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Clouds offer a dramatic backdrop to the Sawtooth Range as viewed from state Route 75 along the Sawtooth Scenic Byway in Idaho (see page 34).



Many motorhome manufacturers offer factory tours, which give visitors a firsthand look at the building process. Pg. 42

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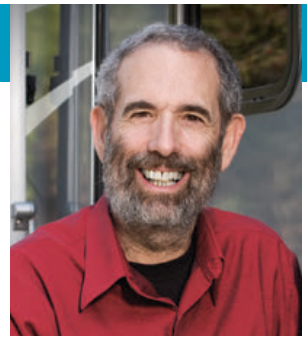
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ON THE COVER

The 2016 Interstate Grand Tour EXT — shown in the Brilliant Silver Metallic exterior color scheme — is a nimble Class B that uses air bags to create a more stable ride and lessen side-to-side movement (see test on page 54). Photo by Scott Hirko.





By Bob Livingston

It's Never Too Early to Plan

Now that we're well into spring, it's time to think about making travel plans and getting your motorhome ready for the travel season. The latter is a given, but the timing for getting the motorhome out of mothballs is not as critical as making sure you have campground reservations lined up well in advance.

The pressure to lock in good sites in popular destinations has never been greater as interest in RV ownership grows rapidly. Sales of RVs continues at a brisk pace and it's projected almost 400,000 new owners will get on the road this year. That's great news for both the RV industry and owners, but as the lifestyle gains new clout in the marketplace, we will all have to preplan our trips more carefully than most of us did in the past.

The National Park System, for example, will be heavily impacted this year as travelers help celebrate the 100th anniversary of the National Park Service. Reservations in popular national park campgrounds are filling up fast, and, fortunately, private parks in nearby outlying areas also offer nice places to stay. Nevertheless, visiting one of these national treasures should be high on every motorhome owner's list. As part of our yearlong tribute to the National Park Service, this month's feature by columnist Alan Rider points out the highlights of Voyageurs National

Park in Minnesota starting on page 28. It will be a banner year to spend time in the national parks.

While there are a lot of great parks, both nationally and in the state-park systems, those of us with big rigs need not apply to many of them. Most of the campground sites within the parks were built long before 40-footers with four slides roamed the highways. Preplanning and knowing precisely when reservations will open for your particular travel dates are important tools when mapping out trips. We waited too long for reservations in a couple of popular state parks this summer, so we're already planning our itinerary for 2017.

Dinghy towing is the key when it comes to enjoying places that are not suitable for big motorhomes. Having a vehicle from which to explore new places can make or break a trip. Taking along the "toys" also presents certain

challenges, like the combo assembled on page 60. The owner of the featured Haulmark motorhome enjoys the luxury of his coach in fine RV resorts, but still likes to get out in the middle of nowhere and run his four-wheelers. After all was said and done, we put together a package that made travel on the highways and backroads practical and safe.

Installing equipment and "customizing" projects are part of the motorhome experience. Having dual-pane windows, for example, provides better interior climate control and opens travel opportunities by making all the seasons more suitable for motorhoming. But when the windows fog, they become pretty useless. That's when window swapping, as described by Don Smith (see page 48) becomes a practical do-it-yourself project. If you find that exact window replacements are not available, then working with one of the vendors that repairs fogged windows is another option.

This will likely be a great year for motorhome travel, especially with lower fuel prices, so finding the best campgrounds just might become a competitive sport. **M**

“ It will be a banner year to spend time in the national parks. ”

Contributors | June



Kristopher Bunker, the former editor of *Trailer Life* magazine, is an avid camper and has been RVing for more than a decade. He is currently a freelance writer living in the central Texas area.



Donya Carlson is the managing editor of *Trailer Life* magazine. She grew up camping and loves the outdoors. Previously, she was the managing editor of the motorcycle enthusiast and travel magazine, *Rider*.



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.



Kevin Livingston grew up in RVs. He worked alongside his dad, Bob Livingston, since he was old enough to hold tools. He lives in Reno, Nevada, and enjoys the technical side of the RV lifestyle.



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



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

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Do you have a solar-energy system installed in your motorhome, and if so, what type is it and would you recommend it to fellow RVers?

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

Up On the Roof

In the March issue, the question of the month was about solar-energy systems. Here's my experience on this issue.

We installed 20 solar panels on our roof and are very happy with the system. In early February Southern California sun, it generates around 4 kW daily.

Obviously, when planning the layout, you need to consider roof vents, A/C, satellite dishes, etc., and determine whatever roof space is appropriate for installation of solar panels. I highly recommend flexible panels, which are only about a quarter-inch thick and bend to perfectly fit the roof structure. Barely noticeable from below, they reduce the risk of theft and keep aesthetics intact. Some come with an adhesive backing

avoiding screws going into the roof and the related leak potential. And some of them are so sturdy you can even walk on them, though it is not recommended [I use a half-inch-thick gym mat to walk/kneel when working on the panels].

It goes without saying that the larger the coach battery capacity, the more power can be stored for evening and night consumption. Adding an inverter to the equation allows it to run not only all 12-volt DC circuits but also 120-volt AC outlets. In the best-case scenario, everything but the A/C can be operated without shore- or generator power. In order to optimize the system in terms of the inverter size, battery capacity and solar capacity, I highly recommend getting qualified professional advice. It is amazing how many

so-called "solar experts" are out there, but only few have practical experience with off-the-grid systems like the ones in RVs. I was very pleased with the advice as well as the products we purchased from www.soldonsun.com [based in California].

One final note to get the most out of your solar while connected to shorepower, especially when campsite power is metered: when on shore (or generator) power, the regular AC battery charger kind of competes with the solar charger. Some chargers allow switching off the AC input so the batteries can be charged solely through solar. If such functionality is available for your AC charger, it should be set so it only kicks in when the voltage or state of charge drops below a certain value.

Featured Letter

Free Power?

I was reading the current issue of *MotorHome* at my brother-in-law's home in Reno, Nevada, even though I own a 39-foot Brookstone Diamond fifth-wheel. I have two 160-watt panels I purchased from West Marine in October and added two more 170-watt panels from the recent Pow Wow in Quartzsite, Arizona. Solar is the way to go, since I do a lot of dry camping. I did have an issue with the trailer's built-in converter overcharging the two 6-volt batteries at 18.2 volts. I would flip the breaker off supplying the converter and just rely on the solar panels providing 670 watts to keep the batteries up to par. (I have since replaced the defective converter.) I had the panels disconnected from the batteries for a couple of days while I was upgrading to 8-gauge wire, and when I finished, the GoPower solar charge controller was showing a little more than 22 amps of current going to the batteries ... not bad for free power! I still have room on my roof to add three or four more panels if needed.

Michael Krivohlavy | Fullerton, California





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Solar power in the motorhome definitely increases “staying power” for the dedicated boondocker, but it might not (yet) improve the monetary bottom line of the average “connected” RVer. However, it certainly gives us the feeling of doing something good for the environment and/or being ahead of the pack technologically while still being close to nature.

Helmut Meissner | Via email

Catching Some Rays

When I started dry camping with my previous RV, the battery would drain simply from the LP-gas fridge electronics and carbon monoxide detector in less than three days. I decided to go with a solar system, but I didn’t want to worry about setting up a portable system, so after calculating my load requirement, I went with a 40-watt panel, permanently roof mounted,

with the charge controller connected directly to the electrical panel (don’t go cheap on the controller, and make sure your panel is raised for ventilation). I have since moved up to a 24-foot Class C motorhome and I wanted a similar system, but as guys typically do, I went bigger than I needed to for the panel size; just because I could. I opted for a 120-watt polycrystalline panel (\$200). The polycrystalline is slightly less efficient than the monocrystalline panel, but its cell is not completely rendered useless in the event that it’s partly shaded; therefore, it’s better when parked in a campground with a lot of trees. I have also replaced all light bulbs in the RV with LEDs, and the batteries with two 6-volt models (\$300), versus the existing 12-volt ones for longevity.

With this system, I can now last forever without being plugged in, and without being conservative on my consumption. This includes hours of TV use at night, and barely seeing a dent in the batteries. The house batteries are always fully charged by early morning; even on rainy days. The cost for the charge controller was \$100, the custom roof rack and wiring was \$100 and the full LED replacement cost \$100.

Michel Filion | Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Measure Twice, Drill Once

I outfitted our 2014 Winnebago View Profile motorhome with a solar system that has two 160-watt (27-by-58-inch) panels and four 6-volt batteries, totaling 484 amp-hours of 12-volt DC storage. The panels are connected to the batteries through a solar controller that I got from an online solar company for about \$700 (two panels, 25-amp controller and cables). I had installed a more basic solar system on our previous rig and wanted to go to the next level in our new motorhome.

I laid out the panels (with cardboard covers) and routed the cables (threaded in white pipe insulation), along with the satellite cables, to a central point in a void over the refrigerator that had room for the solar controller panel. After measuring and plotting coordinates a number



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of times, I finally drilled through the roof, hitting the mark. I checked with Winnebago on its recommendation for fastening the panels to the roof. I found the proper threaded inserts at my local hardware store and sealed everything with silicone sealant.

After repeated measuring, I finally cut into the paneling, connecting the two panel cables and running a cable to the battery bank. After mounting the solar controller, it looked like it always belonged there. The new electronics in the controller are far improved over previous units I've used. It shows the percentage of bank capacity, current charge in amps coming in and the number of volts in the battery bank. I leave the controller set on the capacity percent and watch the level go down from 100 percent at sunset to about 75 percent in the morning. It's usually back up to 100 percent by midmorning, weather permitting.

The Winnebago came with two undersized 12-volt batteries totaling only 160-amp-hours of storage. I replaced them with the two largest 6-volt batteries that fit into the available space, ending up with 242 amp-hours of storage. I then ran two cables into an adjacent outside storage compartment and put two matching 6-volt batteries in a vented battery box, adding another 242 amp-hours to the bank. I added a remote water-fill system to replenish the battery water. I sourced my battery supplies from a local supplier who deals primarily with contractors. The four batteries, cables, box and watering system cost around \$1,000.

With this solar system, we rarely use full-hookup sites and only use our onboard generator on rare occasions when we're in heavy clouds or rain for the entire day (or when we need to use the microwave). I was disappointed that Winnebago didn't provide any 12-volt DC power points other than those in the front dash. In order to minimize our use of 120-volt AC power, I added five dual-outlet 12-volt DC fixtures. The objective was to minimize the use of the 1,000-watt inverter, which draws power just to function. In the past few years, I've only used the

inverter to operate power tools and a vacuum cleaner.

The only two 120-volt AC devices that I couldn't get in a 12-volt DC version were the KVH satellite dome and the DirecTV receiver. The combined wattage was under 100 watts, only requiring a small, solid-state inverter that cools through heat sinks rather than an electric fan (even the smallest electric fan makes noise

and/or vibrates). I have one of my dual 12-volt DC outlets mounted near the 150-watt solid-state inverter so I can easily unplug it when we're finished watching DirecTV.

With this solar system, we are able to concentrate most of our travels along the Pacific Coast staying in state parks that don't have hookups. Good luck with your project!

Ken Sweezy | San Jose, California



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P.O. BOX

More Solar Power

We purchased an all-electric 40-foot 2012 Allegro Bus new in April 2012. Two years later we upgraded our solar setup using Starlight Solar in Yuma, Arizona. I learned about the company while in Quartzsite, Arizona. We own a lot at Las Vegas Motorcoach Resort and store our coach there on our lot when not in use, but after doing some research, I decided it was worth driving all the way to Yuma instead of using a different company for our solar system.

You will need an appointment because they are booked out weeks in advance. Solar is all Starlight does and Larry and Debbie Crutcher have been in business for nearly 20 years. They concentrate on sales and education and a married couple does all of their installation work and has been for at least 15 years. That is not to say that Larry doesn't get involved with layout decisions, but his installers do the rest. These four people know what they are doing and do not attempt to upsell unnecessarily. I have been so happy that I used them.

For my setup, I went with six Panasonic panels. All the installers had to do was move the factory panel to the passenger side. They then installed two rails running front to the rear on the passenger side and then mounted the panels to the rails. The rails/panels do not encumber anything on the roof.

I wanted a lot more amp-hours of storage so they removed the six 6-volt factory-installed batteries and replaced them with six Lifeline 12-volt glass mat batteries. This required removing the battery slide-out tray (necessary to give more height) but since the new batteries were maintenance-free, the tray wasn't needed. Be aware that these batteries actually cost more than the solar panels.

They also added a new controller to handle the 1,500 watts of solar (including the factory panel) and upgraded the Magnum remote control to the newest model (my choice). They did all necessary wiring and made certain that everything was compatible.

All work was done on site with my coach usable at night because it took nearly two full days for the install.

Once installed, Larry went over everything with me twice to make certain I understood how it works. The total cost of this total package was \$10,200. It was worth every penny.

The only thing I would do differently is to go with lithium batteries. Larry did not begin to recommend them until 2015 after he had tested them for months. One of the advantages of the lithium batteries is that you can charge them at 100 percent until full. The taper down required for the glass mat batteries is not required, so charging with solar or the generator is much quicker. Hope this helps.

Tom Garrett | Via email

Fabulous Fairbanks Museum

I enjoyed reading Bobbie Has-



selbring's March article, "The Fairest of Them All," about Fairbanks, Alaska, and the surrounding area. We visited there last summer and enjoyed many of the same sites described. I agree with her description of the Fountainhead Auto Museum as a true gem and would add that one of the three automobiles not restored is a 1911 Everitt positioned in front of the Sourdough exhibit in the museum. Visitors can dress in period and location-appropriate clothing and pose for photos in the 1911 automobile. We thoroughly enjoyed the experience. When we tried to tip the docent who helped us get dressed and took the photos, he refused to accept the gratuity. A great museum and a great experience.

Dennis M. Jauch | Tampa, Florida

Full Stop

I just read the "What's Your Sign" article about using hand signals for maneuvering a motorhome that was published in March, and I have two

additional points to add.

First, the article states that the assistant should stay in view of the driver. Now, if the driver loses sight of the assistant — STOP! The assistant might have fallen and you don't want to run him/her over.

Second, my wife and I use an emergency stop signal — we use the flat of the hand slapped against the side of the motorhome. This means COMPLETE STOP. This sometimes happens when signals are not seen or they are misinterpreted, or even when you are going to hit something. After an emergency stop, driver and assistant get together to talk about the next action before moving the motorhome.

Bernard Jurgiel | Wesley Chapel, Florida

Motorhome Cookin'

We both very much enjoy reading *MotorHome's* question of the month and seeing the variety of opinions from your readers. Well-done!

One design drawback in the majority of motorhomes we see on the market is the lack of good counter-space in the kitchen. The emphasis seems to be on storage and luxury appointments and they give much less attention to the cooks on the road. We love to cook in our motorhome and are pleased to report that our rig (a 2006 35-foot Itasca SunCruiser) has great counterspace — and a very well-designed galley overall.

Our question is, how important is good kitchen counterspace and design for cooking to other readers?

Doug and Pat Kreitz
Palo Alto, California 

Question of the Month

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

Send your comments to:
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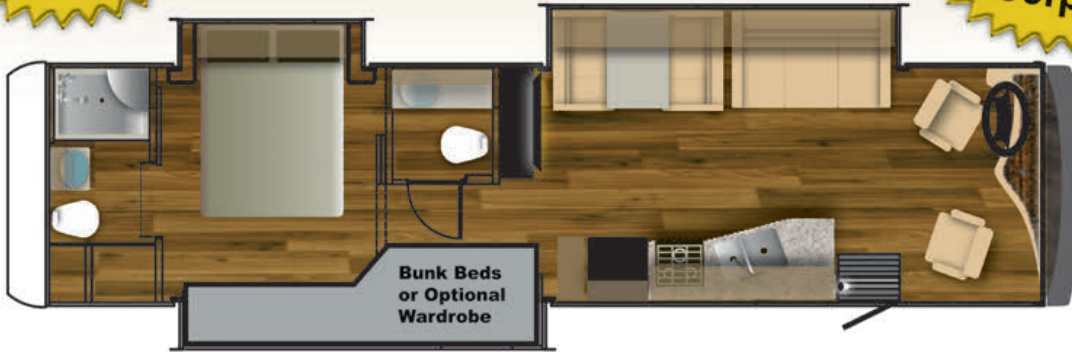


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Beachy-keen Destination

With a waterfront campground and boardwalk, Grand Haven, Michigan, comes alive during summertime

By James Richardson

Though it's only 48 acres in size, Michigan's Grand Haven State Park has a big draw — the entire park is on sand. Situated on the western shore of Lake Michigan, the park's beachside campground is open mid-May through October and has 174 sites. Besides camping, activities here include picnicking, fishing, metal detecting, volleyball and swimming.

The park is adjacent to the Grand Haven Lighthouse. A 1½-mile-long boardwalk along Grand River on the park's north side runs along the Grand Haven harbor, and is lined

with shops, restaurants, marinas and charter fishing boats.

One of the most popular attractions in the city is the Grand Haven Musical Fountain, a synchronized water and light show. The 20-minute show features different themes and plays daily at dusk during summer. The city's most popular event is the annual Coast Guard Festival, which runs July 29-August 7.

For more information, call 616-847-1309, or go to <http://www.michigandnr.com/parksandtrails/Details.aspx?id=449&type=SPRK> — *James Richardson*



From far left: This 48-acre park on the shore of Lake Michigan (and the Grand River to the north) has a beachside campground with 174 sites, plus a 3-mile round-trip boardwalk that runs along the harbor and ends at a pier with two lighthouses.

By Bobbie Hasselbring

Tales of Tuna

Health authorities are always urging us to “eat more fish.” But messages about tuna, one of the most common and popular fish, are confusing. Tuna, especially canned tuna, is inexpensive, a great source of protein and Omega-3 fatty acids, and a versatile ingredient. However, we’ve all heard that tuna is full of dangerous mercury and that the species is on the brink of extinction. How can we make sense of it all?

Like lots of people, I grew up eating tuna fish sandwiches made with mayo and pickle relish, but tuna can also be enjoyed as a steak or in sushi. Atop a salad, tuna creates a low-calorie, protein-rich lunch or dinner, and tuna casserole makes a thrifty meal. Stash a few cans of tuna in your motorhome and you’re stocked for a quick meal.

Tuna is a saltwater fish that belongs to the Thunnini tribe, a subgrouping of the mackerel family. Fifteen different species range in size from less than 2 feet (about 4 pounds) to 15-foot monsters weighing more than 1,500 pounds. Along with being commercially fished, tuna is popular among recreational fishermen for its large size and notorious fighting qualities.

Is it Healthy?

One of the more recent problems with tuna is that it’s being commercially overfished, putting it at risk for extinction. The good news is that while some species like the big southern bluefin tuna are at risk, others like slender, bullet, frigate, mackerel and skipjack are not. Also, companies like Community Supported Fishery in Garibaldi, Oregon, are sustainably line fishing (no nets). In other places, tuna is being sustainably farmed.

Another concern is mercury. Larger types of tuna like bluefin, yellowfin, blackfin and albacore have higher mercury levels than smaller types, as larger fish accumulate more contaminants than smaller ones. Some companies like Safe Catch mercury test their tuna and sell only fish with very low mercury levels.

The Food and Drug Administration advises pregnant women, nursing mothers, women who may become pregnant, and young children consume no more than 12 ounces of canned light tuna or 6 ounces of albacore tuna per week. For the rest of us, most health authori-



From top: In places like Garibaldi, Oregon, many fishermen sustainably line-catch tuna. Tuna salad makes a healthy alternative to processed meats for sandwiches.

ties, including Joshua Cohen, Ph.D., of Tufts Medical Center, say there’s no scientific evidence mercury in the fish we eat causes adverse effects in adults. In fact, not eating fish is a bigger gamble. “Fish protects against stroke and heart disease — two really big killers,” Cohen says.

Got a favorite tuna recipe or place you buy or catch tuna?

Email bobbie@realfoodtraveler.com with “tuna” in the subject line.

EASY TUNA SALAD



Here’s an easy recipe for a low-calorie, protein-rich tuna salad that makes a perfect quick lunch or dinner in the motorhome.

Makes two salads

- 1 can tuna, drained
- ½ head lettuce, torn into small pieces
- Two tomatoes, diced
- ½ avocado, sliced
- Veggies (carrots, bell pepper, celery, etc.), chopped
- Salt, pepper to taste
- Olive oil
- Rice-wine vinegar (you can substitute red-wine vinegar or lemon juice)

► Arrange tuna and veggies on a plate. Season with salt and pepper. Splash with olive oil and vinegar.



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Super Storage

If you're looking for a sanitary, compact way to store your motorhome's sewer hose, D&W Inc. has the solution in its new Super-Slider telescoping sewer hose carrier. The Super-Slider can be mounted almost anywhere on the motorhome for the ultimate in accessibility. Available in three telescoping sizes (33 to 60 inches, 43 to 80 inches and 53 to 100 inches), the Super-Slider features hatch-type doors on both ends for easy access. Unlike traditional screw-in plugs that can often bind and stick, the Super-Slider's built-in mounting-bracket-door assembly features roadworthy hatch-type doors with positive latches that are said to operate easily in tough, dirty undercarriage environments. The Super-Slider's roomy 4 5/8-inch inside diameter allows for storage of sewer hoses with fittings attached, or can even be used to stow fishing rods and similarly shaped gear. The Super-Slider is made of heavy-duty black polymer designed to blend with your motorhome and last for years. MSRP: \$50 (33-inch), \$57 (43-inch) and \$65 (53-inch).

D&W Inc., 800-255-0829, www.dwincorp.com

Zero-G, Zero Worries

A freshwater hose is an often under-appreciated item. In fact, how many among us are guilty of buying the first, cheapest hose we could find at the local RV accessory store? It's time to give the hose the respect that it deserves, so Apex Hose has developed a specialized hose designed specifically for the RV/marine market. The Zero-G hybrid hose is lead-free and features a pliable inner core to prevent kinking, in addition to a rugged G-Force high-density jacket rated at 600-plus psi. The 5/8-inch hose remains flexible in temperatures as low as 35 degrees Fahrenheit, and coils easily for simple storage, according to the company. The hose also features commercial-grade ergonomic aluminum couplings that are knurled for an easy grip, and are crushproof up to 900 pounds. MSRP: \$42.99.

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



Solar Saver

To help keep batteries from discharging when in storage, PulseTech Products introduces its SolarPulse Temporary Solar Charger Maintainer for 12-volt batteries. The new SP-5 OTR 5-watt system utilizes a simple, temporary plug-in, making it easy to use when needed. The SP-5 OTR harnesses the power of the sun to reverse the normal loss of battery power, sulfation buildup and parasitic draw on 12-volt batteries, and the company claims the SP-5 OTR is so efficient it typically requires only a couple of hours of sunlight to maintain the connected battery. The easy-to-use OTR attaches to the vehicle's exterior with four suction cups and plugs directly into the OBD connector for power. Half the size of comparable solar chargers, the SP-5 OTR has the ability to maintain up to four 12-volt batteries connected in parallel and works with all types of batteries, including conventional, flooded, gel, AGM and VRLA types. MSRP: \$249.99.

PulseTech Products Corp., 800-580-7554, www.pulsetech.net



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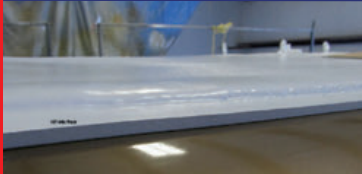
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Cooperstown, North Dakota

Cold War Relic

If you're driving across North Dakota on Interstate 94, take a 40-mile detour north to Cooperstown and visit the Ronald Reagan Minuteman Missile State Historic Site, which consists of the Oscar-Zero Missile Alert Facility and the November-33 Launch Facility. These facilities were completed in 1965 as an integral part of the Minuteman II Missile system.

The tour begins at the Launch Control Support Building with a walk through the aboveground living area for the support staff. Everyday items inside have been left as they were the day the facility was decommissioned — including magazines and newspapers and a VHS player. Then an elevator takes visitors down 60 feet into the blast-hardened Launch Control Equipment Building where the two duty officers were stationed and prepared to open the red box and turn the keys to activate the launch sequence of the Minuteman II missiles.

Next, take a short drive to the Minuteman II missile silo where the launch would have taken place. It's located in a fenced area in the middle of a field.

This historic site is open to public tours. Check the online schedule for days and hours of the tours, as they change based on the time of the year.

For more information, call 701-797-3691 or go to www.history.nd.gov/historicsites/minutemanmissile — *Morey Edelman*



Photo: Morey Edelman

Chaska, Minnesota

Garden Variety

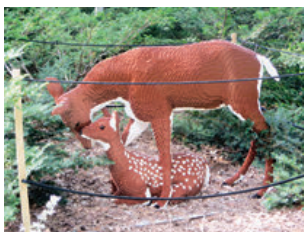
For nature lovers and art aficionados in the Twin Cities area, there's no better place to spend a day than the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. It's home to 1,137 acres of natural areas and public gardens, including 32 display and specialty gardens. Its history can be traced back to 1908 when the University of Minnesota created the Horticultural Research Center to develop apple trees that could survive Minnesota's subzero winters. Honeycrisp apples and nearly 100 fruit introductions are the result of research done at this facility.

Outdoor sculptures are found throughout the grounds. In 2013,

the 3-acre Sculpture Garden was installed on the rolling hills surrounding the Arboretum's High Point. In the summer of 2015, the Arboretum hosted a nature-inspired sculpture exhibit made from Lego pieces.

Numerous options are available for visitors to explore the Arboretum via Three-Mile Drive: in their own car, on foot or bicycle, on a narrated tour on a tram, or on the hop-on/hop-off transportation provided free of charge by the Arboretum. There are 12 miles of hiking trails, 9 miles of cross-country ski trails and 3.5 miles of snowshoe trails for those who want exercise.

For more information, phone 952-443-1400, or visit www.arboretum.umn.edu — *Mary Zalmanek* **M**



Photos: Mary Zalmanek

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GUARDIAN



In 1902, during the last visit to his hometown of Hannibal, Mark Twain spoke from Rockcliffe Mansion's grand staircase.

Mark Twain's Mississippi River Town

Samuel Clemens' hometown of Hannibal, Missouri, served as a source of inspiration for many of the famous author's novels

By Arline Chandler

Thomas Edison once wrote, "The average American loves his family. If he has any love left over for some other person, he generally selects Mark Twain." A superstar a century before superstars were icons on the Internet, in movies and on TV screens in America's living rooms, Twain endeared himself to fellow citizens. His edgy quotes, stories and books are embedded in American literature.

Mark Twain started out as Samuel Clemens, a sickly sixth child in a line of seven kids growing up in the Mississippi River port town of Hannibal, Missouri. His carefree childhood, played out against

the backdrop of a whitewashed fence, percolated his active imagination. Some days he dreamt of becoming a steamboat captain; other times, he and his pack of playmates aspired to be clowns. "Now and then we had a hope that if we lived and were good, God would permit us to be pirates," he once said.

Although Sam Clemens the boy had a limited formal education, he avidly read Shakespeare, the Bible and newspapers. By age 14, he had quit school and was setting type in his brother's printing business. To keep the newspaper lively, he used various pen names to write columns and stories, often satirical, sometimes downright accusatory. He first gained national attention with a comical short story written in dialect and titled: "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County." The absurd tall tale appeared in newspapers across the country and made him famous. Along the way, he turned his playmates into characters and the American language into enduring literature. While numerous other stories and books under his pen name, Mark Twain, filled

HANNIBAL, MISSOURI

← Getting There

Hannibal is located along the Mississippi River in northeastern Missouri, approximately 100 miles northwest of St. Louis and 295 miles southwest of Chicago. The town sits at the intersection of Interstate 72 and U.S. highways 61 and 36 (the Chicago to Kansas City Expressway).

bookshelves nationally and internationally, his most famous is "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer," published in 1876, and still in print.

As a young man, Sam Clemens followed his steamboat captain dream by becoming a riverboat pilot and reading the currents and dangers of the Mississippi River like a book. Later, he heeded his wanderlust — and the lure of silver and gold — by traveling to boomtowns in the West. Instead of gold nuggets, Clemens reinvented himself in the composing room of Nevada's Virginia City "Territorial Enterprise," the biggest newspaper in the inland West. He took the name Mark Twain, a Mississippi River term for declaring a safe depth of water for a steamboat. Then he fashioned his character with a deadpan expression, an unruly shock of hair, bushy eyebrows and a crisp, white suit.

RVers today can step into Mark Twain's boyhood world in Hannibal, where young Sam and his raggedy crew played hooky, skipped Sunday school and hatched up numerous pranks. Eventually, his childhood gang turned into fictional characters — sweet pig-tailed Becky Thatcher, Huckleberry Finn, son of the town drunk, and Tom Sawyer, an eternal summer boy with a straw hat atop his sun-bleached head and a fishing pole in his hand. Into his stories, he also wrote the undertones of a shabby, impoverished river town: a drowned runaway slave in the muddy Mississippi, thugs on a shadowy street, fierce thunderstorms and children lost in



The state of Missouri paid \$10,000 to erect this statue of Twain in Riverview Park. Held July Fourth, the National Fence Painting Contest is one of the highlights of the Annual Tom Sawyer Days.



winding passages of a dark cave. The reinvented storyteller remembered that Hannibal was a town where "... everybody was poor, but didn't know it; and everybody was comfortable and did know it." He called his hometown, "... a boy's paradise."

Today, Hannibal's centerpiece is a restored complex featuring Twain's boyhood home, which is a National Historic Landmark. Other neighbor-

hood structures include the Becky Thatcher House, Huckleberry Finn House, J.M. Clemens Justice of the Peace Office, and a Museum Gallery and Interpretive Center. The Interpretive Center, an educational and entertaining place to begin a tour of Hannibal, features permanent and rotating exhibits about Twain's boyhood, his young adult life as a riverboat pilot and a world traveler,



The Mark Twain Riverboat has been plying the waters of the Mississippi for more than 30 years. Visitors can take 1-hour tours or 2-hour dinner cruises.

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GETAWAY

HANNIBAL, MISSOURI



and his legacy in American literature.

Hannibal Trolley Company Sight-seeing Tour offers an overview of the city, once the port of as many as 10 steamboats docking daily and home to one of the busiest railroad yards in the Northeast. The trolley rolls along historic downtown streets while the driver narrates Hannibal's history. The route winds through neighborhoods with houses large and small; some restored to Victorian opulence, and others bearing signs of a timeworn past. The driver circles onto roads that pass Molly Brown's Birthplace, Rockcliffe Mansion, Mark Twain Cave, the Lighthouse on Cardiff Hill and

Visitors enjoy a 1-hour tour inside Mark Twain Cave, where the temperature stays a constant 52 degrees Fahrenheit year-round.

Riverview Park.

Rockcliffe Mansion, the home of Hannibal's lumber baron, John Cruikshank Jr., is a step back into the lifestyle of the wealthy in 1900. On a guided tour through the mansion, a focal point is the hand-carved grand staircase leading to a vibrant Tiffany stained-glass window at the first landing. A few steps from the landing, Mark Twain spoke to a large company of guests when the Cruikshanks entertained in his honor during his last

IF YOU GO: MARK TWAIN CAVE & CAMPGROUND

Mark Twain Campground, open April 1 through October 31, is adjacent to the historic Mark Twain Cave. Partial- and full-hookup sites, some under shade and others in full sun, as well as pull-through sites, are available. The campground also has an on-site laundry, restrooms and showers, dump station and a safe playground for kids. A camp store is on the premises. The park is approximately 2 miles from Hannibal.

At the turn to Mark Twain Campground, Sawyer's Creek Fun Park sits on the opposite side of State Highway 79. A family-oriented complex on the banks of the Mississippi, Sawyer's Creek Fun Park offers a mini golf course, train rides, bumper boats, arcades and an attraction named Tom Sawyer's Wild Adventures. Lunch or dinner is served in the Riverview Café, overlooking the Mississippi River. A retail shop stocks specialty items, jewelry, home décor, souvenirs and gifts. The park's Wine Shop features Missouri and Sawyer Creek wines. Wine tasting is available Monday through Saturday. Sawyer's Creek Fun Park is open April to December, weather permitting.

Mark Twain Cave Campground

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GETAWAY HANNIBAL, MISSOURI



Above and right: The Huckleberry Finn House — part of the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum complex — is where the real Huck Finn (Tom Blankenship) grew up.



visit to Hannibal in 1902. The tour continues upward for three stories, inviting guests to walk into elaborately furnished rooms.

At the Mark Twain Cave, visitors can imagine Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher exploring the narrow passages with a mere candle stub lighting their way. Today, experienced guides escort guests on a 55-minute circular tour. Persons of any age can make the tour on level and smooth walkways. In October only, a Ghosts, Heroes and Villains Tour fills in history and stories of the names etched on a wall of the cave. The tour includes Jesse James' hideout and a spot where artist Norman Rockwell was inspired

— and spooked.

Cameron Cave, located on the Mark Twain Cave property, was discovered in 1925, yet is considered a new find. The third-largest maze cave in the Northern Hemisphere, Cameron Cave has no electricity and few modifications from its natural state. Two tours, the Lantern Tour and the Total Eclipse Tour, are offered mid-May through mid-September, giving its bat population time to hibernate during the fall and winter months. Visitors hike a quarter-mile from the Visitor Center to Cameron Cave's entrance. While the



Two of the exhibits at the Mark Twain Boyhood Home & Museum include a scene depicting Twain, Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn, and a J & B Overland Express stagecoach.



Two miles from Hannibal, Mark Twain Cave Campground has 58 full- and 19 partial-hookup sites.

tight walkways are level, each guest carries a lantern or a flashlight.

If visitors are up for more “spookiness” after a Lantern Cave Tour, Haunted Hannibal Ghost Tour departs from the Hannibal History Museum on designated evenings. Inside the free museum, various exhibits showcase Hannibal’s history and notable people. One of the museum’s highlights is the dioramas hand-carved in fine detail portraying scenes from Mark Twain’s enduring novel, “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer.”

On Hannibal streets, the whistle from the Mark Twain Riverboat alerts residents and visitors that the three-deck paddle wheeler is boarding passengers. From the climate-controlled decks, visitors can imagine young Sam Clemens and his rowdy friends on a skiff riding the currents of the mighty Mississippi for a day’s outing on a nearby island. A one-hour narrated sightseeing tour fills in history and legends of the river and its steamships. The cruise passes Jackson Island, Lover’s Leap, and bluffs and ledges along the Mississippi. Both the sightseeing tours and dinner cruises are available May through October.

At the Museum Gallery, Jim Waddell brings Mark Twain’s words to life in a free performance. Other live

performances on designated dates include “The Life and Times of Molly Brown” and “Aunt Rachel’s Life as a Slave,” told by master storyteller, Gladys Coggsell. Hannibal also hosts numerous festivals and events throughout the year. The Annual National Tom Sawyer Days happens in early July, an event on the town’s calendar for more than 60 years. Activities include the National Fence Painting Contest, a frog-jumping competition, arts and crafts, and the Tom & Becky Contest, in which two youngsters are chosen to represent Mark Twain’s famous characters, Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher.

The legacy and literature of Mark Twain comes to life in Hannibal, Missouri — a small town set on a big river. The man recognized as the founder of American literature came from the nation’s heartland. Although as a young adult, he restlessly roamed abroad, as well as through America’s Western lands, he eventually made his home in Connecticut. However, Mark Twain’s heart is discovered daily in the boyhood home of Samuel Clemens. **M**

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Utah Deer Sams: Going above and beyond.

RAISING THE BAR

Good Sam's Chapter of the Year takes service seriously

Each year since 1975, the Good Sam Club has singled out one chapter that exemplifies the Good Samaritan spirit, and 2015 was no exception. Five judges based their scoring on last year's volunteer hours, charitable donations and other philanthropic pursuits. After the scores were tallied, the club presented its 2015 Chapter of the Year award to the Utah Deer Sams.

But they didn't stop there. Firing up their grills, members cooked hot dogs at the annual Halloween party to benefit Rise, a nonprofit organization that provides services for adults and children with developmental and other disabilities.

Throughout the year, the Utah Deer Sams also found time and funds to support their state's Good Sam Club organization. At the 2015 Utah Good Sam RV Rally at the Juab County Fairgrounds, the chapter organized the Crazy Golf tournament and the Theme Parade, judging the parade floats and making sure both activities ran smoothly.

Music producer Quincy Jones once said, "Imagine what a harmonious world it could be if every single person, both young and old, shared a little of what he or she is good at doing." For 2015's Chapter of the Year, those are words to live by.

Chapter of the Year Honorable Mentions

- ▶ Phoenix Phun Phinders: East Phoenix, Arizona
- ▶ Trail Blazing Sams: Tampa Bay, Florida

The Good Sam Club has more than 1,200 regional chapters of RVing families that get together for good times and good deeds. Joining or starting a chapter is a great way to meet people who share your interests and make a difference in your community. www.goodsamclub.com/chapters

FROM STITCHING SUPERHERO CAPES TO RAISING CASH, THE UTAH DEER SAMS USE THEIR SKILLS TO HELP LOCAL CHARITIES.

Based in Orem, Utah, the winning chapter provided more than 21,000 hours of volunteer service in 2015, and collected money and donated goods with a combined value of more than \$23,000. Putting their creative talents to work last year, members donated 136 homemade blankets, 49 hand-stuffed animals, 67 knit hats and 108 pillowcases to an assisted-living community and shelters for the homeless and victims of domestic violence and child abuse. Members also stitched 36 superhero capes to help make young patients feel special at the Utah Valley Regional Medical Center.

Remember the old saying "The train is leaving the station"? The Utah Deer Sams take this to heart. Each year the chapter volunteers at the Heber Valley Train Pull for Special Olympics where locals attempt to pull a 178-ton locomotive 30 feet in a fundraiser for the Law Enforcement Torch Run. Members set up, kept score and served as official timers at the 2015 event.



◀ Nicholas Barber (left) and his new Coleman.

Golden Giveaway

The first instant winner of a Coleman 262BH travel trailer in this year's Camping World and Good Sam Golden Giveaway is Nicholas Barber from Roscommon, Michigan. Barber received his scratch-off ticket after making a purchase at the Houghton Lake, Michigan, Camping World SuperCenter.

As part of the 50th anniversary

celebration for Camping World and Good Sam, four more 2016 Coleman trailers, valued at \$18,000 each, are yet to be given away to lucky scratch-card holders, along with \$5 million in free camping at Good Sam Parks and the grand prize of a 2016 Thor Windsport Class A motorhome worth \$140,000.

In addition to the Golden Giveaway sweepstakes, which continues through September 11, monthly events and July's big birthday celebration commemorate the 50-year milestone at Camping World all year long.

www.campingworld.com/goldengiveaway

GrillFest

Good Sam Club members can take advantage of sizzling savings with four-day-only specials at Camping World during GrillFest, sponsored by Coleman, May 19 through 22. On May 20 and 21, the first 50 customers at each location will receive a free grill lighter, and shoppers can enjoy free lunch from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Sale pricing on grills and grilling accessories continues through May 29.

www.campingworld.com/stores



DO YOU KNOW an RVing Good Sam Club member or couple who supports worthy causes or otherwise serves their community in a big way? If so, please take a few moments to nominate them for the 2016 RVer of the Year award. You can even nominate yourself and in the process promote your own charitable cause. www.goodsamclub.com/rveroftheyear



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By Alan Rider



BON VOYAGEURS!

Set sail for adventure at Minnesota's Voyageurs National Park

Summer is finally here and you wanna go somewhere. Preferably someplace where you can escape the summer heat! And what better place to do that than at one of the 400-plus units under the protection of the National Park Service (NPS). As the NPS celebrates its 100th birthday in the months ahead, we'll be right there beside you as we continue our yearlong series full of unforgettable experiences — from mild to wild — that are unique to America's national parks. Places where we sincerely hope you'll Find Your Adventure.

As you dip your paddle blade into the clear water of Rainy Lake, the present day seems to fall away as you find yourself paddling a birch-bark canoe loaded down with 90-pound bundles of beaver pelts headed for the fashionable hat factories of 18th-century London or Paris.

In Voyageurs National Park that unexpected sensation of time travel is not as uncommon as you might think. It may be because the French word *voyageur*, which translates roughly to "traveler," has more than one meaning. Or it may have something to do with the park's spectacular scenery that in many places looks virtually unchanged from the days of the original voyageurs.

One thing is for certain, though. Namely that this region of lakes and islands remains as welcoming to visitors with an adventurous spirit as it was 200 years ago when the fur trade first opened this area to outsiders.



Lay of the Land

Straddling 55 miles of the United States-Canada border, one of the best parts about this watery paradise near International Falls, Minnesota, is that it's an easy five-hour drive from the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Unlike many national parks, however, visiting Voyageurs is not a drive-through experience. That's because more than one-third of its



Photos: Alan Rider and courtesy Rainy Lake CVB

International Falls serves as the northern gateway to Voyageurs National Park. Look up to the tops of tall trees along the lakeshore to spot a bald eagle, a year-round resident of the park.

218,000 acres are covered in water and much of the rest is only accessible by boat, a fact that makes visiting this national park a decidedly uncommon adventure.

Voyageurs National Park is made up of four main lakes: Rainy, Kabetogama, Namakan and Crane. There are more than two dozen smaller ones in total, along with some 900 rocky islands just waiting to be explored.

On those explorations, don't be surprised if you catch sight of bald eagles in the treetops or a bull moose wading through the shallows. The call of the loon seems to be everywhere, but if you hear another unfamiliar keening it might very well be the howls of the park's reclusive timber wolves.

The 344 square miles of Voyageurs National Park also hold another hidden secret. Because of its location on the edge of the geological core of the North American continent, this is one of the few places on the planet that you can see and even walk on rocks that are half the age of the Earth itself.

The First Voyageurs

Established in 1975, Voyageurs National Park preserves part of the 3,000-mile route the French-Canadian and English fur traders used to explore the northwestern frontier in the late 17th and early 18th centuries.

The first voyageurs, more accurately known as *courers des bois*, worked alone and did much to establish paths through this watery landscape for those who would follow. This also made them the first Europeans to interface with the Native Americans in this part of the country, as the Ojibwa people trapped the animals and prepared the pelts that they then traded for modern luxuries such as blankets and metal knives.

Later, after the French monarch required fur traders to have a license, the men who actually became known as voyageurs worked as employees of license holders like the Hudson's Bay Company. Based in Montreal, Canada, the voyageurs would take trade goods west each spring and return with pelts in the fall.



Getting There

Voyageurs National Park is located in northern Minnesota and shares its northern boundary with Canada. The park is approximately five hours north of Minneapolis-St. Paul on Interstate 35 and U.S. Highway 53, three hours north of Duluth via U.S. 53 and four hours south from Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

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BON VOYAGEURS!



Guided boat tours are offered June through September and are a great way to see the park.

These were no easy jobs back in the day either. In addition to paddling their huge eight-man birch-bark canoes for up to 16 hours a day, they also had to carry both the canoe and 90-pound bundles of furs over the portages between lakes. By the early 1800s there were as many as 3,000 men earning their living as voyageurs, before fur fell out of fashion around 1840.

The route the voyageurs took in their travels ultimately became so important that it served as the basis for the border between the United States and Canada. The 1783 treaty that ended the American Revolution set the international boundary as the "customary waterway" used by the voyageurs.

Can You Canoe?

To get a feel for the life and times of the actual voyageurs, stop by any of the three national park visitor centers and hop aboard a 26-foot North Canoe.

But be aware this is no pleasure cruise. Propulsion is provided by you and a group of your nouveau-voyageur pals as you paddle your way past incredible views of broad marshes and rocky, pine-crested islands.

Under the watchful eye of two park service interpreters in period dress, this 90-minute paddle trip will take you back two centuries as you get a taste of what it's like to crew one of these giant freighters of the canoe world. In addition to perfecting your paddling strokes, you'll learn

Forty percent of the park are the waters of Rainy, Kabetogama (shown), Namakan and Sand Point lakes.



Photo: courtesy National Park Service

Photo: courtesy Explore Minnesota

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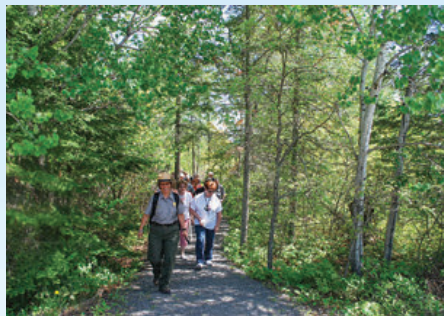
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Travel the historic routes of the voyageurs as a member of a canoe brigade (below) and learn about the history of the fur trade and the hardships of the voyageur's life (above, left). Oberholtzer Trail (above, right) is an easy, 1.7-mile hike through the forest near Rainy Lake Visitor Center.

the voyageurs salute and some of the songs the men sang to help them keep their spirits and bodies from flagging during the arduous journey.

Floating, an Idea

If you'd prefer rowing your own boat, you'll find canoes and kayaks available for rent from local resorts and outfitters. If you'd rather not go it alone, you can find outfitters that also offer guided paddling trips from daylong excursions to multiday adventures.

If you'd prefer a motor assist, many of the same operators rent powerboats as well. Choices range from small skiffs with outboard motors to pontoon boats big enough for the whole family. While there's a lot to be said for the Zen-like peacefulness of paddle power, even a small outboard motor can make a big difference in the amount of ground, er, water you can cover in a single day.

If you'd like to spend the night on

the lake, there are also several places that rent houseboats. Sizes run the gamut from modest floating condos all the way up to luxury barges complete with hot tubs and waterslides.

Whatever form of watercraft you end up engaging, take the time to familiarize yourself with its operation before you cast off. Even more important, take the time to learn the rules of the road, such as what to do when you encounter the red and green buoys that mark most major channels.

You'll also want to get the lay of the land, er, lake before setting out. Because of the sheer volume of islands and bays in the park, things can get a little confusing, so make sure you have a map of the lake and know how to read it.

Last, but certainly not least, go slow. While the marked channels should present no problem, these lakes are known for having rocks just beneath the surface — very few

IF YOU GO

Here's what you need to know to make the most of your visit to Voyageurs National Park:

Visitor Centers

The national park has three widely spaced visitor centers. They include, from west to east, the Rainy Lake Visitor Center, the Kabetogama Lake Visitor Center and the Ash River Visitor Center.

National Park Service Boat Tours

Don't wait to book your passage as sailings do sell out, particularly in the busy summer season. Reservations: 877-444-6777, www.recreation.gov.

Fishing Guides, Boat Rentals

www.destinationvoyageursnationalpark.com/guides-and-charters
www.kabetogama.com/outfitters.htm
www.rainylake.org/things/guides-outfitters

Fishing License

A Minnesota fishing license is required. You can get one online at www.licenses.dnr.state.mn.us or by calling 888-665-4236.

Guided Kayak Trips

218-244-6506, www.voyageursoutfitters.com

Campgrounds

Arnold's Campground & RV Park, 218-285-9100, www.arnoldsfishing.com/camping.htm

Pines of Kabetogama, 218-875-2000, www.thepineskab.com

Woodenfrog State Forest Campground, 218-235-2520, www.dnr.state.mn.us/state_forests/facilities/cmp00032/index.html

of which are marked — ready and waiting to turn your pleasure cruise into a rerun of "Gilligan's Island."

On the Border

If you don't feel up to paddling or piloting your own craft, there are still



Photos: Alan Rider and courtesy Rainy Lake CVB

ways to get out onto the water.

Among the most reliable are the boat tours offered by the National Park Service itself. There are a half-dozen different tours in all, ranging from shorter 90-minute cruises to excursions that last the better part of the day, including a lunch stop.

Boat tours leave from both the Rainy Lake and Kabetogama Lake visitor centers. Trip options include an outing to Little American Island, where you can see the remnants of the Bushyhead Mine and learn about the brief but intense 1890 Rainy Lake gold rush. Another tour circumnavigates Rainy Lake in search of wildlife, including bald eagles.

The longest tour takes visitors to the Kettle Falls Hotel, located a short stroll from the Canadian border. There you'll have the chance to explore and grab a bite to eat at the historic 1910 Kettle Falls Hotel and visit the nearby dam that's one of the

few places you can stand on U.S. soil and look south into Canada.

Wetting a Hook

With all this water comes, that's right, you guessed it, a lot of fish. Making Voyageurs National Park a little slice of heaven on earth for folks who live for wetting a hook.

Park officials say there are more than 50 species of fish lurking under the waves, including lake sturgeon, northern pike, black crappie and smallmouth bass. The area is also considered by many to be the best walleye fishery in the country.

The Voyageur Spirit

No matter how you spend your time here, you'll come away with an understanding of how those original voyageurs were eager to meet the untamed wilderness on its own terms. More importantly, you'll find that same spirit of adventure still lives on in Voyageurs National Park. **M**

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SAWTOOTH SCENIC BYWAY:

FROM DESERT TO MOUNTAIN

Starting in Shoshone, Idaho, this route winds north through the resort towns of Hailey, Ketchum and Sun Valley, and then to the Galena Summit for stunning views of the Sawtooth Valley below

When we travel in our motorhomes, we can become so focused on getting from point A to point B that we forget all the wonderful discoveries waiting for us on the less-traveled backroads and byways. On this particular trip to Idaho, we're committed to exploring the slower, more scenic routes. Our first is the Sawtooth Scenic Byway, carving 117 miles through the Boulder Mountains to Galena Pass, along the way showcasing the magnificent Sawtooth Mountains, the spine of the Rockies. While we could drive this byway in three or four hours, we're dedicating a couple of days to get to know this impressive route.

Interstate 84, the major east-west route through Idaho, is fast and it's a good choice if you just want to pass through the state. But it's not the route for discovering the beauty of Idaho, so we leave it as soon as we can. We pass the fast-food suburbs surrounding Boise, then pull off the highway and drive through the town of Glens Ferry to Three Island Crossing State Park, one of our favorite campgrounds. The park offers 82 grassy RV sites

with partial hookups and plenty of shade, a rare commodity in this desert landscape.

Three Island overlooks the mighty Snake River and marks the spot where, between 1840 and 1860, more than 50,000 emigrants made the perilous water crossing on their way to Oregon. The park features the Oregon Trail History and Education Center that tells the fascinating and often heartbreaking story through videos, dioramas and

artifacts of these intrepid travelers. Admission to the center is free and it's worth a visit.

Early the next morning, we travel along I-84 under amazing cloud formations and buff-colored buttes. The desert's muted beauty contrasts sharply with the vibrant green of the irrigated fields. Our planned exit, U.S. Highway 26, is closed for construction so we take exit 147 and wend through backroads. It's a fortuitous detour that takes us through Malad Gorge, an impressive 250-foot-deep basalt canyon cut by the Malad River and its stair-step waterfall that are part of Thousand Springs State Park.

History, Caves and Desert Landscape

The historic town of Shoshone is the official start of the Sawtooth Scenic Byway. This former railroad center

Photos: Anne Weaver



is famous for its many lava rock buildings that were handcarved by Basque shepherders who lived in the area. It's also home to a number of antique stores like Whistle Stop Antiques (aka Second Time Around Antique Mall), where we admire a huge horse sculpture made out of 15,000 metal maple leaves. I'm certain the equine would look great in my garden; the \$36,000 price tag convinces me to move on.

We explore Shoshone under brilliant blue skies and, while it's sunny, a cool, stiff wind makes us glad we're wearing fleece vests. The proprietor of Crossroads Attic, where they sell old housewares and freshly baked bread and home-canned preserves, tells us this is typical early summer weather. Before leaving town, we grab burgers and shakes at the Shoshone Snack Bar, a local favorite.

We take state Route 75 north out of Shoshone. The craggy, snow-covered Sawtooth Mountains are clearly visible and stand in sharp relief to the sage-covered landscape we're driving through. Just 9 miles out of Shoshone, we spot a big, blue sign sporting the word "Cave." Since we're not in a hurry, we turn off the roadway and drive 1½ miles down



Above: Mammoth Cave and Shoshone Bird Museum sits off the highway and offers an easy walking path into one of the area's hidden caves. Some of the famous Sun Valley ski runs are visible from the outdoor dining area at Sun Valley Resort in Ketchum, Idaho.



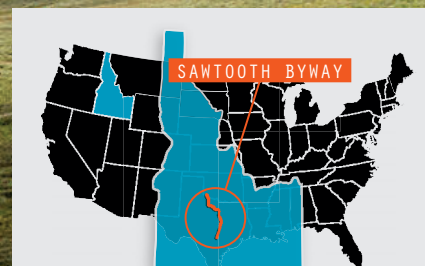
a washboard gravel track until we come to a gaggle of wooden and stone buildings, corrals and animal cages. We've arrived at Idaho's Mammoth Cave and the Shoshone Bird Museum of Natural History, site of a half-mile-long lava tube and a strange collection of taxidermy animals.

For \$10, proprietor Paul Olsen gives us each a gas-fired camping lamp and instructs us to follow the winding pathway to the cave. Back in the 1950s, Paul's dad discovered this cave, the result of volcanic lava intrusion that cooled and left caverns as high as 50 feet tall. The family cleared out the cave's rubble and built an easy, hard-pack trail that pushes a half-mile into the gloom. Since this is a lava tube and not a limestone cave, the walls are smooth and there are

no impressive stalagmite or stalactite formations. But it's still interesting to walk through the cool dimness that ends at the large cavern room.

The bird museum is housed in an impressive round wood and lava rock building Paul and his family built. Visitors wind through circular aisles to see a strangely wonderful collection of fossils, antiques, Native American grinding rocks, carved African masks and a massive assemblage of stuffed animals from bears to birds to giraffes. This is desert quirky at its finest.

We take a shorter half-mile road



The Route

The byway is 117 miles long and takes a minimum of three hours to drive. From I-84, take U.S. Highway 93 or 26 to the town of Shoshone (the southern terminus). From there, head north on state Route 75 to the town of Stanley (the northern terminus). Fuel stations are available in Hailey and Ketchum.

Visitors carry lanterns provided by the facility as they venture deep into Mammoth Cave.

back to the byway. This is flat country with long, wide vistas. It's also open range, so we keep an eye out for cattle that occasionally cross the road. We pause briefly at the Bear Claw Trading Post and browse through tourist trinkets, artificially colored rocks, and authentic Native American beadwork, leather goods and jewelry.

The road is straight and fast and, while it's hot and sunny here on the Sawtooth Byway, clouds have gathered along the Sawtooth range and sheets of rain/snow are falling in the distance. We crest a hill and drive into a vibrant, emerald valley of ranches and irrigated farm fields. Trees grow wildly along irrigation fields, but just beyond the water's reach, the land retreats to sagebrush.

This is Sun Valley. We pass through the town of Bellevue and the valley narrows and mountains rise up steeply on both sides of the road. As we enter the outskirts of Hailey, big raindrops



splat the windshield. We've caught up with the mountain weather we'd seen earlier. We cruise through Hailey's cute, walkable downtown and the raindrops become hail that rat-tat-tats on the motorhome's roof.

Just outside of Hailey, the speed limit springs back to 55 mph, but there's a line of traffic due to road con-

struction. We cross a bridge over the Big Wood River and spot an elevation sign — 5,607 feet. We've climbed quickly from the desert floor just a few miles south and evergreens, aspens and willows dot the hills.

Skiers' Heaven

We're still climbing and the forests are becoming thicker when we enter Ketchum, an attractive resort town filled with river rock and timber buildings. It's gorgeous here, with



From above: Three Island Crossing State Park near Glens Ferry, Idaho, has large, shady campsites. The author takes aim under the guidance of a veteran on the gun range at Sun Valley Resort. A replica of an Oregon Trail wagon overlooks the treacherous Three Island Crossing near Glens Ferry, Idaho.





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nearly vertical slopes crisscrossed with ski runs. The weather is socking in and snow is falling on the hillside trees as we check into a flat, full-hookup site at The Meadows RV Park, our home for the night.

Dinner is at Trail Creek Cabin, a historic hunter's cabin built in 1937 and once frequented by author Ernest Hemingway, a resident of Ketchum. Seated on pine furniture beneath old-time photos, we gobble down their famous "scones," mini cornbread muffins with whipped honey butter; a charcuterie plate that includes house-smoked duck; roasted beet salad; giant, perfectly cooked, bone-in cowboy rib-eyes; and, for dessert, warm peach crisp with rich caramel ice cream.

The next morning, our motorhome sports a thin layer of snow and the air is chilly despite the sunshine. It's a good reminder to bring warm clothes when traveling in the mountains.

We're eager to explore Ketchum and we start at the Ketchum Visitors Center, conveniently located in the downtown Starbucks. Central Ketchum is charming, with plenty of shops, cafés, galleries, coffee shops, and restaurants to enjoy and a popular, paved walking/biking path. Many of the shops are high-end boutiques and, for visitors on a budget, there's always the Gold Mine Thrift Store or Terra Sports, a consignment shop that sells gently used sport clothing.

The village is completely surrounded by steep mountains that loom over the town like green Titans. The forested slopes sport ski runs and chairlifts snaking down their faces. While it's hard to imagine anyone skiing down these sharp cliffs, they're the reason Sun Valley is famous for world-class skiing. Riding the Doppelmayr Gondola (2,000 vertical feet in eight minutes) up Bald Mountain is a popular summer activity, but we're too early in the season and it hasn't opened yet.

Ketchum has been ski central for years and many of the sport's advances, like the first ski lift, were



A visitor exits Mammoth Cave through the lava-lined pathway. The Shoshone Bird Museum is filled with taxidermy. This was the only bear the author saw on the Sawtooth Scenic Byway!



invented here. It's a fascinating history that's documented in the Ketchum Sun Valley Historical Society Heritage & Ski Museum.

Our next stop is the Sun Valley Gun Club at Sun Valley Resort to try our hand at skeet shooting. Bob, a fit and tanned 70-year-old, outfits us with a couple of shotguns and ear and eye protection. On the range, he tells us the object is to hit orange discs that are launched from a mechanical launcher. I shoulder the rifle, staring down the barrel. "Pull," I say.

Pow! The gun slams into my shoulder nearly knocking me off my feet and the orange puck torpedoes into the hillside sending up a tiny puff of dust. I try again and again with Bob gently coaching me and correcting my stance, my grasp, even how I hold my head and breathe. Finally, kapow! The disc shatters in a satisfying spray of orange.

We're there for an hour, taking turns shooting, mostly missing, and occasionally smacking those lightning-quick targets. By the time we depart, my shoulder is a bit sore, but I'm feeling smug, like I'm a budding Annie Oakley.

While the weather has been clear all day and it would be easy to spend days here hiking, horseback riding or mountain biking the hills or fly-fishing, rafting or kayaking the Big Wood River, it's starting to cloud up. We decide to

make a run for Galena Summit (8,701 feet) before it socks in. We climb through a narrow valley with shafts of sunlight illuminating the ragged snow-covered Sawtooths. We're driving along the wide Big Wood River with mountains on both sides of the road that are dotted with craggy rock outcrops and wildflowers — purple lupine, orange Indian paintbrush, red shooting stars. We climb higher and higher, our ears popping and the motorhome's engine working hard on the 5 percent grade.

At Alexander Ross Summit (8,278 feet), we pull off into a wide turnout to take in the view — the steep Sawtooth and White Cloud mountains with their thick forests dusted with fresh snow. Way down below are the headwaters of the Salmon River and two more Idaho scenic byways to explore — the Ponderosa Pine Scenic Byway to the southwest and the Salmon River Scenic Byway to the northeast. **M**

For More Information

Idaho RV Campgrounds Association
www.rvidaho.org

The Meadows RV Park
208-726-5445,
www.themeadowsinketchum.com

Three Island Crossing State Park
208-366-2394, <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/parks/three-island-crossing>



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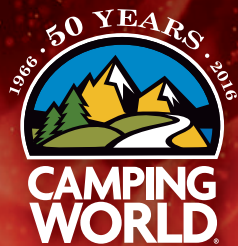
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By Kristopher Bunker

HOW'D THEY DO THAT?

RV factory tours give visitors an up-close-and-personal look at the motorhome manufacturing process

RVers tend to be a curious bunch, in terms of discovering the best scenic routes, campgrounds and national parks, and also about what makes all things mechanical tick. Over the years, much of the time I've spent with fellow campers around the campfire has been discussing our quests for learning about how something is made. When I was growing up, I would often enjoy going to work with my general contractor father, who would oversee — and participate in — the residential-

home-building process, from planning to pouring the foundation to framing the house all the way up to the final paint job. It was always fascinating to me to see professional craftsmen ply their trade in order to deliver so many of the residential comforts we take for granted on a daily basis, and to this day I continue to appreciate the finer points of things like insulation, ceiling texture, rise and run and P-traps in the sinks because of my father.

It was only natural that, as I grew up and became enchanted with the RVing lifestyle, the same type of pre-



Left: Manufacturing facilities are often large warehouse-type buildings with wide-open spaces. Staying with the tour is priority No. 1. Below: Factory tours also include some of the fine-tuning, which often requires a personal touch rather than machine work.



ciousness I exhibited as a child would translate to my new passion. Many times, after spending time in an RV, I'd wonder, "How did they do that?" or more importantly, "Why did they do that?" These questions are no doubt the result of my childhood experiences on construction sites, but it continues to become more and more obvious that I am not alone in my musings about the RV construction process.

And luckily for me and other curious folks, digging in to the RV manufacturing process is both an exciting and educational experience, as many manufacturers offer factory tours, which not only shed some light on some of the more common RV-construction processes, but also allow potential buyers the opportunity to view firsthand the stages of a motorhome being built from the ground up.

"We love to share with our customers, and potential customers, our build process," said Don Gephart, marketing manager for the REV Group, which includes American Coach, Fleetwood, Holiday Rambler and Monaco, among others. "We take great pride in our construction techniques and welcome the public to come see firsthand what makes our motorhomes some of the best built on the road."

This customercentric sentiment is shared by a majority of the manufacturers, as a quick Internet search for "RV Factory Tours" will result in dozens of potential destinations. These factory tours are becoming more and more popular, and are a valuable tool for manufacturers to begin building a sense of trust among not only potential customers, but the general public as well. By presenting the entire manufacturing process on full display, these companies are perhaps easing any tensions that RVers may have about a particular company's building practices ... or simply reinforcing that customer's satisfaction with their

From painting to cabinet making to sewing customizing fabrics, visitors can expect to see construction from the ground up on many tours. Many motorhome manufacturers encourage visitors to ask questions of not only the tour guides but the workers themselves, provided the situation (or task) is conducive to the interactive experience.

already purchased motorhome. "Factory tours are a way to build trust in our brand," said Steve Gerzeny, vice president of Coach House Inc. "A plant tour allows the customer to inspect our materials and methods firsthand and make a truly informed decision about our products. We find that the more people know about our vehicles, the more they want to buy one."

"At a Nexus tour, visitors can see all 17 stations at work and be able to ask any questions about construction techniques or engineering principles that make the product great," said Claude Donati, president of Nexus RV, which offers a factory-direct sales model. "Having factory tours allows the public to touch and feel the actual unique construction of [our] products," he added.

Offering RV factory tours also helps to open up a line of communication between the public and the manufacturer. "Truly driving our design and innovation, Newmar customers are an integral part of the life of a Newmar motor coach," said Shannon Stover, marketing manager for Newmar Corp. "We feel our daily factory tours help visitors to experience the entire process of creating these fine motor coaches," she said.

"Our potential customers and current owners are always impressed at how the units are built and the care that goes into every model and the passion our employees have for the product," said Karyn Torcoletti, director of



Photos courtesy of the manufacturers

“The tour answers questions they might have, but it also gives them information that may answer questions they have never posed.”

marketing for Erwin Hymer Group North America Inc., which represents Roadtrek motorhomes. “It is something you can’t quite understand until you see it firsthand.”

And some companies have even taken the personalized experience a step further. “Sit down with the owners of Nexus RV, Dave Middleton or Claude Donati, and they will personally answer all of your questions while you decide on specific options and colors,” said Donati. “No other manufacturer offers these VIP treatments,” he said.

“In the past, our customers would walk around the plant on their own,” said Mark Richardson, marketing director for Tiffin Motorhomes. “The tour answers questions they might have, but it also gives them information that may answer questions they have never posed.”

In addition to the informative tours, a few well-placed extras, like refreshments, a motorhome showroom or multimedia presentation, may also go a long way toward creating brand loyalty and respect. Attending an RV factory tour can be a fun event, as it’s not simply arriving at the plant and walking the production line; many manufacturers go all-out to create a special experience. “When visitors first arrive for the tour, they have the opportunity to peruse the Jayco visitors center, where we have key moments from Jayco’s history displayed,” said Ashley Lehman, Jayco’s director of marketing. “We then show them a short video about Jayco before we take them to the plant in the tour trolley.”

Winnebago also recognizes the opportunity to turn the factory-tour excursion into a destination-type experience that benefits both visitor and manufacturer. “Before or after the tour, visitors can also take a look at items in the Winnebago Outdoor store and visit the Winnebago museum, which is located in the upper level of the visitors center,” said Sam Jefson, public relations specialist for Winnebago. “The museum chronicles the company’s history as well as the design and construction of the company’s motorhomes.”

From above right: Who better than the pros themselves to actually describe the manufacturing process. Here, these workers take the time to explain the intricate details of building an RV.



➤ THE FINE PRINT

We’ve included a handful of motorhome manufacturers here that offer factory tours, but there are many more that offer them as well. If you’re interested in attending an RV factory tour, all manufacturers encourage you to check online and call ahead for availability, especially if you’re part of a large group. The tour schedules vary from manufacturer to manufacturer; some offer daily tours, while some offer weekly tours. And, many manufacturers follow a tour “season,” meaning they may not be conducting tours when you’re in the area.

The factory tours generally require a large amount of walking, so be sure to wear comfortable, close-toed shoes. Any safety equipment, such as helmets/goggles, is usually supplied by the manufacturer, but be sure to clear that upfront.

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Once the tour begins, visitors will likely notice one thing right away: total transparency. "Tour participants will see the full manufacturing line from chassis prep to paint, all the way through final inspection," said Gephart. "Tour participants are encouraged to ask questions before, after and during the tour."

"Normally, clients are toured through the entire facility — the welding shop, sewing shop, fiberglass shop, sandwich department, paint department and shipping department are walked through," said Mark Ratzlaff, sales administrator for Triple E/Leisure Travel Vans. "Some of our R & D [research and development] and prototype departments can be seen, even our service department if requested," he added.

Getting answers straight from the people who work on the motorhomes is perhaps the most effective way to understand the construction process, and certainly beats asking a salesperson assigned to several different brands on a large dealer lot. "Tours are a great way to meet and interact with the public, while also offering us a way to educate them about the manufacturing process," said Wes Bogan, marketing manager for Thor

From above left: Many RV tours are family-friendly and suitable for children (be sure to check beforehand). Some tours require viewing off the factory floor in order to ensure the safety of the visitors and craftsmen.

Motor Coach.

The benefits of an RV factory tour aren't limited to the visitors, as the manufacturers themselves also get a firsthand look at what the potential customers are asking ... not to mention a boost in sales. "I'm very positive and optimistic that the factory tours definitely translate into more unit sales," said Ratzlaff. "I

could give you countless examples of clients who, through our factory tours, made a decision to buy our product because of the information given and the person witnessed the building of the product."

"Customers often visit our showroom out of curiosity and then, once they have inspected the models on display, ask for a tour," said

Right: Touring a factory can be a great experience, and one that shouldn't be attempted without proper safety equipment. And the pros aren't immune, either; eye protection, especially, is of paramount importance.



Gerzeny. "A gratifying number of those people purchase one of our vehicles."

And, while all companies aren't necessarily looking to begin customizing RVs based solely on tour input, this exchange of information is invaluable to both parties. "At the heart of our engineering and manufacturing process are our customers and future customers' involvement," said Donati. "This makes a better motorhome overall. We will work together with the customer to provide a unit the customer is satisfied with."

In fact, many manufacturers even offer unique opportunities for visitors who are currently in the midst of the purchasing process. "If someone has a unit online, we will locate that unit during the course of the tour and will allow them the opportunity to take a closer look as it's being constructed," said Bogan.

One thing that's certain is these RV factory tours continue to be an important part of the motorhome-

buying process. "Our tours have been well-received by the public," said Lehman. "We host many large groups [requires planning ahead] ranging from school-age groups to alumni groups passing through the area to camping clubs."

"About 10,000 visitors from all over the United States will tour our factory yearly," said Jefson. "We strongly believe in the value the tour gives our visitors."

An RV factory tour is a great way to gain perspective on the construction process, and may even assist you down the line when the time for maintenance or repairs rolls around. It's the closest thing to being a part of the design team ... and can definitely make your motorhome-purchasing decision a bit smoother. "Our customers are extremely important to us; we know that buying [a motorhome] is a big decision and our customers put a lot of effort into their buying decision," said Torcoletti. "Offering tours allows them to see how the units are made,

meet some of our staff, ask as many questions as they want and become part of the overall experience," she added. **M**

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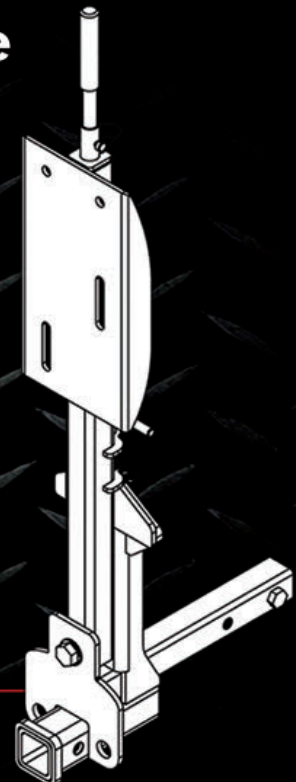
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By E. Don Smith

MOTORHOME WINDOW SWAPPING

Replacing fogged or broken windows doesn't have to be a pain in the glass

If you own a motorhome long enough you may eventually be faced with circumstances that require you to replace a dual-pane window. A large motorhome has a lot of windows and that means a lot of opportunity for a broken window or a window that is fogged internally from condensation. Not every fogged window needs a complete replacement but in many cases replacing one or two smaller windows may be less expensive than driving to a service center to have the glass removed, cleaned and reinstalled.

Our Tiffin coach is 8 years old and during that time we have not had any broken glass but we have had a few windows fog internally. Each time we have considered taking the motorhome to a service center for a repair, but once we factored in the travel time, fuel cost, time away from home, etc., a DIY replacement has always been our choice, as it was this time as well.

No matter what size window you

have, the replacement route is a straightforward process, but of course the difficulty increases in proportion to the size of the window. The window we replaced for this article is the driver's-side window and in this coach it is approximately 48 inches wide, which means it is also fairly heavy and difficult to ship. We ordered our replacement from the Tiffin factory and in less than two weeks the window

showed up in a huge box, which required a delivery truck with a lift gate to unload.

After seeing the size of the box, we instantly questioned the decision to tackle this as a DIY project. However, after opening up the box, we realized that more than a foot on each end of the box was foam insulation to protect the glass during shipment. After breathing a sigh of relief we scheduled a helper so that two physically able individuals would be there for the installation.

Every manufacturer constructs and

Right: We ordered our replacement window from the Tiffin factory and in less than two weeks the window showed up in a huge box, which required a delivery truck with a lift gate to unload it.



installs its windows in a different manner, so make sure you double-check yours before you begin so you can plan ahead with supplies such as foam insulation tape, rubber weatherstripping and exterior sealant. We picked up the needed foam tape, sealant and weatherstripping at a local home-improvement store. The flange on this window allowed for a 9/16-inch-wide rubber seal so that is what we used. The foam tape on the inside trim was 3/4-inch wide so we picked up two rolls of that also. Perhaps the most important supply item you will need is the sealant/caulk. We used a 100 percent exterior silicone caulk that remains flexible after curing and doesn't shrink. Make sure you do not use self-leveling sealants as used on roof repairs because it will sag when used on a vertical application such as this project. Also make sure your tube of sealant has not expired, because many of the new caulks now have an expiration date.

For this job you will need some basic tools such as a cordless drill with the correct bit for your window screws, a razor utility knife, a rubber mallet and possibly a small 90-degree driver with a bit insert. We needed a 90-degree wrench because one of the window screws was at the edge of the dash and access with a cordless drill was impossible. We also needed two ladders with enough reach to allow easy access to the height of the window from outside of the motorhome.

Even with time to take photos along the way we were able to remove the old window and install the new one and seal the edge in about 2½ hours. In terms of the number of steps required to complete the job, it is a simple project. It's the size of the window that adds to the difficulty, and though we got by with two experienced people, in hindsight, three would have been better. Three people allows you to have two people outside ready to hold the window as it comes out and one on the inside pushing.

Let's take a look at the process step by step so you can decide if you want to tackle the job yourself or leave it to the professionals.



1



2

[1] The lower right section of this dual-pane window was completely fogged. Prior to beginning any work, we covered the driver's seat with a heavy mover's blanket to protect it during the removal and installation process. [2] Before you order your replacement window from the motorhome manufacturer, make sure you provide the order desk with the year, model and VIN of your motorhome, as well as the measurements of the current window. This will greatly increase the chances that you get a window that fits perfectly.



3



4

[3] Before removing the old window, we first opened the box containing the new window and double-checked its size. [4] This window came shipped with the aluminum inner window trim attached, so the next thing we did was remove the trim using a cordless drill. Make sure you save the trim and screws, as you will need them later. Also note the position of the trim, as the holes will be predrilled.



5



6



7



8

[5] Next, we installed the rubber weatherstripping around the entire flange of the window. This weatherstripping will be what seals between the outside wall of the motorhome and the window. If you have to use two pieces of weatherstripping, make sure the seam is not on the top, because that is the area that will be subjected to the most water. [6] The inside aluminum trim on this motorhome requires a foam tape on the backside to cushion the trim from the inside flange of the window and the wall of the coach. [7] Now that the new window is prepped and ready to install, it's time to take the old window out. Start by locating all the screws around the window trim on the inside and remove them with a cordless drill. Make sure you have someone on the outside to stabilize the window in case it is a loose fit. [8] In some instances, you may encounter a screw that is not accessible with a drill. This happens because the window was installed before the dash.



9



10

[9] We used a 90-degree wrench to allow us access to the hidden screw. Without a special tool, this screw was inaccessible. [10] After all the screws have been removed, pull the inside trim away from the wall. Be careful to avoid damaging the wall or wall covering as sometimes the foam tape behind the trim can be sticky.

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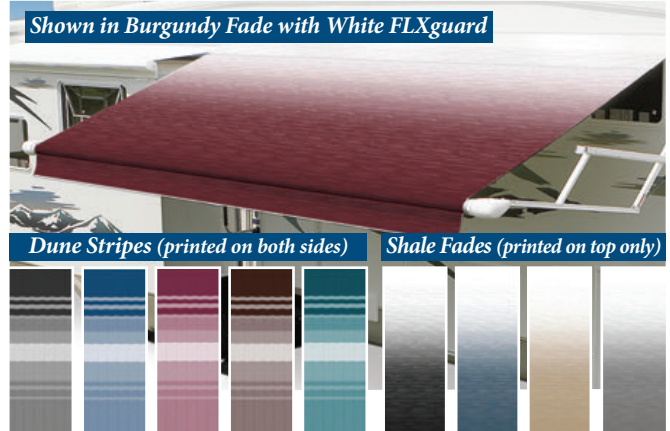
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11



12



13



14



15




16

[11] Now that the prep work is done it's time to remove the window from the wall of the coach. With one person inside, and at least one helper outside, you can start the encouragement process to get the old window out. We used a rubber mallet to get it moving, starting at the upper corners, then progressing around the frame. [12] After the window has been moved away from the coach wall, you may need to use a small utility knife to go behind the window flange and cut the sealant that

was used during installation. Be very careful not to damage the paint. [13] Once the window starts to move, be prepared to carry the weight of the window, because it will usually release all at once. Make sure both people are ready to hold it as the bottom comes out first, then the top. [14] Now the window can be safely lowered to the ground. Since both hands are on the window, be careful as you descend the ladder. [15] Once the old window is removed, you will need to prepare the wall for the new

one. This is also a good time to inspect the area under the frame to make sure there was no previous leakage. Ours was perfectly dry. [16] Depending on what kind of sealant was in place, it will either be hard to remove or really hard to remove. We tried various paint-safe chemicals as well as plastic scrapers in an attempt to remove the thin film of sealant left around the window frame. In the end, they all failed so we very carefully used a utility knife to "shave" it as much as possible.

[17] Next, we raised the new window into place and it easily slipped in. We started with the top of the frame going into the motorhome wall first, and then pushed the bottom into place last. [18] With one person on the outside holding everything in place, the other person moved inside and started attaching the inside trim with the supplied screws. In most cases this trim is predrilled so make sure the holes on the trim line up with the holes in the window frame. The first time around we set the torque on the drill to a low setting, then after all the screws were in place, we increased the torque and went around the entire frame two or three times to ensure the window was pulled into place properly. Since the rubber weatherstripping is being compressed, it takes a little patience to make sure it is correct. [19] Finally, we applied a thin bead of clear sealant around the top of the window and sides of the frame. We used an exterior-rated clear sealant that is 100 percent silicone so it will remain flexible even after curing. Depending on the color of your window and paint, you may need a different color sealant. [20] After you finish, it's always a good idea to come back after a day or two to recheck the sealant to make sure there are no gaps or cracks and that the screws are tight. 



17



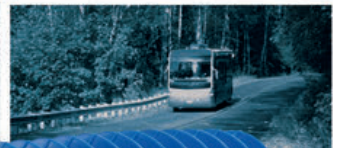
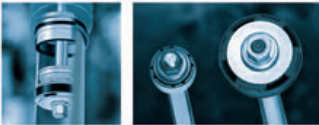
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19



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An Airstream Interstate Grand Tour

The new EXT model Class B from the iconic RV builder has the efficiency to take travelers on or off the beaten path in luxury *By Donya Carlson*

Airstream's Interstate is one of the top-selling Class B diesel motorhomes in the United States. Which seems ironic, simply because on our recent adventure with a 2016 Interstate Grand Tour EXT, most people who inquired about it — and there were many — didn't even

know that Airstream made a Class B. This isn't Airstream's first foray into the Class B market; the Interstate has been around since 2004 — but back in 1989, Airstream built Class B's based upon the Ford Econoline chassis, which lasted for 10 years.

Many people associate Airstream,

the oldest company in the industry currently building RVs, with those iconic, sleek aluminum silver bullet trailers being towed down the highways and looking fetching in campgrounds and RV parks. For 2016, Airstream made a few changes to the Class B Interstate Grand Tour EXT, introduced last year, including adding chassis underglow lights. The Grand Tour EXT is offered in two floorplans, one with a pair of twin beds and one with a power sofa that converts to a 70-by-82-inch bed, the latter of which we tested.

Our springtime stay-off-the-interstate-as-much-as-possible-in-the-Interstate tour got postponed for

ABOVE: The Interstate Grand Tour EXT's awning has a seismic sensor that detects vibration and automatically retracts the awning when it gets too windy.



BELOW: The Ultraleather sofa and dinette at the rear of the Grand Tour can seat five in comfort and converts into (bottom) a 70-by-82-inch bed. Marine-industry Majic Suede fabric window surrounds are soft to the touch and wipe clean easily. Day-night shades are remote-controlled and part of the motorhome's high-end décor.



a night because after all the hype, El Niño decided to rescue California from its drought and unleashed a storm on the day we wanted to leave. This seemed apropos since the Grand Tour EXT sports a nautical theme with its Ultraleather seats and sofa from the marine industry that stay cool and won't crack or fade, waterproof marine-grade plank-style synthetic flooring and a 9-by-9-inch porthole-style window on the lavatory door. At the crack of dawn the next morning, it was all hands on deck for our crew of two to pack up the Grand Tour and take it on its maiden voyage. Our mission: to find wildflowers.

The Interstate is built on the Mercedes-Benz 3500 Extended Sprinter chassis with a 3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel engine. We sailed smoothly down the

road on its dually chassis, due in part to the rear air suspension (a \$7,500 option), which is regulated as road conditions change. The air bags are pressurized to make for a stable ride and lessen side-to-side movement, which worked pretty darn well considering that a lot of California's roads are riddled with potholes and pavement seams. The air suspension doubles as a leveling system, which can be controlled by the remote panel near the driver's door.

A 9-by-4-inch monitor takes the place of a rearview mirror and displays views from three cameras (backup

and left/right directional changes). The Mercedes-Benz Driver Assistance Package includes Collision Prevention Assist, Lane Keeping Assist, Blind Spot Assist, Front and Rear Parking Assist and Front and Side Camera Assist, which ups the ante quite a bit in the safety department.

Directly behind the driver's seat is a workstation with one of three USB ports and one of two 24-inch LED HDTVs. Also in the area are the systems' command center and monitor panels. The Grand Tour's entertainment system includes Pandora Internet Radio connect, iPod video cable, SiriusXM Radio Universal,



The galley is set up for convenience so the spacious upper and lower cabinets can be reached easily, along with the drawers, food pantry, refrigerator and unique undercounter microwave.

Sirius antenna and tuner, and a Blu-ray player.

One of our first stops was Arthur B. Ripley Desert Woodland State Park in Antelope Valley, west of the California Poppy Reserve. Here, Joshua trees with twisted branches and large, white blossoms sprang from the Mojave Desert floor to vie for attention among desert tidy tips, golden brush, California buckwheat and purple chia. Inside the motorhome, while we prepared to go out into a biting wind, we vied for aisle space as we walked to and from the rear area to collect warm clothing. The Grand Tour, with an exterior length of 24 feet, 4½ inches, has a narrow floorplan, and with just 18 inches of aisle width, we learned that two people in the aisle created congestion at times. We adopted a system of announcing, "Clear the deck!" to alert each other so

one of us could move fore or aft. Once we got the system down, all it required was a little patience.

Later, at our primitive campsite, we discovered that this floorplan included a great workspace for efficient food prep, and easy access to our cooking gadgets and food. A flush-mounted stainless-steel sink with folding faucet and Italian-made SMEV two-burner cooktop are incorporated into an almost 6-foot-long Corian countertop; both have glass covers. Below the counter, spacious drawers (best accessed from the side, otherwise you'll be back up against a wall, literally) in dark Columbia Walnut of varying sizes are visually attractive as well. Adding to the opulent feel, light-colored fabric around the frameless windows, called Majic Suede (also from the marine industry) wipes clean with

WHAT'S HOT

Long galley countertop, Italian-made SMEV range, undercounter microwave, seating for seven

WHAT'S NOT

Vent crank handle, A/C unit and open overhead cabinets hazard for tall people, narrow aisle



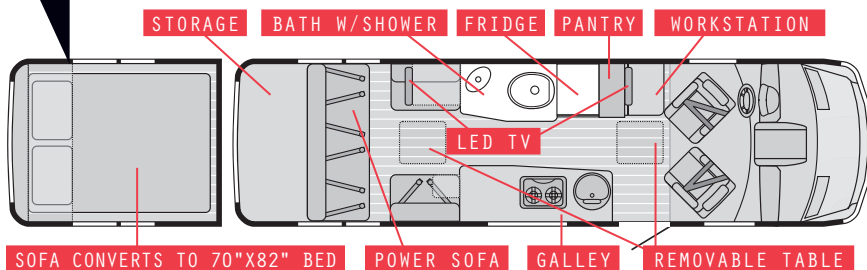
soap and water.

Getting large hands under the sink faucet was problematic because the faucet is placed too close to the front of the sink, so access from the side worked better. Tilting the fold-down faucet, rather than keeping it upright, worked better, too. Below the sink is a handy drawer with a built-in wastebasket, space for cleaning supplies and a towel rack. In fact, there is so much storage space that we couldn't fill the cabinets for our outing, even though I tried my best!

We also appreciated the roominess of the 3.1-cubic-foot Nova Kool refrigerator and freezer. Each compartment is 25½ inches tall and 14 inches wide. The stainless-steel marine-style all-electric refrigerator consumes very little power and runs off 12-volt DC and 120-volt, and blends nicely with the cabinetry. The only thing missing in the fridge was a drawer to keep fruit from rolling around, so we kept round things in a bowl so they wouldn't shot-put out of the refrigerator when opening the door after travel.

A 24-inch drawer-type stainless-steel Sharp microwave is mounted below the counter for easy reach and will make shorter folks especially happy. The floor-to-ceiling pantry has adjustable shelves and three slide-out drawers and can quickly transform into a wardrobe with the attached closet rod. Hidden from view when the pantry door is closed, specialty hinges allow

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Specifications

Chassis

Model	Mercedes-Benz Sprinter 3500 Extended
Engine	3.0-liter V-6 turbodiesel
SAE Hp	188 @ 3,800 rpm
Torque	325 lb-ft @ 1,200-2,400 rpm
Transmission	Five-speed automatic
Axle Ratio	3.92:1
Tires	LT215/85R16 LRE
Wheelbase	170"
Brakes	Four-wheel disc with ABS
Suspension, Front/Rear	Independent with transverse mono-leaf spring and stabilizer/leaf spring with stabilizer bar; rear air assist
Fuel Capacity	24.5 gal
Fuel Economy	16.95 mpg
Warranty	Three years/36,000 miles
Engine	Five years/100,000 miles

Coach

Exterior Length	24' 4.5"
Exterior Width	6' 7.7"
Exterior Height	9' 8"
Interior Width	5' 10"
Interior Height	6' 2.25"
Construction	Steel framing, skin and roof
Freshwater Capacity	32 gal
Black-Water Capacity	14 gal
Gray-Water Capacity	27 gal
Water-Heater Capacity	6 gal
LP-Gas Capacity	14.55 gal
Air Conditioner	13,500 Btu
Furnace	16,000 Btu
Refrigerator	3.1 cu-ft
Converter	50 amp
Inverter	1,000 watt
Battery (2)	Group 24 AGM
AC Generator	2.5 kW LP-gas
MSRP	\$155,060
MSRP as Tested	\$167,120
Warranty	Three years/36,000 miles

Wet Weight

(Water & Heater, Fuel, No Supplies or Passengers)	
Front Axle	3,540 lbs
Rear Axle	6,040 lbs
Total	9,580 lbs

Chassis Ratings

GAWR, F/R	4,410/7,720 lbs
GVWR/GCWR	11,030/15,250 lbs
ROCCC	1,450 lbs
GAWR	Gross Axle Weight Rating
GVWR	Gross Vehicle Weight Rating
GCWR	Gross Combination Weight Rating
ROCCC	Realistic Occupant and Cargo Carrying Capacity



Cockpit controls are within reach and easy to operate. Mercedes-Benz Driver Assistance Package includes safety features such as Lane Keeping Assist, Collision Prevention Assist, and Front and Side Camera Assist. The Ultraleather heated seats are extremely comfortable.

it to be opened almost all the way back so as not to block the aisle when open.

While there's no hood directly over the range, a Fan-Tastic Vent pulls steam and smoke out of the galley while cooking, and the aluminum above the stove is easily wiped down. The entire ceiling, in fact, is aluminum like those in the company's travel trailers, with two rows of LEDs shedding plenty of light. There's also a dimmer switch so you can set the mood, plus a ceiling-level strip of LEDs and floor-level lights. All in all, the area works well and the only issues we encountered were related to the 6-foot, 2¼-inch interior height. The crank handle for the Fan-Tastic Vent hangs down close to the entryway, so tall people smacked their heads on it the first time through while focused on the galley. An easy fix would be to rotate the vent so that the crank handle is by the wall. The air-conditioning unit reduces interior height as well, and open overhead cabinets, with sharp edges, posed another hazard for tall folks. We got in the habit of keeping them closed.

The Grand Tour EXT sleeps two but has belted seating positions for seven including the back lounge. A remote controls the day-night shades, and we liked that the shades can be closed individually or all at once with the touch of a button. They worked wonderfully

to keep light out in the morning and privacy in.

When it came time for bed, the sofa reclined electrically. We then laid the side seats flat and unstrapped two fold-down headrests to transform the back of the Grand Tour EXT from a mini living room into a 70-by-82-inch bed. Although the bed is made of sections, it was fairly comfortable, but adding a memory foam topper made it even better. Above the sofa/bed is a 30¼-inch-deep cabinet (with a light that automatically comes on), which was cavernous enough to hold bedding, the memory foam topper and pillows. The cabinet also has extra nooks and crannies, so there's lots of storage space, though some things were hard to retrieve because parts of the cabinet are so deep. A collapsible rod for hanging clothes is located over the sofa/bed.

Viewed perfectly from the bed (and sofa) is the Grand Tour's second 24-inch LED TV. The front TV can also be pivoted around to view from the sofa/bed, which is what we did since we had to get up to put a movie in the Blu-ray player. Both TVs lock in place for travel. In camp or when parked, we unlocked the rear TV to move it to the window side because it encroaches on precious aisle space.

The water closet is just that — a toilet, sink and shower all in a

fiberglass enclosure practical enough for small or average-size folks to get business done. The 2-foot width was roomy enough for me to lather up and take a quick shower using the hand-held sprayer that doubles as the sink's faucet. Even though there's a shelf over the loo for toiletries, I found it convenient to use the sink as a shower caddy. There's a shower curtain on the door side to keep a towel dry on the door-mounted rack, and the mini ceiling fan does a good job pulling steam out. A wall-mounted mirror, the only vanity mirror in the motorhome, swings out, and there's a retractable clothesline. With a ceiling height of 5 feet, 10 inches, and no skylight to add headroom, taller folks will not be able to stand up straight. The best part was getting out of the shower and having warm air blowing on my bare feet from the floor-level vents.

We awoke to ice on our outside camp chairs and freezing temps. Inside, the furnace warmed up the

Grand Tour quickly. The motorhome is well-insulated, keeping temps inside nicely regulated and hushing outside noise. As cozy as it was inside, the outdoors beckoned and we packed up to head down the Interstate 5 Grapevine, a 5-mile, 6 percent grade carved through the Tehachapi Mountains, to Wind Wolves Preserve in search of more wildflowers. And we weren't disappointed — acres upon acres of daisies, blazing stars, red maids, lupines and California poppies greeted us — although we were disappointed to learn that no RV camping was allowed. After a lovely, colorful 7-mile hike, we settled our tired bottoms in the exceptionally comfortable captain's chairs and set the seat heaters for the highest of three settings for the half-hour drive back to our previous campsite. Heading back up the Grapevine, the V-6 turbodiesel pulled the 9,580-pound Grand Tour up the steep grade with nary a sigh.

There are two threaded post recep-

tacles for the 22-by-22-inch pedestal table, one in front and one in back, but there's only one table and post. Since the one table can't be in two places at once, we chose to set it up in front and swiveled the seats around for an intimate setup. The parking brake needs to be disengaged for the driver's seat to swivel, and the media center in the cockpit will not play a movie with the parking brake off. Both of us scrambled to be the first one in the driver's seat because with the table in place, you are essentially anchored in there unless Passenger Seat Occupant (PSO) gets up. That means PSO is the one serving Driver Seat Occupant (DSO). "Hon, there's some cheesecake in the fridge, but I can't get it. Would you mind ...?"

If PSO and DSO are talking with friends sitting on the sofa in back, it's a bit awkward because with the narrow aisle, there's not a clear view to all the seating and it feels almost as if there are two separate rooms. **(continued on page 80)**

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By Bob Livingston

BRING IT ALL

Setting up a heavy-duty dinghy towing system to handle large vehicles and toys takes careful preplanning

Outdoor enthusiasts who collect equipment and vehicles that enhance recreation typically subscribe to the adage, "The difference between men and boys is the price of their toys." Filling a garage with toys is one thing; figuring out a way to bring them along on motorhome trips is another. For some, a toy hauler is the answer, but most motorhome owners will end up towing a vehicle or trailer. And then there are those who do both, like the owner who redefined "big" when he elected to tow a 2016 Ram 1500 four-wheel-drive truck with a Honda Pioneer off-road vehicle in the bed behind his commercial-grade 42-foot toy hauler motorhome.

The motorhome, a Haulmark built on a Freightliner Columbia commercial chassis, was equipped with a garage and lift gate, which could easily handle the Honda Pioneer. But the owner converted the garage into a shop, which precluded the ability to store ATVs. Instead, a custom ramp was fabricated for the bed of the Ram, where the Honda was winched into position for travel. In the end, the owner was faced with assembling the right equipment to solidly lash the Ram to the motorhome, and have effective braking to keep the heavy — and long — package safe on the road. For this project, we turned to

Roadmaster, a leading dinghy towing supplier with many years' experience connecting just about any suitable vehicle to motorhomes. Our objective was to combine ease of operation with properly rated components that could hold up to many years of rough use, including off-highway travel to favorite recreation spots.

Supplemental Braking

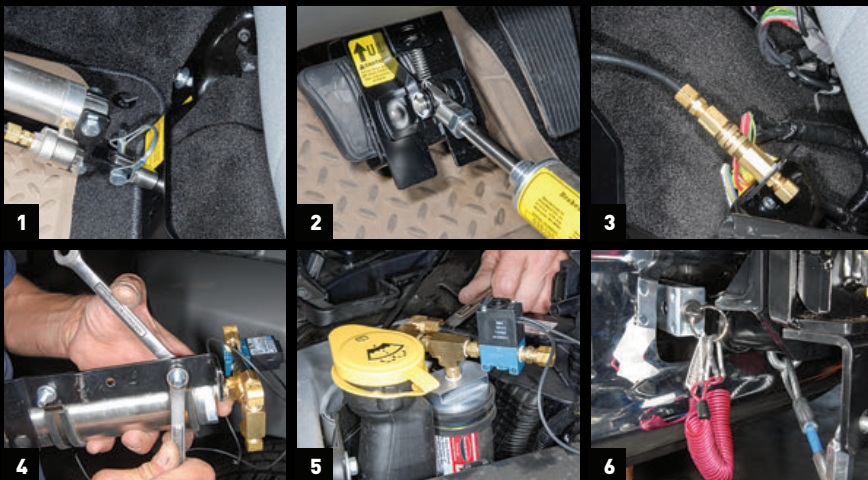
Although the motorhome has pretty stout air brakes, the addition of a supplemental braking system was mandatory, not only to make sure the combo could stop quickly, but to meet all U.S. and Canadian requirements.

Roadmaster's BrakeMaster Proportionate Towed Car Braking System was chosen because it connects directly to the motorhome's air brakes. And the main components are permanently installed in the towed vehicle, so it's a simple matter of connecting the air-cylinder assembly to the truck's brake pedal and bracket on the floorboard. The whole process takes about a minute, without tools.

While the system seems complicated, especially after perusing the instructions prior to the installation, the operation is fairly straightforward, using air pressure in concert with motorhome braking to regulate the ram and push the brake pedal. The towed-vehicle brakes are applied in direct proportion to motorhome braking, which assures accuracy and effective stopping distances, especially in emergency situations.

The installation should not be attempted by do-it-yourselfers who are squeamish about a lot of moving parts, but experienced mechanics can get it done in a few hours. After assembling the air cylinder, which was not that complicated, we turned our attention to the installation of the air reservoir. This cylinder is typically mounted in the engine compartment of the towed vehicle as long as it is placed at least 2 feet away from a heat source, like the exhaust system. We found a cubbyhole next to the windshield washer fluid





[1] Base of the air cylinder (ram) is bolted to the floorboard in the cab of the Ram truck, right in front of the driver's seat. Air cylinder connects to the bracket with a safety pin. [2] The business end of the air cylinder is attached to the towed vehicle's brake pedal. Once adjusted, attaching and removal takes less than one minute. [3] Quick-connect fitting is mounted to the driver's seat frame for easy access when hooking up the air line to the air cylinder when in place for towing. [4] Bracket is mounted on the air reservoir, which is the key component for operating the breakaway system. [5] After modifying the mounting bracket, the air reservoir was tucked into a cubbyhole next to the windshield washer fluid tank in the engine compartment of the Ram. [6] Breakaway switch with coiled lanyard was bolted to the front frame of the Ram using the provided bracket.

reservoir that worked after modifying the mounting bracket. The air reservoir must be positioned so that the drain valve faces the ground, for obvious reasons.

The air reservoir is the key element for controlling the breakaway system, which will apply the brakes in the towed vehicle should it become detached from the motorhome while on the road. The breakaway switch, attached to a coiled lanyard, is mounted to the front of the towed vehicle and wired accordingly into the

electrical system, and then to the air reservoir.

Installing the air lines in the towed vehicle and connecting to the proper line in the motorhome takes some study. Once we identified the proper source of air, which was a distribution manifold under the motorhome, we used a 3/8-inch brass tee fitting to tap into the motorhome's air system. This fitting is optionally available from Roadmaster. From here, the air line is routed to a quick connector mounted in the back of the motorhome (near the hitch receiver)

and coupled using 1/4-inch plastic air lines and compression fittings. Another quick connector is mounted on the front of the towed vehicle and an air line is routed to the air reservoir under the hood.

From here another air line is routed to the air cylinder using a quick connector, so it can be removed easily when the truck is not being towed. A portable tubing with quick-connector ends is used to couple the two fittings and supply air to the towed vehicle when the motorhome brakes are applied. This is the part of the installation where the instructions must be followed carefully. Failure to install the lines and quick connectors precisely can cause unwanted braking problems, which can lead to damage or even a fire in extreme conditions.

The final step involved installing the monitor light, which is simply an LED in a clearly marked panel that's mounted in the motorhome cockpit. There are a number of possible wiring configurations, depending on the towed vehicle's type of brake lights and turn signals. Since the Ram brake lights automatically turned off after a period of time, an optional brake light switch was needed so the signal could be sent to the LED monitor in the cockpit. A patch cord with bullet connectors is used to complete the circuit between the

[7] Compression fittings are used to attach air lines to the quick connectors and air reservoir [8].





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towed vehicle and motorhome.

In use, the BrakeMaster system followed the motorhome's braking flawlessly. The amount of braking felt strong without jerkiness caused by overbraking. Not only does the light in the cockpit inform the driver of proper braking, it will indicate unwanted braking in the unlikely event of a system failure. The BrakeMaster system for air brakes (with breakaway feature) retails for \$801.67.

Installing the Baseplate

Roadmaster prides itself in baseplate development and has designed application-specific hardware for just about any vehicle that can be towed. The goal is to make the fit as precise as possible without major modifications — but in reality, there are always a few cuts here and there that must be made. For the Ram 1500 truck, two fascia panels needed to be removed to allow access for the side-arm brackets, but they came out without

[9] High-quality quick connectors make easy work of routing the premade hose between the Ram and the motorhome. Sliding cover on the air line [10] keeps road debris at bay, and tight covers [11] are used to keep the fittings clean when the dinghy is not being towed.

difficulty or damage to the plastic. As part of the EZ4 series kit, the side-arm brackets can be removed from the main receiver braces when the tow bar is not being used. These main braces are mounted to the bumper and tow-hook supports (after removing the tow hooks).

As per the instructions, two notches were made in the front section of the frame, but we needed to do a little more cutting in a few places to make the bolt holes line up. This is normal operating procedure for installing a baseplate, and most installers know the drill. We also had some difficulty placing the bolts in the holes because of clearance issues, so we ended up using string to "thread" the bolts. Once everything was bolted in place, the brackets blended nicely into the front of the Ram. The baseplate for the Ram 1500 with the EZ4 brackets retails for \$429.95. Figure on two hours for the installation.

Mounting brackets for attaching

the crossbar are bolted to the EZ4 removable side arms using the supplied bolts. When it comes time to connect the tow bar, the cross bar is mounted on the vertical pins and locked in place with removable pins or optional padlocks. From here the tow bar is attached to the quick-connect bases on the cross bar and locked in place with specialty pins. No pain, no fuss.

The Tow Bar

For this project we opted for the Sterling All Terrain tow bar with the 8,000-pound rating. Although Roadmaster offers the Blackhawk tow bar with a 10,000-pound rating, we like the way the Sterling operates, and of course, enjoy the fact that it weighs only 35 pounds. Even with the Honda on board, the weight of the truck was still within the limitations of the Sterling tow bar.

There are a number of selling features that appeal to users, including

[12] Optional tee fitting is used to tap into an air-distribution manifold under the motorhome. Air line is routed from here to the fitting on the rear of the motorhome.

[13] Two fascia panels are removed from the front of the Ram 1500 before starting the process of mounting the baseplate braces. [14] Existing nuts are removed from the Ram frame to make way for the main receiver brackets. An air grinder was used to notch the frame so that the side-arm brackets could be positioned through the space [15] vacated by the plastic fascia panels. [16] It took a little maneuvering to tighten the main receiver brackets to the frame of the Ram. Small hands really helped here. [17] Since the space to reach in and place bolts through the brackets was extremely limited, string was used to "thread" the bolts through the holes.



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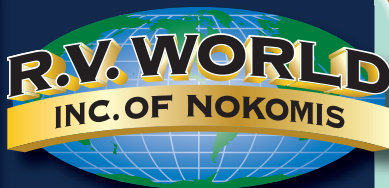
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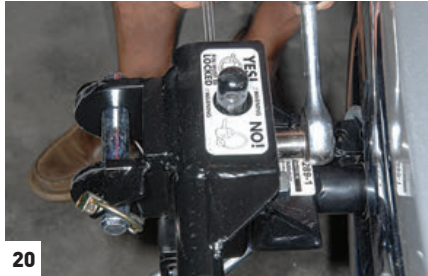
TOWING ON STEROIDS



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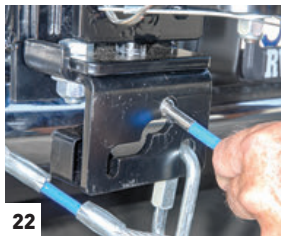


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[18] Side-arm brackets in the EZ4 kit lock into the main braces with a simple twist. Mounting brackets [19] for attaching the cross bar are bolted to the faces of the side-arm brackets. [20] Cross bar needs to be on mounting brackets while the bolts are being tightened to ensure that the holes line up. Once in the right position, the cross bar will easily seat on the pins. Provided pins can be used to secure the cross bar or for additional security, Roadmaster offers optional keyed-alike padlocks [21] that fit precisely.

the channel guides for routing the safety cables and power cord (to keep everything under control and clean looking), but we really like how easily it connects to the towed vehicle. The process can be quickly achieved by one person, and when it comes time to disconnect, the Freedom Latches

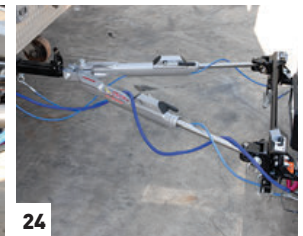
make releasing the telescoping arms a cinch. A patented storage latch keeps the tow bar secure in the motorhome’s hitch receiver when disconnected from the towed vehicle. The only caveat was the final attitude of the tow bar when it was connected to the Ram. It was too low in front to meet Roadmaster’s



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[22] Ends of safety cables slide into the special cuts in the mounting brackets making it unnecessary to deal with connectors and bolts. Short safety cables [23] are used to prevent the removable side arms from being dislodged while towing. [24] Safety cables and power cord are routed through channels in the tow bar arms; tubing to connect air from motorhome to dinghy is wrapped on top. Lanyard from the breakaway switch [25] is stretched to a connection point on the motorhome. [26] Drop receiver was necessary to raise the tow bar to a level attitude as specified by Roadmaster. These adapters can be used to raise or lower a tow bar by simply reversing the bar in the receiver. [27] Roadmaster’s Freedom Latches make it very easy to release the telescoping arms in the tow bar.



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[28] Roadmaster offers locking hitch pins that make it much more difficult for thieves to steal expensive dinghy-towing equipment. [29] Form-fitting cover is used to protect the folded tow bar from the elements when mounted to the motorhome and not in service. [30] Clearly marked LED mounted in the dash of the motorhome informs the driver when the brakes are being applied in the dinghy vehicle. [31] Testing revealed that the Ram brake lights automatically turned off after a period of time, making it necessary to install an optional brake-light switch to provide a signal to the LED monitor in the motorhome dash. [32] A patch cord for the LED light must be connected when hitching up. Bullet connectors work OK, but after a while might become difficult to seat. Other options can be considered down the road. [33] The big motorhome with the Ram 1500 and Honda Pioneer in tow is quite a sight on any highway. Modern dinghy-towing equipment and effective braking devices make it possible to take desired toys on any trip.

requirement, so we ended up installing a drop receiver on the motorhome to level the tow bar. Drop receivers are available in a number of sizes and can be turned to accommodate high or low tow bars.

The aluminum housing, stainless-steel inner arms and self-lubricating polyurethane bushings keep the tow bar in service for a very long time. The mounting brackets and cross bar are part of the Sterling package, which retails for \$1,068.83.

Lighting

Finally, to get the combo on the road, we needed to decide on a method to make the tow vehicle's brake, signal and running lights work in conjunction with the motorhome. Using one-way diodes and hardwiring into the towed vehicle's electrical system is very popular, as is installing independent lighting sockets into the taillight fixtures. We chose a wireless system for simplicity and to keep from making modifications to the towed vehicle. The TowMate light bar (see July 2015 issue) uses wireless technology via a transmitter that fits into the standard seven-way receptacle mounted in the

rear of the motorhome. The transmitter sends a signal to the light bar, which responds to input from the motorhome. It's not inexpensive at \$325, but it gets the job done efficiently without additional work, other than figuring out how to hook up the system to 12-volt DC power. For this project, we added a small power receptacle in the bumper of the Ram.

The inaugural trip to test the equipment rolled up close to 3,000 miles, with plenty of bumpy backroads to favorite spots to run the Honda Pioneer and to take the Ram truck on off-road adventures. The integrity of the Roadmaster equipment and the relative ease with which everything worked was definitely confidence-building. It was quite a spectacle to see the high-profile motorhome with full-size truck and ATV on board in tow, but those who relish their "toys" have never been shy. **M**

Sources

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

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800-680-4455, www.towmate.com

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Shower Matters

After checking out the price of teak shower mats, I decided to make my own, cheap, wooden mat. I bought pressure-treated lumber and decking screws to craft this gizmo. I made the size of the mat to fit conveniently on the bottom of my storage compartments when it's not in use. The mat works great for outdoor showering or in campground shower facilities.

Will Garner | Grand Junction, Colorado



Sewer Service Separator

Don Callahan had a great sanitary solution for water and sewer service being next to each other in RV parks ("Start With a Clean Spigot," Quick Tips, March). I owned a 2001 Pace Arrow that had, as is quite common in RVs, the freshwater and sewer service in the same compartment. To keep the respective hoses separate, and the freshwater hose more sanitary while traveling and during storage, I installed a dividing wall in the compartment. I used Plexiglas, but any number of materials would work. With trial and error I made a cardboard template to get the shape for the Plexiglas. I left about a half-inch of space at the bottom for drainage from the water to sewer side. Mine was attached with "L" brackets and rivets.

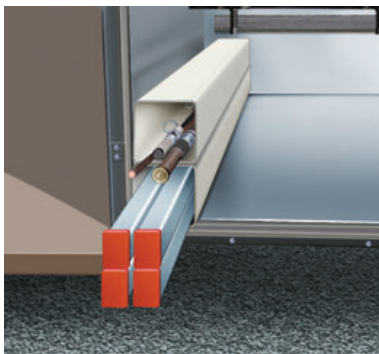
Wayne Koski | Loveland, Colorado



Hamper Helper

Like lots of RVs, our model was designed without a space for a laundry hamper. After months of putting up with a bag on the bedroom floor or in the bottom of a closet, I came up with a solution. We have a shallow cabinet (about 24 by 24 inches) in the corner of our bedroom that had a shelf across the center. I removed the shelf and bought a plastic hamper at Wal-Mart that fit in the space and made a cutout at the top to allow easy access from the side. Now we just have to open one door and drop soiled clothing into the hamper to await laundry day.

Tom Becker | Bernalillo, New Mexico



Chutes and a Ladder

I own a 40-foot American Eagle motorhome with a storage area that goes all the way across underneath the coach. I bought a folding ladder from Camping World (item No. 20319) that folds down to about 4 inches square. I wanted to be able to put the ladder in the storage area and get it out again without having to move everything off of it. My solution was to buy a 5-by-5-by-96-inch vinyl post cover at a building supply store. The post cover fits precisely across the storage compartment. The ladder slides in and out of the square post cover and is always easily accessible. I bought a second post cover for fishing rods to protect them from breaking when the cargo shifts in the storage area.

Bobby Watson | Rockwell, North Carolina



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1650 PSI PRESSURE WASHER

SAVE \$73

LOT 68333
69488 shown

• 1.3 GPM

~~\$149.99~~
\$76.99

comp at \$149.99

36463381

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WOW SUPER COUPON

20% OFF

ANY SINGLE ITEM

Limit 1 coupon per customer per day. Save 20% on any 1 item purchased. *Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or any of the following items or brands: Inside Track Club membership, extended service plan, gift card, open box item, 3 day parking lot sale item, compressors, floor jacks, saw mills, storage cabinets, chests or carts, trailers, trenchers, welders, Admiral, Badland, CoverPro, Daytona, Diablo, Franklin, Hercules, Holt, Jupiter, Predator, Slik-Tek, StormCat, Union, Vanguard, Viking. Not valid on prior purchases. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 9/10/16.

36470200

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FREE

WITH ANY PURCHASE

CENTECH 7 FUNCTION DIGITAL MULTIMETER

LOT 90899 shown
98025/69096

\$15 VALUE

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36455925

WOW SUPER COUPON

72" x 80" MOVING BLANKET

SAVE 66%

HaulMaster

LOT 66537 shown
69505/62418

\$5.99

comp at \$17.97

36350938

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WOW SUPER COUPON

WINNER - TrueSkill Magazine

US-GENERAL

Customer Rating ★★★★★

26" 4 DRAWER TOOL CART

LOT 95659 shown
61634/61952

• 580 lb. capacity

~~\$349.99~~
\$99.99

comp at \$349.99

SAVE \$250

36403465

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WOW SUPER COUPON

PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE

LOW-PROFILE CREEPER

Customer Rating ★★★★★

LOT 69262
69094/61916

2745 shown

• 300 lb. capacity

~~\$279.99~~
\$19.99

SAVE 75%

36413771

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WOW SUPER COUPON

CENTRALPNEUMATIC

3 GALLON, 100 PSI OILLESS PANCAKE AIR COMPRESSOR

Customer Rating ★★★★★

LOT 95275 shown
60637/61615

\$49.99

comp at \$89

SAVE 43%

36436077

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WOW SUPER COUPON

1.5 HP ELECTRIC POLE SAW

SAVE \$29

PORTLAND

LOT 68862/62896 shown

• Extends from 6 ft. to 8 ft. 10"

~~\$99~~
\$69.99

comp at \$99

36380793

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WOW SUPER COUPON

PITTSBURGH AUTOMOTIVE

RAPID PUMP® 3 TON HEAVY DUTY STEEL FLOOR JACK

LOT 69227/62116
62584/62590

68048 shown

• Weights 74 lbs.

~~\$155.95~~
\$79.99

comp at \$155.95

SAVE \$75

36355578

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WOW SUPER COUPON

10 FT. x 20 FT. PORTABLE CAR CANOPY

SAVE \$79

LOT 62858/63054/60728/69034 shown

~~\$159.99~~
\$119.99

comp at \$199

36395910

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WOW SUPER COUPON

27 LED PORTABLE WORKLIGHT/FLASHLIGHT

LOT 67227 shown
69567/60566/62532

~~\$7.15~~
\$2.99

comp at \$7.15

Batteries included.

36423187

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WOW SUPER COUPON

4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER

SAVE 40%

drillmaster

LOT 95578
69645/60625 shown

\$11.99

comp at \$20.26

36346862

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WOW SUPER COUPON

9 PIECE FULLY POLISHED COMBINATION WRENCH SETS

PITTSBURGH SAE METRIC

LOT 69043
42304 shown

LOT 42305
69044

YOUR CHOICE

~~\$8.99~~
\$5.99

comp at \$17.97

36350580

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WOW SUPER COUPON

12" SLIDING COMPOUND DOUBLE-BEVEL MITER SAW WITH LASER GUIDE

CHICAGO ELECTRIC POWER TOOLS

Customer Rating ★★★★★

LOT 69684 shown
61776/61969/61970

~~\$399~~
\$134.99

comp at \$399

36365684

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WOW SUPER COUPON

900 PEAK/700 RUNNING WATTS 2 HP (63 CC) 2 CYCLE GAS RECREATIONAL GENERATOR

LOT 66619/60338/69381 shown

~~\$124.99~~
\$89.99

comp at \$168.97

SAVE \$78

36404288

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WOW SUPER COUPON

12,000 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH REMOTE CONTROL AND AUTOMATIC BRAKE

LOT 61256/60813/61889
68142 shown

\$319.99

comp at \$752.99

36455126

LIMIT 3 - Good at our stores or HarborFreight.com or by calling 800-423-2567. Cannot be used with other discount or coupon or prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase with original receipt. Offer good while supplies last. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 9/10/16. Limit one coupon per customer per day.

RV Rodent Repellent

Sewer Sock prevents pesky pests from finding their way inside openings used for hoses, power cords and coax cables

By Kevin Livingston



PEST CONTROL

Cost: \$24.99

Time: 20 minutes

Difficulty: 2/10

Most owners will do everything in their power to keep their motorhomes looking nice and protected from the environment. One of the more aggravating situations that seems to mystify owners is discovering

that the interior of the motorhome has been infiltrated by unwanted pests. There's nothing more disconcerting than opening a drawer to pull out a utensil and finding mouse droppings. Yet, too many owners have to endure this problem when parking or storing their motorhomes in locations commonly patrolled by rodents and other unwanted pests, and finding a solution can be difficult.

The question is, "How do these pests find their way into the motorhome that is essentially sealed from the elements?" The attraction to food and other delicacies, like wire insulation that's made from soy, give rodents an uncontrollable desire to find any pathway inside a motorhome. Aside from their natural ability to climb up nearly everything, most of these critters can squeeze into very small cracks and holes, especially the worst offender of them all — mice. Openings for the sewer hose, water hose and power cord are easy targets for rodents. They can easily climb up a sewer hose, for example, and make their way inside the motorhome through a number of places in the cargo bays. To do battle against pests, you could resort to poisons and traps, but we all know there can be negative side effects if you have pets and/or prefer not to handle expired carcasses.

The better way is simply to prevent entry. This is exactly what the Sewer Sock by My Smart Manufacturing was invented for. The Sewer Sock is a specifically designed cover and sealing device that uses a closeable steel mesh

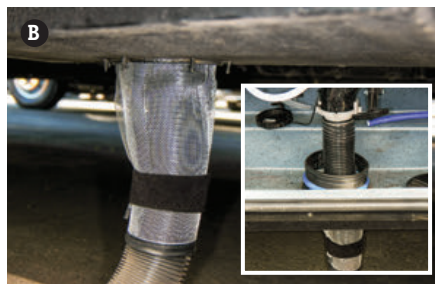
Smaller models can be used on access doors that lead to the water hose, power cord and/or coax cable.

screen with a hook-and-loop strap at one end connected to a heavy-duty flexible, but stout, nylon-reinforced rubber ring at the other. The Sewer Sock is mostly intended for enclosed utility bays that typically utilize a low-level panel to allow for access to the hoses and electrical cord. However, with one of the four offered sizes and a little creativity, the use of the Sewer Sock on a side-access panel is certainly doable.

To use and install the Sewer Sock, simply push the end with the rubber ring through the hole in the utility bay from the outside. When in place, the sewer hose is threaded through the Sewer Sock and connected to the valve. The hook-and-loop strap is then used to seal the end of the Sewer Sock around the hose. When all is said and done, you should see a portion of the Sewer Sock with the hose inside hanging under the floor of the utility bay. The rubber ring seals any potential openings in the access hole and the screen prevents rodents from sneaking in between the hose and Sewer Sock. There's not much science here, just a foolproof way to eliminate potential openings for rodents. Similar procedures can be used to seal the openings for the water hose and power cord, if they are in a different area.

Sewer Socks can accommodate various size openings, to include those for cable coax to larger screw-in "plugs," and they are really not very expensive, especially when amortized against the damage, mess and disease potential resulting from rodents that end up making themselves at home inside a motorhome. All four sizes sell for \$24.99. **M**

My Smart Manufacturing, 423-327-0052,
www.sewersock.net



[A] Two larger sizes designed for the sewer hose will accommodate most of the access panels/plugs used in the bottom of utility bays. **[B]** Hook-and-loop strap snugs the screen mesh around the sewer hose to prevent pests from gaining access to the compartment. Nylon-reinforced rubber ring seals the opening used to feed the sewer hose through the bottom of the utility bay for connection to the dump valve. It's virtually impossible for rodents to make their way into the compartment.

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Moldy Mattress

Concerned that his wife's allergies flared up every time they set out in their new motorhome, a reader asked us for help. He wrote:



“ We purchased a 2014 Fleetwood RV Tioga Montara motorhome in July 2013 from Lazydays in Seffner, Florida. That fall, we traveled about 9,000 miles touring the national parks. Four days after setting out, my wife fell ill. By the time we reached St. George, Utah, I had to take her to the emergency room. She was prescribed antibiotics for 40 days. She has been fine since then, except for when her allergies acted up on our monthly three-day RV trips.

In June 2014, we had an additional electrical outlet installed in the motorhome, and the technicians found signs of water leakage. We then discovered that the mattress from the overhead compartment was full of mold — the cause of my wife's illness.

I am requesting that Fleetwood and Lazydays reimburse us for the repairs that needed to be done. Since the repairs were made, we've taken several trips, and my wife has been symptom-free on each occasion.

Leslie Johnson | Land O' Lakes, Florida

Johnson's case was sent to Fleetwood RV and Lazydays RV for their consideration. Soon afterward, we received the following letter from Johnson letting us know that he had received replies from both companies and they had reached an amicable resolution. It read:

“ We are totally satisfied with how Fleetwood and Lazydays acknowledged the problem and offered to reimburse a portion of our expenses. Fleetwood paid \$1,061.70, which was half of the expense we incurred for having the seal leakage problem repaired, and Lazydays offered to pay about half of the remaining balance. L.J.

Arizona, last year we stopped at a couple of RV dealerships to see what they had. When we arrived at La Mesa RV, a salesman asked us what we were looking for. We said if we were to buy, it would probably be a 2011 or 2012, tag axle with a bath and a half. He showed us a used 2013 Winnebago Journey and before we knew it we were on a test drive. Once we got back to the lot, he started talking about financing and trading in our current motorhome. We told him that with a purchase like this we would have to sleep on it. We then had more discussion about financing and interest rates and he asked me for my driver's license and a credit card. I gave them to him and he came back and said I qualified for an interest rate

of 4.5 percent. Again, I said we would have to sleep on it. Then I signed and initialed some paperwork, which I thought was just to see if we would be approved for a loan, but turned out to be a purchase contract with no cooling-off period. I wondered what that meant, but I didn't say anything at the time.

We were a little excited and a lot confused as we headed back to camp. The next morning I called La Mesa RV and told the sales manager we couldn't do the deal. We sought legal counsel and were advised to just not pick up the motorhome, which is what we did. We waited for La Mesa RV to contact us. The salesman called us to find out when we were picking up the unit and I told him we couldn't do the deal. We had nothing of theirs but they had charged \$5,000 to my credit card as a deposit. I looked over the contract and nowhere did it say that we would get credit for the \$5,000.

I would like to get most of my \$5,000 back, if not all of it, and I highly recommend all buyers make sure they know what they are signing in advance. **Robert and Yvonne Krah | Ammon, Idaho**

There seem to be a few inconsistencies surrounding this transaction. Also, the Krahs erred in not reading and understanding the terms and conditions of the paperwork prior to signing. La Mesa RV sent Hot Line a favorable reply and we received the following note from Yvonne Krah:

Probably because of Hot Line's letter to La Mesa RV, it made a refund to our credit card for \$5,000. Thanks so much for your help. We learned a great lesson. **Y.K. M**

Read Before Signing

Confused about a recent transaction with an RV dealer, two readers asked Hot Line to get involved. They wrote:

“ While we were in Quartzsite,

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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 EQUAL HOUSING LENDER

By Ken Freund

Torn Vinyl Flooring

Q I own a 2003 33-foot Itasca Sunova Class A motorhome that until this year was stored inside (unheated) or under cover in an open shed. I am storing it outside now, covered with a new ADCO Tyvek cover from Camping World. There are no body leaks and it has stayed perfectly dry. This week I discovered that the vinyl flooring that runs through the central aisle of the coach has a long crack running lengthwise from almost one end to the other, maybe 10 to 12 feet. It runs in a random pattern, not associated with the embossed pattern. Is this related to shrinkage from the cold, or something else? Even at 30 degrees Fahrenheit, it seems to have plenty of give or looseness. If it's cold related, I don't understand why this only happened this year. Not to mention all the thousands of RVs stored outside in very cold climates without issue. What else should I be looking for?

On a related issue, what are your thoughts on replacing this with a poured epoxy floor or some other poured floor? Will it crack? Thanks for the help on this one.

Ray Jorgenson | Harrisville, New Hampshire



A You live in a lovely, historic town, but I'll bet it gets cold there at night sometimes in the winter. As vinyl floor materials age they also dry out and become more brittle. Since it is already torn, lift the edges along the tear and look underneath. If the underlayment is intact, the cause pretty much has to be shrinkage. While the entire vinyl floor is glued in place, the edges, where the cabinets are installed over the flooring, hold those areas very tightly. When the flooring shrinks, something has to give, and it's usually the "wide-open spaces" in the middle of aisles and other open areas.

I don't have any firsthand experience with poured flooring; perhaps some of our readers can send in comments on their experiences. You might consider installing new vinyl flooring or carpet.

Towing in the Real World

Q We have a new Mercedes-Benz Sprinter-based Winnebago Navion (it weighs about 11,000 pounds). I would like to tow about 3,400 pounds of car/dolly. Weight, brakes and hitch capacity aside, is it really practical? My wife lives in fear of being "one of them" — the slow RVers who block traffic. We plan on taking trips through hilly or mountainous areas.

Harley Rice | Seattle, Washington

A The gross vehicle weight rating (GVWR) of your motorhome is 11,030 pounds, and you may be considerably below that weight when you are fully loaded for a trip. If you haven't done so, stop by a public scale and verify the real-world weight the next time you're ready and loaded on a trip. It's always

better to work with a certified weight figure than a manufacturer's estimate.

The gross combined weight rating (GCWR) is 15,250 pounds, so if you subtract the GVWR from the GCWR you get 4,220 pounds. The hitch is rated at 5,000 pounds, so you're good there. The standard engine is a 3.0-liter, 6-cylinder, 188-horsepower turbo-diesel with five-speed automatic transmission. I see these motorhomes towing dinghy vehicles, and the weights you mention are within the manufacturer's limits.

To be considerate of other drivers (and it seems like you want to be), simply use the far right lanes and anticipate hills so you have some speed up when you get to them. Allow following drivers to get around you when approaching upgrades and use turnouts when needed. Don't be afraid to floor the accelerator pedal and

hold it there. That's a rugged engine that was designed for the Alps, but don't expect brisk performance when climbing steep grades while towing.

Oil Filter Size

Q I own a 2007 Winnebago Adventurer 38T Class A motorhome with an 8.1-liter GM gas engine. I would like to increase the size of the oil filter so the engine has better filtration and the increased volume would hopefully drop the oil temperature. I have used Mobil-1 after break-in oil. The pressure during operation ranges from 25 PSI at idle to 40-45 PSI at 2,500 RPM. The engine has 45,000 miles with no problems. That being said, I've been told that I will see an increase in oil pressure fluctuation. Is there any truth to this?

John Pemberton | Via email

A Having more oil capacity is a good thing, but don't expect much of a temperature drop just by running a larger oil filter. The increase in surface area should not produce a noticeable difference. If high oil temperatures are a concern for you, I suggest you add an auxiliary oil cooler. The oil pressures you quote are fine and well within the normal range. I have never experi-

enced greater pressure when running the larger oil filters from trucks. Perhaps you could ask the person who told you that to back it up with some evidence.

Refrigerator Power Source Comment

Regarding the letter "Refrigerator

Power Source" from Steve Richards in the March issue, we also had problems with a Dometic refrigerator in our 2013 Winnebago Via not cooling as well using LP-gas versus 120-volt AC, except our unit ran about 6-7 degrees warmer with gas, no matter the ambient temperature outside. We cleaned the gas orifice for the refrigerator (there was some rust around the orifice), but that still didn't produce good results. I took the motorhome to our local RV shop, and they discovered a faulty gas regulator on our LP-gas tank. We had it replaced, and now our refrigerator runs colder on gas than it does on 120-volt AC power!

Robbie Nelson | Austin, Texas

Generally, running a refrigerator on LP-gas produces more cooling effect than the 120-volt AC electric heating coil provides. So this is a tipoff; if you're not getting that result, suspect that the burner is underperforming for some reason. Low pressure from a faulty gas regulator can certainly cause this problem. Thanks for writing and sharing your experience with this subject.

Ghostly RV Steps

Q My wife and I own a 2013 Itasca Sunstar Class A. One day last fall, I noticed that the motorhome's steps were out as I was driving down the road. I thought it was strange, so I pulled over and checked things out. When I closed the door, the steps retracted. When I opened it, they came out again. I continued down the highway and noticed that the steps had come out again. Then, as I looked at them in the mirror they suddenly retracted. This happened a couple more times until the steps finally just stayed out.

I took the motorhome to my mechanic and he detached the arm, tied the steps in the retracted position for me and tested the motor, but could not test the controller. I had the dealer test the controller and was told I needed a new one. I bought one and installed it myself only to find I had the

Sun Wave, Circle 103 on Reader Service Card



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same issues.

I did notice that if I held pressure on the door when I closed it, the steps would stay retracted. If I removed my hand, they would come down. As you may have figured out by now, I have a problem with the contacts on the frame and the screen door. When I put pressure on the door, the contacts are closer to each other and the steps work fine. I have not found the proper way to adjust the contacts or to adjust the bottom of the door so that it is tighter. I have pushed on the bottom of the screen door a little and found some success, but I think all that did was tweak the aluminum hinge of the screen door. But I did find it would retract the steps and keep them retracted — at least while it sits in my driveway.

I hope you can provide some advice on how to adjust the door so that the contacts work together to keep the steps retracted. I was able to return the part and recover the cost but I can't cover the cost of the bad assessment and I wonder if I had them install it if I would have been able to recover the labor or anything at all as I don't know if the old part would have been available for me to test myself. Also, probably a good tip to anyone that may have this problem is to check the alignment of the door and how the contacts are aligned. That may be the source of the problem.

Michael Lessard
Dunbarton, New Hampshire

A There's a good chance that either the door latch is out of adjustment, or the door is slightly warped. Either will cause the door to not exert enough pressure on the switch in the door frame. First, try adjusting the latch tighter. The simplest fix I've come up with if the door is slightly warped is to glue a thin disc of hard plastic to the door where it closes against the switch. Regarding the old part, I always recommend that anybody having repair work done requests ahead of time that the old parts be saved and returned to the owner.

Most motorhomes with power-operated steps also have a switch, located close to the entry, that allows you to shut off the power to the steps. This is so the steps don't operate every time you use the entry door when camped, for example. You should be able to use that switch to shut off the step's power so it can't extend during travel.

Refrigerator Tip

Like many folks who write in, I have had problems with my absorption refrigerator. My motorhome is parked for months, and then taken out for weeks. It takes about a week for the refrigerator to get cold enough, but after that it works fairly well. My solution is \$5 worth of dry ice put inside on day one.

Ken Obenski | San Diego, California

You need to have your refrigerator checked for proper operation, as it should not require a full week to cool down; more like 8 or 10 hours is all it should realistically need.

Towing Choices

Q I have a 2003 Minnie Winnie Class C and I would like to buy a 2003-2005 model-year dinghy vehicle. I know it would be good to have a 4x4, which I plan to do. I've been looking at the Jeep Liberty 4x4. Any other info you can give me would be appreciated.

Roland Dezentje | Cooper City, Florida

A The main considerations are if the vehicle is towable, and if the motorhome and hitch have sufficient towing capacity for the weight. *MotorHome* has past Dinghy Towing Guides on our website (www.motorhome.com) so you can look up various models under consideration. If you don't have the tow rating for your motorhome, check with Winnebago (800-537-1885). I highly recommend adding an auxiliary braking system, which applies the brakes in the dinghy vehicle when the motorhome slows, along with an emergency breakaway switch that applies the brakes if the

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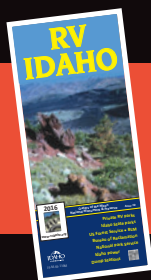
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COACH & POWERTRAIN

vehicle becomes detached from the motorhome.

Vacuous Vacuum

Q We have a 2000 Winnebago Adventurer powered by a Ford V-10. When using the air conditioner the airflow is good from the vents when driving on the level, but dies out nearly completely when accelerating or going up a hill. It returns to full force again when going downhill and again and when cruising on the level. What could be causing this diminishing airflow?

Dan Amstad | Sandy, Oregon

A Your problem is a common one on Ford E-series and F53 chassis. It's caused by a lack of sufficient engine intake manifold vacuum, which is used to operate the flapper valve that switches over the vents to defrost airflow. When the engine is under a heavy load, intake manifold vacuum is nil. The system is designed so that airflow will be directed onto the windshield to keep it clear when vacuum is lost. The simplest solution is to put a vacuum check valve in the system and add a vacuum storage tank connected to the system. A tank about the size of a coffee can will work, but it must be designed to handle vacuum, or else it will collapse. Both items are readily available on eBay, inexpensively. If you are unsure how to install these items, check with an auto air-conditioning shop.

Rough-riding Chevy

Q My 24-foot Class C Fleetwood on a Chevrolet chassis rides very hard with every small bump pounding and jarring the motorhome. What is the best method to add a smoother ride to this chassis?

Larry Campbell | Carmichael, California

A You didn't mention what year your motorhome is. If it is older, the first step should be to determine if anything related to the ride has deteriorated, particularly shock absorbers. Premium (continued on page 80)

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COACH & POWERTRAIN

(continued from page 77)

aftermarket shocks, such as Bilstein, are known to improve ride quality and handling. Also make sure the tires are properly inflated for the actual load you carry. Weigh the axles and look up the recommended inflation pressures using a load-inflation table. These are available on the tire manufacturers' websites.

Pay careful attention to where the rough ride is coming from, front, rear or both. Generally, I find that these chassis have very little rear suspension travel. I think the most convenient way to improve this situation is to install air springs, along with a remote inflation system that allows you to adjust air pressure from the dashboard, while driving. Then you can tailor your ride to road and load conditions.

Mold Removal

Q We have a Holiday Rambler purchased new in 2009. A 3M clear mask protects the front of the motorhome, from the windshield down. Recently, I discovered numerous small areas of mold. I suspect small pin-size holes have resulted from rocks hitting the front of the motorhome. How can I clean the mold spots under the film?

Harold McGalliard | Via email

A Using a mold remover could damage your coach's paint job. These protective films generally only last seven to 10 years, so it might be time to replace the mask. Scotchgard warrants its 3M Paint Protection Film Pro Series for seven years, but it does not cover damage caused by accidents or ordinary wear, nor does it apply to dents caused by the physical impact of rocks or road debris. **M**

Have a Tech Ques-

Contact our experts:

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(continued from page 59)

Since we were boondocking, we appreciated the 100-watt solar system (a 200-watt system is available and recommended for more effective battery conditioning). The Fiamma Power Awning is fitted with dimmable LED lights, and also has a seismic sensor that detects vibration and retracts the awning if it gets too windy.

Open the cargo doors, which fold back flush against the Grand Tour's flanks, and there's a good amount of storage space, some of which is accessible from inside through the cabinet below the sofa. In the test motorhome, the hose for the outside shower is kept in place by a bungee net in the door. Also at the back of the vehicle (in a small, covered compartment) is a quick-connect LP-gas fitting for convenient barbecue hookup and a hitch receiver (for the 5,000-pound-rated tow package) hidden under a paint-matched bumper cover. The spare tire is mounted under the vehicle, and a basic toolkit is included. With a bunch of starts and stops and short hops around town, the Interstate got 15.95 MPG, and did better on our road trip with 17.95 MPG, averaging close to 17 MPG.

While I was cleaning the inside of the Grand Tour when it was parked in front of our house, I heard two guys comment as they rode by on bicycles: "Now, if I had a motorhome, this is exactly the kind of motorhome I'd like." And the other guy: "Oh, wow ... it's an Airstream ... yeah, it looks like it can go anywhere, and my wife wouldn't mind if" And then they were out of earshot. I'll never know what his wife wouldn't mind ... but I suspect it was something about how practical and attractive it is since those were the No. 1 comments from people, especially after taking a look inside.

The Airstream Interstate Grand Tour EXT has everything you need in a premium Class B that feels at home in a full-service RV park or a secluded campsite — without sacrificing luxury, versatility and efficiency. Just be sure you're traveling with someone who knows how to keep the deck clear. **M**

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Passion Play

The Sturgis Motorcycle Museum in South Dakota is one of the Black Hills' must-see attractions

By Alan Rider

Allow me, if you would, to ask you a personal question. Namely, what is it that you feel passionately about? Or maybe, put another way, what would you prefer to be doing right now if you had your druthers?

If you're able to come up with an immediate answer, good for you. If not, no worries. For a subject that's been a central theme of our culture for years, the fact is passion is something we don't spend much time talking about.

Which is a shame because having even one thing that stirs our passions can mean the difference between living fully, instead of merely existing. It doesn't have to be something you do every day (that might get old), just something that makes you light up every time you think about it.

For me, motorhome travel is like that. It doesn't even matter so much where I'm going as long as I get to look at the world going by through that big windshield.

Neither does it matter that I might not be on the road at any given moment. Just thinking about past trips and journeys to come is enough to keep the fire in my belly fully stoked.

Now just to be clear, I enjoy doing lots of things, from skydiving to pottery making. But there's only one other thing I feel as passionately about as my motorhome meanderings: the simple act of riding a motorcycle.

You see, I've loved motorbikes since I was old enough to throw a leg over one. I've owned or ridden a small handful over the years and, though I

am currently between bikes, I can't help but daydream about my next one or reminisce about the fun I've had on past rides.

Which helps explain why I'm a sucker for motorcycle museums. Like the one housed in a vintage brick former post office in Sturgis, South Dakota.

The Sturgis Motorcycle Museum & Hall of Fame (999 Main St., 605-347-2001, www.sturgismuseum.com) does a fine job of representing this small town that becomes a mecca for roughly 500,000 riders each August in a weeklong happening known as the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally (or just Sturgis for short).

While the motorbikes attending

Sturgis (the event) trend toward made-in-Milwaukee machines with the initials H-D, the museum is far more agnostic. Along with the requisite classic and customized Harley-Davidsons, you'll find significant bikes that date back more than a century, from Hondas and Nortons to vintage Indians and BSAs, all tucked into every nook and cranny of the museum's two levels. You'll also find obscure two-wheeler brands you may never have even heard of, like Douglas, Ace or, my personal favorite, the bright orange Flying Merkel.

The Hall of Fame portion of the museum enshrines legendary motorcyclists from all walks of life. There's a tribute to actor Peter Fonda of "Easy Rider" fame, special recognition for showman Evel Knievel and even a nod to multimillionaire Malcolm Forbes, known for having his own world-class collection of 68 bikes.

Put it all together and the reality is that the Sturgis Motorcycle Museum is one of the premier attractions in South Dakota's Black Hills. It's a safe bet that riders past, present and future will find themselves having more than a few "Oh, wow!" moments here.

Ultimately, of course, it doesn't matter what pastime you choose. All that's really important is that you follow your passion to see where it leads you along The Road Ahead. **M**

“ For a subject that's been a central theme of our culture for years, the fact is passion is something we don't spend much time talking about. ”

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The Sturgis Motorcycle Museum & Hall of Fame has several exhibit rooms and an impressive selection of unique motorcycles, such as this inline 4-cylinder 1922 Ace.



Photos: Alan Rider

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