tow a 2006 Chrysler Sebring on a dolly behind my 26-foot 2002 Tioga Class C motorhome?

Linda Balster | Via email

A On page 25 of our 2006 Dinghy Towing Guide, the Sebring is listed as approved for flat towing if it has a manual transmission. If it has an automatic, it would need to be towed on a dolly, so that the

front drive wheels aren't turning. The claimed curb weight of that year Sebring is 3,135 to 3,402 pounds, plus the weight of the dolly, cargo, etc. You should be within the tow-rating limit of your motorhome, but check with the owner's manual to be sure. Provided that all proper maintenance procedures are done, and the dolly has brakes, you should be good to go.

Diesel Storage

In the August letter "Starting Engines in Storage," Jerry Moore asked if a diesel engine that has been shut off for several months is OK to let sit and start, or if it should be started every month. Cummins recommends that for an engine that has been shut down more than 30 days, the wire that actuates the fuel shutoff solenoid be temporarily disconnected and the engine cranked until you see oil pressure on the gauge. It may take 20 seconds of cranking because the oil leaks down during storage.

H. McNevin | Longmont, Colorado

Thanks for sharing the tip. This is a good idea with all brands, not just Cummins, as they all lack lubrication after sitting for an extended period. In addition, make sure you're not storing the motorhome with old cruddy oil in the engine, which forms sludge and the resultant acidity causes damage. Also, ensure that the coolant is fresh enough (use test strips) and that the low-temperature freeze protection is sufficient. Be sure to leave a safety margin in case it gets unusually cold during the winter. A fuel storage additive should also be used.

Wiring Problem

Q I have a 2001 Itasca Spirit Class C. The 12-volt DC lights work great on shorepower, but they don't work on the house batteries. I ran a hot wire directly from the solenoid (non-insolated position) to the fuse panel, and the lights work great on the batteries. I don't have voltage at the fuse panel using the current wire coming out of the wiring bundle. Does the hot wire from the solenoid go directly to the

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fuse panel, or does it go to a junction block/solenoid from the battery?

Carl Mock | Pensacola, Florida

A The house-battery disconnect solenoid may not be latching and providing continuity from the battery to the panel. Winnebago has a resource on its website (www.winnebagoind.com/diagram/wiring.htm) that includes the wiring diagrams for these models. Unfortunately you didn't provide the exact model, so I can only direct you to the website to find your specific diagram.

Tire-Failure Comment

Q Good reply to "Tire Failures" in the September column. However, you didn't answer the main question, "Is there a better tire in the LT225/75 R16 size than what Michelin makes?" I think the heavier, larger Class C motorhomes stretch these tires to the limit, which leads to premature tire failure. Is there a better, stronger tire in that size available other than the Michelin?

Alan Jackson | Floral City, Florida

A I agree that these tires are often close to their limits, but many thousands of owners use them successfully. It's imperative to inflate the tires properly for their load, and to make sure you have load rating E, not D. If you were to go to a higher load range than E, the wheels would not be rated for the higher air pressure. If you go to a larger 235 size, the dual-wheel spacing is insufficient. If it makes you feel better, consider an all-steel tire such as Michelin's XPS Rib. Bridgestone also makes an all-steel tire in that size. **M**

Have a Tech Question?

Contact our experts:

Email 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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Local Color

Celebrate like a local at these eclectic New Year's Eve festivities

By Alan Rider

One of the great things about motorhome travel is the opportunity it gives us to go from passive bystander to active participant in all kinds of events. That's especially true when those events are uniquely local things you simply won't find anywhere else.

It's a reality that got me thinking about one of this month's coming attractions. Namely, an uncommonly colorful event we like to call New Year's Eve.

Now, I've never had much desire to attend massive New Year's Eve celebrations, mostly because they always seem to take place somewhere bitterly cold. But I've found a half-dozen holiday happenings that combine more benign temperatures with distinctly local and slightly quirky reinterpretations of New York City's famous Times Square ball drop.

Topping that list is Key West's "Shoe Drop," where a female impersonator is lowered from a balcony in a giant red high-heeled pump as the raucous crowd assembled below counts down to midnight. If that's not quite your style, another local establishment — Sloppy Joe's Bar — drops a 20-foot conch shell. Either way, it is Conch Republic kitsch at its finest.

A little farther north in family-oriented Panama City Beach, Florida, it's a humongous beach ball that takes the 12-story plunge at midnight. The cool thing here, though, is the 8 p.m. drop for younger revelers, where more than

10,000 of the brightly colored inflatable balls are released from overhead nets, a sideshow that almost sounds more fun than the main event.

Farther up the coast in Raleigh, North Carolina, the midnight drop centers around a brilliantly lit 10-foot-tall metal acorn, a nod to the town's City of Oaks nickname. Unfortunately for the local squirrel population, all they can do is stare at the 1,250-pound nut with mouth-watering wonder.

Speaking of mouth-watering wonders, Mobile, Alabama, drops a giant Moon Pie as the clock ticks toward midnight. Unfortunately for all the humans concerned, this 12-foot-high, 600-pound version of the South's favorite treat is likewise inedible. That said, the laser light show and fireworks display put on to mark the new year's arrival go a long way toward helping you forget that disappointment.

On the other side of the country, Show Low, Arizona, drops an oversized deuce of clubs, a symbol of the town since two local property owners settled their differences by trying to draw the lowest card (i.e.: "show low") out of a standard deck. Needless to say the deuce of clubs won the day, giving rise to the town's name and its unusual New Year's Eve Deuce of Clubs Drop tradition.

Finally, way out West, the wine grape-growing region of Temecula, California, lowers a giant 250-pound bunch of "grapes" festooned with 4,500 LED lights at the stroke of midnight (a special family version takes place at 9 p.m.). Other goings-on include activities for kids, live music, ice skating and more.

Besides their offbeat nature, what is it that all these festivities have in common? They offer us a chance to rub shoulders with the locals, and an opportunity to see a familiar holiday through new eyes. Which, frankly, beats the heck out of watching some far-away televised celebration from your decidedly uninspiring perch on the living-room couch.

And, when it comes right down to it, isn't that what the motorhome lifestyle is all about, anyway? Getting out to experience the world for yourself, rather than just watching it go by on TV?

Fortunately for all of us, there's always something colorful going on along The Road Ahead. **M**

“What is it that all these festivities have in common? They offer us a chance to rub shoulders with the locals, and an opportunity to see a familiar holiday through new eyes.”

Happy New Year! ☺

Revelers in Panama City Beach, Florida, celebrate the new year with 10,000 beach balls dropping from the sky, while California dreamers in Temecula enjoy the Grape Drop.



Photos: Courtesy Visit Panama City Beach; Visit Temecula Valley

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